Jesus’ Answer To The Direct Question On How To Obtain Eternal Life

Was Jesus Ever Point-Blank Asked How To Have Eternal Life?

Jesus was asked twice how to have “eternal life.” Once by a lawyer and once by a young rich man. Jesus both times answers that the key to salvation is to obey the Law, in particular the Ten Commandments. Jesus then explains to the apostles this means one must live a life based on self-denial which keeps on following Jesus.

What did Jesus precisely say to the rich young man? Jesus told the young rich man that if you would “enter life,” obey the Ten Commandments. (Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-26.) Jesus recited these commands verbatim to the young man.1 Here is the exchange:

(16) And behold, one came to him and said, Teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? (17) And he said unto him, Why askest thou me concerning that which is good? One there is who is good: but if thou wouldest enter into life, keep [Greek, tereo, obey] the commandments. (18) He saith

1. Some think it is significant that the Sabbath command is not repeated. Some have developed an odd hermeneutic that if something is not repeated in the New, it is abolished. Why? Jesus said all the Law, to the least command, remains. (Matt. 5:19.) Also, Jesus did not have to inquire whether the man kept the Sabbath because in that era it was an unavoidable civil duty.
Jesus' Answer To The Direct Question On How To Obtain Eternal Life

unto him, Which? And Jesus said, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, (19) Honor thy father and mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. (20) The young man saith unto him, All these things have I observed: what lack I yet? (21) Jesus said unto him, If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. (22) But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sorrowful; for he was one that had great possessions. (23) And Jesus said unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. (24) And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Matt. 19:16-24, ASV.)

Is Jesus Heretical For Teaching Us The Law Applies?

That Jesus says obeying the Law is the key to entering life should not surprise us. The commonly heard idea in the Fable of Cheap Grace that the Law was abrogated for a New Testament believer is itself the clearest heresy. (Or is Jesus the heretic?) For even if a prophet came with “signs and wonders” that “came to pass” but tried to “seduce you from following the way the Lord commanded you to walk in,” he would be a false prophet. (Deut. 13:3-5. See Isaiah 8:20.)

What about Paul’s language that the Law was abrogated? Luther in his youthful writings relied upon those passages. The young Luther clearly thought the Law was abrogated. These youthful passages in Luther’s writings are frequently cited by evangelicals. However, the mature Luther recanted.
The mature Luther realized the lesson to the young rich man and many other passages made it absurd to conclude that the Law had been abrogated in the New Testament. The mature Luther condemned as the worst heresy any view that countenances Jesus’ coming abrogated the Law. The mature Luther wrote in the Antinomian Theses (1537):

To abolish the Law is therefore to abolish the truth of God....[To] discard the Law would effectively put an end to our obedience to God.2

Why did Luther make this reversal? Because the mature Luther realized that if any writing were ever joined to the New Testament which purported to teach the Law given Moses is abrogated, then such a text could not possibly be inspired text. It would be sheer heresy of the highest magnitude.

For the Law given Moses was said by God to be “ordinances” that shall be “everlasting for all generations.” (Ex. 27:21; 30:21; Lev. 6:18; 7:36; 10:9; 17:7; 23:14, 21, 41; 24:3; Num. 10:8.)

In fact, Luther knew the Bible teaches that any would-be prophet who seeks to “seduce you from [ever following] the Law” given Moses would be the mark of a “false prophet.” (Deut. 13:1-5.) If Jesus did so, this passage in the Law says any effort to seduce people from the Law’s principles would mark Jesus as a false prophet. Jesus could never be the Messiah even if he had “signs and wonders” if Jesus simultaneously taught the abrogation of the Law which was “eternal for all generations.” (Id.)

Moreover, several passages say the true Messiah will usher in a New Covenant that revives respect for and obedience to the Law given Moses. If Jesus did anything less, this would be a proof Jesus was not Messiah. For God had said

2. Martin Luther, Antinomian Theses (1537), reprinted as Don’t Tell Me That From Martin Luther’s Antinomian Theses (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 2004) at 32-34.
that when the New Testament arrived, it would come and “inscribe the Law (Torah) on our hearts.” (Jeremiah 31:31-33.) What does *inscribe the Law* mean? Isaiah explained those who “know righteousness” are “the people in whose heart is my Law....” (Isaiah 51:7.)

Likewise, Isaiah explained Messiah would make the Law better known and practiced. When the Redeemer is sent to Israel to create a new covenant, God promises by Him “these words that I have given you” (the Law) “will be on your lips and on the lips of your children and your children’s children forever.” (Isaiah 59:21 NLT.)³

Likewise, Isaiah wrote that when His Servant (Messiah) comes, God “will magnify the Law (Torah), and make it honorable.” (Isaiah 42:21 ASV/KJV.)

Jesus proved to be worthy of being Messiah because, contrary to what many suppose, He revived full respect for the Law. In fact, Jesus, for His part, did everything possible to put the Law given Moses by God on our lips and in our hearts forever. Jesus said immediately after just referring to the “Law (given Moses) and the Prophets” (Matt. 5:17):

> Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:19 KJV)

³. All commentators agree Isaiah 59:21 is a promise of the New Covenant. Barnes says “these words” or “my words” means God’s truth previously given “for the guidance and instruction of the church.” Clarke, however, says this means the “words of Jesus.” But Clarke overlooks the tense, which is a past tense. “These words” were given prior to the coming of the Redeemer. Keil & Delitzch concur, but they try to claim the prior “words” are the words of a covenant given to Abraham in Genesis 17:1 et seq. No one wants to accept the simplest solution: Isaiah is saying the same thing as Jeremiah. God intended the Law is on the lips and in the hearts of all those who belong to the New Covenant.
Only in Matthew 19:7-9 does it ever appear Jesus derogates a part of the Law as solely from Moses “due to the obstinacy” of the human heart, permitting divorce when God preferred otherwise. But it turns out that Jesus is not derogating the Law at all, but instead is criticizing the allowance God had to make for man’s sinfulness which was never God’s plan “from the beginning.” Eve was made for man prior to the Fall. This explains why Jesus completely reaffirms the divorce principle Moses’ uttered as valid, namely that a certificate of divorce was appropriate for an “unseemly thing” (Deut. 24:1). Jesus then defines “unseemly thing” as “adultery.” (Matt. 5:32, 19:7-9.) Jesus precisely affirms what the Law of Moses previously said. Hence, Jesus was not saying this is a “defective maxim” in the Mosaic Law.

Thus, Jesus never abrogates the Law given Moses. While it is assumed Jesus did so, and this is used to claim Jesus’ words to the young rich man had to be merely pulling the young man’s leg, the proponents have not thought through the implication. If Jesus were teaching the young man that obedience to the Law was no longer the path to enter life, then this contradicts Deut. 6:25. Jesus no longer qualifies to be God’s Messiah. (Deut. 13:1-5.) But He surely was! Which means Jesus was being serious with the young man.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran Pastor killed by the Nazis, explains in his The Cost of Discipleship (1937) how obedience to the Law is part of Jesus’ salvation formula. Bonhoeffer says we ignore this passage from Jesus at our peril.

The following is how Bonhoeffer reads the story of Jesus’ answering the young rich man’s question on how to have eternal life. (Matt. 19:16-22.) Bonhoeffer says Jesus by

4. Based on this verse, some affirm Jesus supposedly teaches the Old Testament was “marred by imperfect laws or defective maxims” (George B. Stevens, The Teachings of Jesus (1916) at 50.)
quoting the Ten Commandments has changed it from an academic question to a call “to a simple obedience to the will of God as it has been revealed.” (Id., at 72.) Jesus reaffirms the Ten Commandments “as the commandments of God.” (Id., at 73.) Jesus is saying that we must move on from purely academic questions, and “get on with the task of obedience.” (Id., at 73.) It is “high time the young man began to hear the commandment and obey it.” (Id., at 73.)

When the young rich man says he has obeyed all the commandments, Jesus tells him that he still lacks one thing to be “perfect.” Jesus tells him to sell all that he has and give it to the poor. Bonhoeffer says the point is unmistakable:

But it is an addition [to the salvation formula] which requires the abandonment of every previous attachment. Until now perfection has always eluded his grasp....Only now, by following Christ, can he... practise it aright. (Id., at 76.)

But the young man was attached to his many possessions. He did not heed Jesus’ call. He went away grieved by the cost. The young man did not make the commitment Jesus required. The young man wanted grace for eternal life, but only if it came free. Jesus said it was instead a costly grace — one that would cost the young man everything.

Bonhoeffer then excoriates the Christians who use Paul’s attack on legalism to undermine Jesus’ message:

We are excusing ourselves from single-minded obedience to the words of Jesus on the pretext [that this endorses] legalism....(Id., at 80.)

Bonhoeffer claims that we cannot “trifle” with Jesus’ words (id. at 81) by reinterpreting them to line up with our favorite doctrine of grace:

[T]he whole word of the Scriptures summons us to follow Jesus. We must not do violence to the Scriptures by interpreting them in terms of an abstract principle, even if that principle be
Other Commentators Who Get It Right

**the doctrine of grace** [for fear] otherwise we shall end up in legalism. (*Id.*, at 84.)

Thus, Bonhoeffer saw obedience as crucial and integral to the salvation doctrine Jesus taught. Bonhoeffer even says if the bogeyman of legalism and free-grace are used to refute Jesus, these bogeymen must die. The words of Jesus must live and be always boldly taught.

Other Commentators Who Get It Right

The *Bethel Church of God* observes below that Jesus’ words to the young rich man are starkly different from the Gospel of Cheap Grace which predominates:

What are some of the necessary things one must do in order to gain **eternal life**? Notice this example: [Quotes Matt. 19:16-24.]

Keeping the commandments of God **certainly flies in the face of what many believe today.** Yet, Jesus was **very clear.** The Jewish people were adamant in observing the first four commandments, but **lax in the last six.** This is why Jesus told this man what he should do. The law Jesus referred to was the Ten Commandments.5

Yet, our predominant teachers tell us the Law given Moses was abrogated. When we reject the Law as Jesus’ tool to disciple us, Bonhoeffer says cheap grace creates a “Christianity without Christ.” (*Cost of Discipleship*, supra, at 59.) Without the Law repeated by Jesus, “[t]here is a **trust** in God, but **no following** of Christ.” *Id.* Hence, we arrive at faith alone without any need to follow Jesus. But this is a “way of our own choosing...Jesus will certainly reject it.” *Id.*

Bonhoeffer’s Explanation Of The Law-
Problem Raised By Jesus’ Message To The
Rich Young Man

Bonhoeffer said Jesus is clear that the Law remains valid for the New Testament church in Matthew 5:17-20. How does he address the Fable of Cheap Grace? *He ignores its reliance on Paul.* For Bonhoeffer, it is not necessary to defend relying upon Jesus only. He leaves it up to the cheap-grace pastor to explain why we should reject Jesus’ words.

Bonhoeffer explains the ongoing relevance of the Law of Moses in preference to any other authority.

Bonhoeffer Starts With The Meaning Of Matthew 5:17-20

Bonhoeffer first quotes Matthew 5:17-20. Jesus says that whoever teaches obedience to the Law is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever teaches you to relax in the slightest the Law’s commands will be least in the kingdom of heaven. Bonhoeffer then explains the passage’s import:

But now comes the surprise — the disciples are bound to the Old Testament Law. This has a double significance. First, it means adherence to the Law is quite different from the following of Christ, and secondly, it means any adherence to his person that disregards the law is equally removed from the following of Him. (*Id.*, at 121.)

Bonhoeffer means that Jesus’ followers are not free to disregard the Law. It is a distinct obligation that Jesus imposes which is not satisfied by merely ‘following’ Jesus. This is true because Jesus makes a condition of following Him that His followers follow the Law. Bonhoeffer continues:

It is Jesus...who points to the Law...Because it is their Lord who does this, *they are bound to acknowledge this.* (*Id.*)
Bonhoeffer’s point is subtle. Jesus is Lord. If He says it is so, who can gainsay him? As Paul says, “let every man be a liar, but God be true!” Jesus cannot be lying to us. If we find anyone who says the Law has been abrogated for one who claims to follow Jesus, then let such a person be the liar, but God (Jesus) be true.

Bonhoeffer continues in the same vein.

The question inevitably arises. Which is our final authority? Christ or the Law? To which are we bound?...Now He [Jesus] tells us that to abandon the Law would be to separate ourselves from Him. What exactly does He mean?

Step Two: Answer To The Young Rich Man

Bonhoeffer says the meaning of Jesus is clear from our knowledge of His answer to the young rich man on how to “have eternal life.” Bonhoeffer says:

The Law Jesus refers to is the Law of the old covenant, not a new law, but the same law He quoted to the young rich man and the lawyer when they [each asked how to have eternal life.] It becomes a new law only because it is Christ who binds His followers to it. (Id. at 121.)

Thus, Bonhoeffer is nailing the point home: to be a Christian, Jesus said you must be one committed to following the Law given Moses. Somehow, a contrary view has poisoned Christianity. We have been led to believe if we follow these words of Jesus we are engaging in heretical legalism, i.e., a teaching that God wants obedience to the Law.

Bonhoeffer later returns to this odd development where Jesus’ words stand in stark contrast to the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. Then Bonhoeffer has some scathing

sarcasm for his opponents. Bonhoeffer mentions that when we give all to Christ, it includes a repentance from all our sinful desires. We turn to God’s Law for our new direction because Jesus commanded this. Then Bonhoeffer says the Modern Gospel rejects this. It has developed a rationalization that one can become a Christian and keep on sinning (i.e., disobeying the Law of God):

The breach with things of the world [which Jesus demands] is now branded [by the Modern Gospel] as a legalistic misinterpretation of the grace of God....Once again, justification of the sinner has become justification of sin. (Id., at 97.)

Bonhoeffer offered a re-interpretation of what the heresy of legalism should mean. It would be making the Law itself an idol, letting it take “God’s place.” But Bonhoeffer says such an error is low on the scale of errors. “The disciples were confronted [by Jesus] with the opposite danger of denying the Law its divinity and divorcing God from His Law.” (Id., at 122.)

Thus, we can see that Bonhoeffer refused to shy away from Jesus’ words on the Law. Bonhoeffer refused to cower under the dominant Modern Gospel. He did not reject Jesus’ view merely because such a view is everywhere mocked as legalism. Bonhoeffer refused to bow to the forced contorted readings of Jesus’ words. This explains why Bonhoeffer begins his book saying the words of Jesus have been so “overlaid with human ballast” that if Jesus Himself were here today delivering a sermon, His very words would be rejected by many in the church. (Id., at 35.) We have put up a superstructure of “doctrinal elements” that make it far more difficult for people to accept Christ’s message. (Id., at 36.)
Jesus Is Asked The Same Question A Second Time & Answers The Same Way

If Jesus’ lesson to the young rich man on his need to obey the Law for salvation were not really a sincere teaching, then we would be forced to conclude Jesus answered a Torah-scholar’s identical question about eternal life in the same insincere facetious manner. This stretches all credulity.

For on another occasion, a lawyer asked the identical question. “How do I obtain eternal life?” Jesus answered the identical way, but even more clearly. He asked the lawyer to recite what the lawyer believed is necessary for eternal life. The lawyer answered that it is key to obey the two most elevated commands in the Law given Moses: love God “with all your heart” (Deut. 6:5) and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). The lawyer correctly quoted these two laws from the Law given Moses. Jesus then said the lawyer “answered correctly” and if he did them “you shall live.” (Luke 10:25-37.) The exchange was:

(25) And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and made trial of him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? (26) And he said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? (27) And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. (28) And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. (Luke 10:25-28 ASV)

Jesus did not tell the lawyer that it was not possible to be obedient. Obedience was something God already promised was within grasp. (See the next section.) Jesus did not tell the young lawyer that something shy of obedience to the Law made you acceptable to God. Instead, Jesus said obedience to the Law, which hung on these two central commands, was the right path. There is no reason to believe Jesus is insincere.
God On Humans’ Ability To Obey His Law

Some claim it is contrary to human nature to obey God. Hence, God could not set as a condition of salvation that we must obey Him. Therefore, they read into Jesus’ words to the young rich man and the Torah-scholar that Jesus must have been facetious — He was allegedly pulling their legs.

However, God in Deuteronomy 30:11 assures us obedience to these commands “is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off.” (ASV.) Apostle John said: “And his commandments are not burdensome.” (1 John 5:2-3.) As Jesus too says, “my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:29-30.)

Thus, obeying God’s commandments are not too hard or burdensome if we call on the Lord for help. When Jesus points us in this direction, it is a direction God already promised we can follow.

Self-Denial & Following Jesus

Jesus’ message to the young rich man on how to obtain eternal life was combined with a related condition of self-denial and bearing your own suffering by following Jesus. (Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-26.)

Our Lord explains His meaning to His twelve apostles immediately thereafter. He tells them that if you give up fathers, mothers, and brothers for Him, deny yourself, take up your cross, and “follow Me,” you “shall have eternal life.” (Matthew 19:27-29.) See also, Matthew 10:37-39.

It was as Jesus says elsewhere. Those who are following Him and are losing their life in this world to serve Him do so for “life eternal.” (John 12:25-26.) This echoed:

(38) And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me. (39) He that fin-
deth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Matt. 10:38-39 ASV)
What was this self-denial about? It means not following your will but God’s will. You have the same choice Jesus faced in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. (Matt. 26:39, ASV)

As Jesus denied Himself — the human flesh He was inside, we too must deny ourselves and follow God’s directions, commands, and requirements.

Self-denial in this context means obedience to God, as Bonhoeffer points out. In context, Jesus specifically mentioned to the young rich man obedience to the Law given Moses, in particular the Ten Commandments.

Jesus’ requirement that the rich young man give away his wealth to the poor was an obvious reference to repentance from sin. It was a work worthy of repentance.

Cheap Grace View Of Matthew 19:17

You can prove the force of a passage by looking at how weak are the opposing arguments to such meaning.

Here Jesus is blunt in this message to the young rich man. He clearly states “but if thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:17.) How can this be viewed other than as what it literally says?

Vincent Word Studies makes no comment on this aspect of verse 17. Likewise Robertson’s Word Pictures ignores it. The Geneva Study Bible dares not touch it.

However, the major commentators such as Clarke, Barnes and Gill cannot ignore it.

For his part, Adam Clarke says Jesus’ answer is no longer valid. Since the Law is ended (based on cites to Paul), then Jesus’ words that to ‘enter life one must obey the Law’ is abrogated. Because of Paul’s declarations, Jesus’ words supposedly belong to a defunct dispensation.
However, this directly negates the relevance of the words and message of Jesus’ Himself. How can we do this when Jesus said that even if heaven and earth passed away, Jesus’ words would not pass away? (Matt. 25:35.) How can Jesus’ words be defunct in the era of grace? For after the Resurrection (when that era surely started), Jesus gave the apostles the Great Commission. He told them to teach the nations to “obey all the commandments that I have given thee.” If Jesus’ words to the young rich man were defunct, why did Jesus order them to be taught to us even in the era of grace?

Make no mistake about the horrible implication of what Clarke teaches. It is known as dispensationalism. This doctrine is a blatant denial of our need to listen and follow the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. If Paul is the sole source of a reason to disregard Jesus’ words as irrelevant, then we must re-examine our priorities (or Paul). For Jesus said the “apostolos is not greater than the one who sends him.”(John 13:16.)

The only virtue in Clarke’s argument is that it is consistent with how people view the Fable of Cheap Grace. However, it surely is not consistent with the words of Jesus. It depends on negating them in Matthew 19:17. Clarke is directly upholding a message at odds with what Jesus’ taught.

Barnes & Gill, other famous commentators, both teach Jesus is saying one thing but He means the exact opposite.8 Barnes admits Jesus tells the young man that if he wants to enter life, then obey the commandments. However, Barnes says Jesus really meant the opposite. Jesus supposedly meant that if you trust in obedience to the commandments for salvation, you are trusting in the wrong thing. Barnes has Jesus say one thing and mean the opposite. He is insincere.

7. For extended quotes from Clarke, see “Rebuttal to Jesus’ Answer to the Direct Question On How to Obtain Eternal Life,” in the supplementary material section available online at http://www.jesuswordsonly.com/JesusWordsonSalvation.html.

8. See “Rebuttal to Jesus’ Answer to the Direct Question On How to Obtain Eternal Life,” in the supplementary material available online at http://www.jesuswordsonly.com/JesusWordsonSalvation.html.
Barnes rationalizes this on the same point that tripped up the young Luther — the assumption that the Law was abrogated, relying on patently heretical doctrine. The mature Luther recanted from the doctrine of the abrogation of the Law. (See Preface, “i. The Catechisms (1531) and the Antinomian Theses (1537)” on page xiv et seq.) Barnes is unaware of what compelled Luther to recant.

For example, the idea that the Law was abrogated for New Testament members directly contradicts Jesus’s words in Matthew 5:19. Jesus tells you anyone who teaches you not to follow a command in the Law by the slightest relaxation will be least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever teaches you to follow the Law will be the greatest in the kingdom. If anyone — whether Luther or Paul — contradicts a “teaching of [Jesus] Christ” such as on the Law’s validity or tries to dilute Jesus’ words, Apostle John tells us that person when so teaching does not “have God.” (2 John 1:9.)

In sum, we see Barnes’ first argument to dispel Jesus’ teachings on eternal life to the rich young man depends on assuming Jesus rejected the Law’s principles. One of those principles is in Deuteronomy 6:25. It says the same thing Jesus literally tells the young rich man: obedience to the Law is the means to be right (justified) in God’s eyes.

However, Barnes denies Jesus is merely reaffirming the Law. Instead, Barnes insists Jesus has the view the Law is negated. Jesus is supposedly trying to announce a new means of salvation: faith alone. To lead the rich young man to this conclusion, Jesus allegedly affirms a principle from the Law

9. Even if Paul taught this, it would not make a heresy no longer a heresy. God in Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and Isaiah 8:20 tells us that any new prophecy must not undermine the Law. If it does, it is false prophecy — heresy. You are not to “listen” to that prophet any longer.

10. “And it shall be righteousness unto us, if we observe to do all this commandment before Jehovah our God, as he hath commanded us.” Plaut in his commentary on Torah says this means “these are counted as being ‘right’ in their relation to Him.” (Plaut:1368.) Keil & Delitzsch, Lutheran scholars, say likewise. See page 33.
which Jesus supposedly no longer believes is valid, but has been superseded. Hence, to get the rich young man to this view about faith, Jesus supposedly masks His true meaning by affirming the opposite of what He truly believes.

Barnes and others who make this claim are unwittingly impeaching the validity of Jesus’ Messiahship. Even someone who has previously had “signs and wonders that come to pass” is a false prophet once they teach the people of God not to follow His Law. (Deut. 13:1-5; Isaiah 8:20.) If Jesus is intending to abrogate Deuteronomy 6:25 by endorsing it, which is what Barnes is in effect saying, Barnes is affirming an intention in Jesus’ mind that would not only make Jesus appear an insincere hypocrite, but, if true, also prove that Jesus was a false Messiah. As First Fruits of Zion points out: “Sadly, the traditional understanding of the Christian Jesus is that he is a prophet attested by signs and wonders, but that he also cancelled Torah.” Then FFOZ adds: “Such a person fits Deuteronomy 13:1-5’s description of a false prophet perfectly.” Then “the conversion to faith in such a person would be a violation of God’s own commandments.” (E-Drash 8/8/2004 FFOZ.) FFOZ means that modern Christianity has portrayed Jesus’ teachings so that a Jew is duty-bound to reject Jesus by the command in Deuteronomy 13:1-5.11 Barnes has overlooked this compelling problem.

11.Incidentally, the early church did not agree with our modern view that the Law given Moses, in particular the Ten Commandments, was ever abrogated. Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.), Bishop of Lyon, France, set forth the doctrine of universal Christianity as practiced: “The decalogue [Ten Commandments] however was not cancelled by Christ, but is always in force: men were never released from its commandments.” (“Against Heresies,” Anti-Nicene Fathers, Bk. IV, Ch.XVI, at 480.) For this reason, Irenaeus insisted that the Sabbath was on Saturday, in obedience to one of the Ten. The early church except the city of Rome and Alexandria, Egypt, all followed Saturday as Sabbath until in 363 A.D., Rome — urged by the emperor — abolished Saturday Sabbath. See my prior book, Jesus’ Words Only (2007) at 452 n.31.
Barnes has a second argument to support that Jesus is using guile — pulling the young man’s leg. Jesus is supposedly asking the young man to do something that was not possible at all times (i.e., keep the law without fail). Obedience, if a requirement of salvation, asks us supposedly to engage in a self-defeating enterprise. Barnes did not factor into this the role that repentance covers over the rough spots in obedience. This was in fact the message to the young rich man — Jesus told the young man to ‘give your wealth to the poor’ — an obvious ‘work worthy of repentance.’ Instead, Barnes sees Jesus as putting a 100% without-fail obedience on the young man. Barnes then describes this standard for salvation as an impossible standard because any single failure irreversibly causes loss of eternal life. Repentance-from-sin is ignored apparently because it too is a hopeless alternative. Thus, Barnes concludes that Jesus’ intent was allegedly to discourage concern of the young man to actually obey the Law to enter life by affirming that it was the principle to enter life.

Both Gill and Barnes are trying to imply that the Law given Moses meant that if you sin in the slightest, it is all over. You are damned to hell, irreversibly. Consequently, without a flawless perfect obedience, your destiny is supposedly hell. If true, Jesus was pointing the young man to a path that could not actually save him. It only would lead to failure.

Therefore, what Jesus allegedly was doing is showing the young man that obedience was the wrong direction to go in because obedience must be perfect for eternal life. Any failure supposedly means hell. Thus, obedience to the law is a hopeless endeavor to righteousness. Jesus supposedly made this point by affirming the opposite was true!

However, Jesus’ point is not that the young man should follow a standard that was impossible. Jesus was merely repeating Deuteronomy 6:25. It said obedience to the Law maintains an imputed righteousness before God. The same is repeated numerous times in the Bible, e.g., Eze 18:5, 9. Likewise, Habakkuk 2:4 squarely says in Hebrew that the
“just shall live by his faithfulness” (not faith) — a word in Hebrew meaning obedient living. Such obedience is affirmed to be quite feasible. God in Deuteronomy 30:11 reassures us that obedience “is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off.” (ASV.)

However, in affirming the opposite, Gill and Barnes are grossly misrepresenting the Law and the Prophets. They are suggesting that once you sin, you are irretrievably lost. However, the Law is not a dead end curse, as they assert. Instead, once you sinned, repentance from sin is always an option unless you died too suddenly to repent. This option to repent for lapses is clearly mentioned repeatedly in God’s Word. For example:

And thou, son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression; and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall he that is righteous be able to live thereby in the day that he sinneth. (Eze 33:12)(ASV)

Ezekiel teaches when the righteous sin, they lose life, i.e., eternal life. When the sinner repents, he lives, i.e., he has eternal life. Nothing short of the grave is ever irreversible. Therefore, when one repents and is obeying the Law, it is deemed to be imputed righteousness, so says Deut. 6:25.

The principle of repentance from sin and restoration is also reflected in Deuteronomy 30:1-10, which states:

When all these things befall you...and you return them to your heart... and you return to God...then God will turn your captivity and take you back in love...God will bring you back...God will return and gather you...then you will return to hearing God’s voice...And

12. For discussion on justification doctrine, particularly in Habakkuk 2:4, see page 34.
God will again rejoice over you...if you turn to God with all your heart and all your soul.
(Deut. 30:1-10).

Barnes and Gill are wrong to imply that Jesus was teaching an absolute perfect obedience to the Law was necessary and that if there was any failure, there was never any hope again. Jesus was not insincerely giving an impossible standard. Barnes and Gill are insisting Jesus’ intention was the young man would give up seeking an imputed righteousness from obeying the Law despite God promising this precisely in Deuteronomy 6:25. This is nonsense.

Barnes and Gill are engaging in an absolutely false caricature of God’s word. It is a blatant misrepresentation of God’s Holy Scripture. It also makes Jesus appear deceitful. They make Jesus say one thing but mean exactly the opposite. How shameful that these men would endorse such a depiction of Jesus for the paltry purpose of holding onto cheap grace. Instead, Peter says Jesus “did not sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” (1 Peter 2:21-22.)

There is one Protestant evangelical church that like Bonhoeffer takes Jesus’ words seriously in Matthew 19:17 (“but if thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments”) This is the Active Bible Church of God (ABCG) in Brisbane, Australia. (What a pity we must scour so far to find a true defender of Jesus’ words.)

Even so, this church tries to defend their views are compatible with the gospel of faith alone, as we shall see.

The Mystery Of Lawlessness

In an article entitled The Mystery of Lawlessness, the ABCG explains Jesus’ doctrine on obedience:
But what does it mean to truly believe in Him? *If we sincerely believe in Him, would we not do whatever He asks us to do?* Did not Jesus say, “If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death” (John. 8:51)? What did Jesus say to do? In Matthew 19:16-17 someone came to Jesus, asking Him, “What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” *His answer: “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”*

Thus, the ABCG lets Jesus explain Jesus’ meaning. A refreshing change! Jesus says that the way to life is to obey the commandments. He promises in John 8:51 if we keep His word we shall never see death.

However, then ABCG agrees we are saved by “faith apart from works of the Law,” citing the cheap-grace refrain. Then, ABCG quickly flips back to Jesus. ABCG insists we still must be “concerned with works.” The ABCG then cites Jude and a costly-grace verse ascribed to Paul (as they understand Romans 8:1, 4):

Jude mentioned that ungodly men had entered into the church, “Who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness” (Jude 4). Licentiousness can mean, “Unrestrained by law; lawless.” In other words, these ungodly men taught that *if we are under grace we need not have to keep the law.* Yet, this [license teaching] contradicts what we just read in Romans 8:1,4.\(^\text{14}\)

---

\(^13\)http://www.abcog.org/nh/lawless.htm (last accessed 6/17/06).

\(^{14}\)“(1) There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. (3) For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: (4) that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Rom 8:1-4 ASV)
Thus, here is a group that defends Jesus’ meaning. It interprets Jesus’ words as more important to follow than the refrains of cheap grace. This is truly a refreshing focus on Jesus’ words in order to deduce doctrine. It is too bad they did not directly confront the validity of the refrain of ‘faith alone.’

James Watkins is a Protestant professor and author, with a keen love of humor.\(^\text{15}\) In 2006, Watkins wrote an article entitled *What Must I do to Inherit Eternal Life?*\(^\text{16}\) In it, Watkins notes that Jesus is asked twice on how to have eternal life. Jesus was asked once by a scribe (a lawyer) and once by a rich man. In response to the scribe, Watkins points out Jesus asks the scribe what does he think is the answer. Jesus then comments. It bears repeating how the interchange went, as Watkins recounts it.


He answered: “’Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ’Love your neighbor as yourself.’”


Watkins notes we would *answer differently today*, quite unlike what Jesus affirms as correct:

Unfortunately, in the modern church, the expert in the law would have said, “Simply believe, have faith.”

Watkins is pointing out the incongruity between Jesus’ affirmation of the correct answer to this key question versus how we normatively answer it today.

These passages caused Watkins to focus on what Jesus taught. He put aside what anyone else taught about salvation to hear the Master. Why? Because Jesus is the way, truth and life. Watkins explains:

So, armed with a yellow highlighter pen, I worked my way through the printed-in-red teachings of Jesus to understand what He taught we must do to inherit eternal life. After all, He is “the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [Him]” (John 14:6).

Then Watkins tells how he was completely shocked when he found three passages where Jesus teaches salvation depends on more than faith. Watkins explained:

However, I was surprised (actually shocked), to find that three times more yellow-highlighted passages dealt with putting that faith into practice in tangible, practical ways.

Please read the following passages carefully and ask yourself, must I go beyond simply faith to experience eternal life?


17. For discussion, see “Parable Of The Sheep & The Goats” on page 219 et seq.
Once Watkins opened his mind to the issue presented by these verses, suddenly he recognized a floodgate of similar passages. These two discourses about “eternal life” with Jesus were not isolated to the young rich man and the scribe. Jesus repeats many times the same answer.

Then Watkins in his article gets out of the way. Watkins finds quote after quote from Jesus. Time after time, Jesus links more than faith to salvation. Watkins cites the salvation-formula passages that are discussed throughout this book.

What is interesting is that Watkins was first stimulated by the fact Jesus was asked the direct question on how to obtain eternal life by the young rich man and the lawyer. These passages led to a turning point for Watkins on how he needed to answer the identical question today.

Watkins pointed out that each time Jesus answered, Jesus gave a law-based (obedience-based) answer. Also, the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats was directly in line with that conclusion. Thus, we can see that here — in Watkins’ case — seeing what Jesus taught in answering this direct question opened up his mind to see all the other times that Jesus says, in effect, the same thing.

This passage has powerfully impacted other famous Christians. It is self-evident Jesus’ talk to the rich young man played an important role of disabusing the mature Luther and Bonhoeffer from what they previously thought and believed about belief alone.
Jesus’ Answer To The Direct Question On How To Obtain Eternal Life

did not address faith because in context, it appears, the man believed in Jesus. At least, the young rich man had a strong trust in Jesus. Otherwise, there is no explanation why the man had grief when Jesus told him the cost to obtain salvation was so high. The young man wanted eternal life from Jesus, but only if it was free or easy. The man would only take the offer of eternal life if grace was cheap.

Jesus was telling the young man and ourselves that instead grace is costly. The man had to give away the very thing that was encumbering him with sin. Jesus gave him a work worthy of repentance that implied this young man’s sin was greed. The young man lacked charity. Jesus demanded as a price for eternal life obedience to the principle of cutting off the possessions that were ensnaring him in sin. It was as Jesus elsewhere taught: you can go to heaven maimed or hell whole. (Mark 9:42-47.) For a person suffering from greed whose self-control is absent, the only solution is to give away all their wealth. Then they will learn charity.

The importance of this passage cannot be missed. James Watkins is a perfect example of the shock any Protestant drilled on ‘faith-alone’ will have when he truly digests this passage. When Jesus is your Master and you finally agree to hear Him, your normative beliefs crumble.

Thus, the messages to the young rich man and the scribe are key. In these passages, Jesus directly answered the question on how to obtain eternal life. These passages are something to never lose sight of. Jesus has answered the most important question of life. Yet, He answered differently than what we hear today. Watkins could not believe what he read. So he stopped in his tracks. Then Watkins triple and quadruple checked. Yet, the gospel message of Jesus time and time again came up with the same answer which Jesus gave the young rich man. Salvation is certainly not by belief alone.