

**Conversion to Jesus Christ:
(4) Man's Inability to Convert Himself to Jesus Christ"**

On the first three Sundays that we have devoted to this important subject, "Conversion to Jesus Christ", we addressed the question, "Are We Converted to Jesus Christ?" We sought to show forth the ease in which people, even professing Christians, can be deluded in their thinking that they are true Christians, that they have salvation, but in reality are still in their sin. We were hoping this would result in each one of us to commit to a serious, biblical, testing of the state of his own soul. One minor point that we made in these first three weeks was to set forth the teaching of the Word of God that although conversion involves action on our part, conversion is the work of God's grace in the soul. Fallen man is incapable and unwilling of converting to Christ in order to obtain salvation. The Scriptures teach that "the natural man", that is, the unconverted man, "does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). They declare that "the carnal mind", again, the mind of the unconverted man, "is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom. 8:7). If a man is to be converted to Jesus Christ for salvation, he must be an object of God's sovereign, converting grace. Now what we have earlier suggested, today we desire to confirm, sinful man is unable to convert himself to Jesus Christ in order to be saved from his sin.

Let us begin our study of this matter with the account recorded in **Luke 18:18-30**. Here we read of our Lord Jesus dealing with the soul of a rich man. Although this young man had many admirable qualities, and he had made great efforts to live a life pleasing to God, after he had spoken with the Lord Jesus, he went away from Him an unconverted man. He would not surrender all in order to come unto Jesus for salvation. After the young man departed, our Lord instructed His disciples in the necessity of the sovereign God to bring people to salvation. It is impossible for a rich man, and by extension for any man, to enter the kingdom of God. It is only possible for him to enter the kingdom through the grace of God working in and upon him. Salvation is of the Lord. God alone can bring people to experience salvation.

We read beginning with verse 18:

¹⁸Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. ²⁰You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'"

²¹And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."

²²So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

²³But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. ²⁴And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

²⁸Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You."

²⁹So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life." (Luke 18:18-30)

In Luke 18 we read of events that transpired while our Lord Jesus and His disciples were travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem. This was the last journey of our Lord's earthly life, for in Jerusalem He would experience His destiny to suffer, die, and rise from the dead on the third day. With His earthly ministry coming to its conclusion, the Lord imparted to His disciples instruction regarding the kingdom of God.

God had promised His people of a future kingdom from the beginning of biblical history. God declared that there would be a kingdom comprised of His people, a kingdom in which there was no presence of sin or of sin's effects. In this kingdom God would rule over His people who are willingly subjected to Him. His promised kingdom would be one in which the people of God dwell in safety and security. In God's kingdom His people would live together in harmony, mutual respect, and dignity, and with no need that troubles them. God would rule over His people in this kingdom through a mighty King, a Son of David, who would assure that the will of God would be done on earth as it is in heaven. Within this promised kingdom ruled by the Son of David, God would enable His people to dwell in joy, peace, and righteousness,

The disciples of the Lord Jesus knew that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised King, the Son of David.¹ They also anticipated that the kingdom would be inaugurated when they came to Jerusalem. It was fitting that the kingdom would be the subject of their discourse and the subject of our Lord's teaching as the continued their journey. What the disciples of our Lord did not understand (and some of His disciples today still do not understand) is that the kingdom of God would come in two stages.² The kingdom of God would be inaugurated after Jesus was crucified and then raised and enthroned in heaven by His Father. This kingdom would exist in a "mystery" form throughout this church age, a spiritual kingdom that would exist among the fallen earthly political kingdoms of this world. But the final form and full realization of the kingdom of God would come when Christ returns the second time at the end of the age. Then the Lord Jesus will judge the world, and exclude from the new heavens and new earth any and all, except those who are due to inherit His kingdom. They will thereafter live with Christ their king in His everlasting kingdom. The Lord Jesus emphasized in His teaching that to know that oneself would enter and enjoy the kingdom of God was the most important of all matters. Entering the kingdom of God is to participate in salvation from sin that Jesus Christ has secured for His people. This was the most important matter for this young man. This is the most important matter for you and me today. It is of eternal importance that each of us knows that we have *truly come to Jesus Christ*.

And so, here we read our Lord's words regarding entering the Kingdom of God, in other words, to receive God's salvation through Jesus Christ. We all, each of us, need to know what is involved in entering the Kingdom of God. It is a matter of coming unto Jesus in repentance from sin and faith in Him, committing oneself wholly unto Him without reservation. But none of us are able or willing to come unto Him, unless God Himself moves us and enables us to do so. Our Lord Jesus taught, "All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me; and Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out." And our Lord taught that unless the Father takes the initiative and brings a person unto Christ by His grace, it will not happen. Our Lord taught His disciples, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (John 6:65). This account shows us that even the most seeming, sincere, committed, devout person will not inherit eternal life unless he fully, wholly, without reservation, comes to Jesus Christ as His Savior and His Lord. He is in need of the grace of God to bring him into the kingdom, or he will forever remain excluded.

¹ Dispensationalists, and even progressive dispensationalists, are wrong to teach that Jesus ruling as the promised Son of David is a promise to future ethnic, national Israel, and not to the church, that He will not rule as the Son of David until His Second Coming when He only then establishes the Davidic kingdom upon the earth for a 1,000 year earthly millennium. An example of this teaching would be the clear statement of John MacArthur, "The kingdom promised to David belongs to Israel, not the church" [see *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 953]. Jesus Christ is presently reigning as the promised Son of David over "Israel", as Lord of lords and King of kings. He began His reign upon His resurrection and ascension into heaven as the son of David as testified by Peter on the Day of Pentecost. The remnant of Jews that He saved had gone out into the world with the goodnews of the kingdom, into which multitudes of the Gentile nations have entered and are submitted to the Son of David. James declared this in Acts 15:14-18.

² This is not to say, as dispensationalists teach, that there are two distinct and separate kingdoms,--the kingdom of God for the church and the kingdom of heaven for Israel. Rather, it is one kingdom in two stages, the present spiritual kingdom of which all the redeemed of the world are citizens, and the future full realization of His kingdom in a new heavens and new earth in which will dwell only the redeemed through Jesus Christ.

We first read that...

I. A young man comes to Jesus out of concern for his salvation (Luke 18:18-23)

We read in Luke 18:18 that a rich man came forward to Jesus and asked about what was required for entrance into the kingdom of God. This man came to Jesus to inquire of Him of what God requires of someone in order to inherit “eternal life.” **Verse 18** reads, “*Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”*” Eternal life includes all that is promised in having a place in “the kingdom of God”, of being “saved” (cf. Matt. 19:25). Here, as in many places in the Scriptures, eternal life is viewed as an “inheritance”, something to be received at the resurrection on the Last Day.³ The man recognized the authority of Jesus to teach the truth about these matters, which led the man to Jesus to pose his question.

We learn much about this enquirer from the few words that describe him in addition to the few words that he voiced. We might also consider a word or two about him included in our other Gospel accounts (Mark 10 and Matthew 18).

1. Matthew described him as a **young** man (Matt. 19:20). We may assume that this young man had inherited his wealth. And so he was probably a man of social standing. This man had been blessed greatly, for he had “great wealth.”

2. He was a **religious** young man. He sought to order his life in a godly fashion. With respect to God’s laws he could say honestly, as best he knew, “*All these things I have kept from my youth*” (Luke 18:21). He was reflective about himself. He thought on matters of eternal significance. He was not a careless, idle, young man, who only thought and lived for today. He had probably inherited earthly riches, but his eye was on a heavenly inheritance of heavenly riches, as indicated by his question, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

3. He was an **earnest and sincere** religious young man as well. He was not one who just happened by and listened out of curiosity. Mark describes him as having come “*running*” to the Lord Jesus and then “*fell on his knees*” before Him (Mark 10:17). Young men who care little for spiritual things do not act in this manner. They may come to church and tolerate a sermon, but it really has no interest to them. This young man was not like this. He took his religion seriously. He *wanted desperately* to have eternal life.

4. He was probably even a **religious leader** in his community, even though he was quite young. He may have been one of the leading young men in a synagogue, or even a member of the supreme religious body of Judaism, the Sanhedrin. He is described by Luke as a “*ruler*” (Luke 18:18).

5. He was an **unsaved man**. We see this by his response to Jesus. In the other gospels they tell us “his face fell” and that “he went away sad.”

6. In his encounter with the Lord Jesus, it was revealed that he loved **riches** more than he desired entrance into the kingdom, more than he desired eternal life.

Our Lord liked this young man. In fact, Mark records that Jesus looked on this young man and “loved him.” He was a likeable young man. He had good qualities. And yet our Lord could see right through all that was apparent to the eye, and addressed the matter of his heart. The Lord dealt faithfully with this man for He desired his good. {By the way, if we have dealt with people faithfully, they will not always leave our presence happy and content.)

³ In some places in the Scriptures “eternal life” is set forth as a present possession, a quality of life that is characteristic of every true Christian. The Apostle John presented “eternal life” in this manner frequently in his writings. In the synoptic gospels, the Acts, and Paul and Peter’s letters, eternal life is often, but not exclusively, set forth as a future inheritance.

In verse 18 we read that the young man addressed the Lord as “good teacher.” Our Lord responded to him, “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God*” (18:19). The parallel accounts in Mark and Luke have slightly different wording and meaning. They have the young man address Jesus directly as “good.” But Luke 18:18 reads, “*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” In Matthew, the man asks, “What *good deed* must I do to have eternal life?” In all three accounts, however, the Lord answers with respect to “good” referring to Himself. Jesus answered the man, “*There is only One good.*”

The cultists jump on this and see this as the Lord Himself denying his deity--that He Himself is God. But the Lord was merely addressing the young man from what he could have known. The young man could not have known of anything but our Lord’s humanity, and so the young man should not have addressed Him in a manner that God alone deserves. Now, our Lord of course was not denying His own essential goodness, for He is eternal God, the eternal Son of God. But the young man could not have known Jesus was God, so it was wrong for the man to attribute to Jesus, who he thought to be a mere man, the goodness that is God’s alone. Jesus was affirming that God alone is essentially good.

The point is this: Our Lord sought to probe the nature of the man’s “faith.” The young man addressed the Lord Jesus as “good teacher.” This suggested that the young man might have been a *legalist*, that is, *he may have wrongly thought that people merit their way into heaven through their good deeds*. If the young man could view one human being as “good”, then he might be able to view another as “not so good”, and others, “no good.” He may have viewed himself as good and therefore merited entrance into the kingdom. This way of viewing life results in *exalting* some persons in your estimation, and *degrading* others. The standard of criteria may be based on *religious devotion or activity, moral conduct, religious law keeping, identity with a specific group*. All persons are assessed using these kinds of criteria, concluding, “This one merits forgiveness; that one earns eternal life.” This is heresy. If a person sees himself and others in this way, he is in great error and is probably not saved.

Now we might make a point here. We refer to people as “good” all the time. And that’s okay to do so. In fact, one of the qualifications of being a pastor is that he be an admirer of “good men” (Tit 1:8). But when we use the word, we speak relatively, but certainly we never even imply that by a person’s goodness he/she earns the blessing of God. Besides, man’s “goodness” is *derived* from God; God’s goodness” is *essential* to Him—it is the nature of His very essence.

Let us understand this more clearly. When our Lord told this young man, “*There is only One good*”, He was affirming that *goodness is an attribute of God*. What do we mean by “goodness”? When we speak of the goodness of God, we are saying that *God is perfect in His essence and His ways*. Psalm 52:1 reads, “The goodness of God endures continually.” There is nothing that can be added to the goodness of God, for He is absolutely, He is infinitely good. As **Thomas Manton** declared,

He is originally good, good of Himself, which nothing else is; for all creatures are good only by participation and communication from God. He is essentially good; not only good, but goodness itself: the creature’s good is a superadded quality, in God it is His essence. He is infinitely good; the creature’s good is but a drop, but in God there is an infinite ocean or gathering together of good. He is eternally and immutably good, for He cannot be less good than He is; as there can be no addition made to Him, so no subtraction from Him.⁴

Arthur Pink described the goodness of God:

God is *summum bonum*, the chiefest good. The original Saxon meaning of our English word “God” is “The Good.” God is not only the Greatest of all beings, but the Best. All the goodness there is in any creature has been imparted from the Creator, but God’s goodness is underived, for it is the essence of His eternal nature. As God is infinite in power from all eternity, before there was any display thereof, or any act of omnipotency put forth; so He was eternally good before there was any communication of His bounty, or any creature to whom it might be imparted or exercised. Thus, the first manifestation of this Divine perfection was in giving being to all things. “Thou art good, and doest good” (Psalm 119:68). God

⁴ Quoted in Arthur Pink, *The Attributes of God*.

has in Himself an infinite and inexhaustible treasure of all blessedness enough to fill all things. All that emanates from God—His decrees, His creation, His laws, His providences—cannot be otherwise than good: as it is written. “And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was *very good*” (Genesis 1:31).⁵

Before we move onward, take note that our Lord took time and effort to correct an errant theological opinion of this young man. The man was probably just being polite in addressing Jesus in this manner, but our Lord was compelled to correct the young man regarding his error. There are many who believe that to state or advocate finer points of doctrine is tedious and bothersome to others. It is being “picky” to point out flaws, bring correction, and attempt to speak with precision and accuracy about the things of God. But our Lord did not deal with souls in this manner. When He saw error, He corrected it. We should attempt to define and refine every thought that we have of God and His world that our every thought would become conformed to the truth of His Word. The Apostle Paul wrote,

⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and *take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*... (2 Cor. 10:4)

The Lord Jesus led the man to think about what he was saying and the implications of his assertions. To believe that a mere man, who is fallen due to original sin in Adam, and lives in sin in this world, may be described as “good”, is inaccurate. “God alone is good.” In another place the Lord Jesus described His disciples, and by extension all people, “If you being evil...” (Matt. 7:11; 12:34). God alone is inherently good, although we as His creatures can do good and become good in a derived sense.

In response to the man’s request, our Lord answered, “*You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother’*” (v. 20). This is not the kind of answer that we would necessarily expect, being good evangelicals. We might prefer to hear our Lord say as He did in **John 6:29**, “*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.*” But this is not what our Lord said on this occasion.

We might ask, “Why, then, did our Lord respond to the man in this way?” I think for several reasons. *First*, the Lord Jesus directed this man to keep the commandments of God *because this the way in which every human being is to live in God’s world*, whether Christian or not. God has created us and has established His laws that are consistent with His nature, laws by which all of His creatures are to order their lives in His world. God demands that all people everywhere order their lives according to His law, His commandments.

Second, more specifically, the Lord Jesus directed this man to keep the commandments of God *because to keep the commandments of God is the way of life of all true Christians, His disciples*. Keeping the Lord’s commandments is the course of life that Christians are to take that leads them to life eternal. Our Lord was not declaring the *grounds* of our salvation, which would be Himself--*Christ Jesus alone*. He was not speaking of the *means* by which God brings salvation to His people, which would be His *grace alone*. And our Lord was not speaking of the *instrument* by which God brings salvation to His people by grace, which is through *faith alone*. Rather, our Lord was answering the question of the young man which was essentially, “What kind of life am I to live if I am to inherit eternal life?” The answer of our Lord was a life characterized by keeping the commandments of God.

This is consistent with other passages of the New Testament:

John 15:10. “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”

1 Corinthians 7:19. “For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.”

⁵ Ibid.

1 John 2:3. “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴Whoever says ‘I know Him’ but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

1 John 3:21. “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²²and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him.”

1 John 3:24. “Whoever keeps His commandments abides in God, and God in Him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”

1 John 5:2. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments.”

1 John 5:3. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

2 John 1:6. “And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.”

Revelation 12:17. “Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

Revelation 14:12. “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.”

Third, the Lord Jesus directed this man to keep the commandments of God in order *to reveal to this man his self-righteousness, his sin, his need of grace, by directing this man to the law of God.* “Christ, to convince him of his folly, sends him to the law, saying, ‘If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments of God.’”⁶ God will use His law to convict a person of his sin in order to bring the sinner to see his need for God’s mercy and grace to be extended to him.

Now there are two common, serious errors respecting God’s Law, which we need to be very careful to avoid. **(1)** The error of **legalism**. It says that by keeping the laws of God you merit entrance. (The error of Roman Catholicism and most other man-made religions). **(2)** The error of **antinomianism (lawlessness)**. It says that you can live in violation to the commandments and still gain entrance into the kingdom of God. (The error of much of evangelicalism in these days). Both are grievous errors. Both are refuted repeatedly in the Bible. Paul addressed the first problem of legalism most thoroughly in Galatians and Romans, but he also addressed antinomianism as well.⁷ The problem that exists in these days is that people take Paul’s arguments designed to refute and correct legalism and use them to justify antinomianism. There is no place in the Bible that says a lawless person, one who violates the law of God in practice, can hope to have eternal life.

The Lord was not baiting this young man by telling this man a falsehood. If he wanted to enter life, he would have to walk a straight and narrow path prescribed within the limits of God’s commandments. To think he *merits* entrance by doing so would damn his soul; to think he could gain entrance *apart* from doing so would damn his soul as well. In between **legalism** and **lawlessness** is **grace**, which *motivates* and *enables* one to keep the law of God.⁸

And so, the Lord affirms the need to keep the commandments of God, citing the second of the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments. Our Lord said to the young man, “**‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother’.**” All of the laws of the Bible may be seen to be extensions or applications of the Ten Commandments. In the Ten

⁶ Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston* (Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), vol. 2, p. 66.

⁷ Cf. 1 Cor. 6:9ff.; Gal. 5:19ff.

⁸ Cf. Rom. 7:22; 8:1-8; 1 Corinthians 7:19; John 15:10; Jude 3, 4; 1 John 3:24; 2 John 6.

Commandments we have a summary of the entire law of God that God requires as a standard for living of all of His creatures, especially of His own people who profess faith in Him. **Thomas Brooks** described the comprehensive nature of the Ten Commandments:

The Ten Commandments are the heads of all the duties of the law largely contained in the whole Bible. They are the text which Christ himself, the prophets, and apostles expounded. They comprehend the whole duty of man (cf. Ecc. 12:3). There is nothing that God requires but may be reduced to one of these commandments. So faith is a duty of the first command, as it obliges men to believe whatever God reveals. The first commandment concerns the object of worship, requiring us to know and acknowledge God to be the true God, and our God, and to worship and glorify Him as such, in heart and life. The second relates to the means of worship, requiring us to receive, observe, and keep pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in His word. The third respects the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, words, and works. The fourth requires us to sanctify the Sabbath, that day which He hath set apart for His own worship and service. The fifth relates to the duties we owe to one another in our several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals. The sixth requires the preservation of our own life and that of others. The seventh respects the preservation of our own and our neighbor's chastity, in heart, speech, and behavior. The eighth relates to the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of others and us. The ninth requires the maintaining and promoting truth between man and man, especially in witness bearing. And the tenth requires us to be contented with our own condition, and to have a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbor and all that is his. And every commandment forbids whatever is opposite to or inconsistent with what it requires.⁹

We next read of the young man's response to the Lord in **verse 21**: "*And he said, 'All these things I have kept from my youth.'*" Here we see that this young man did not know himself. **Matthew Henry** wrote of him:

He boasts that he began *early* in a course of virtue, that he had continued in it to this day, and that he had not in any instance transgressed. Had he been acquainted with the extent and spiritual nature of the divine law, and with the workings of his own heart,—had he been but Christ's disciples awhile, and learned of him, he would have said quite the contrary: "*All these have I broken from my youth up, in thought, word, and deed.*"

No one apart from the Lord Jesus has ever or will ever keep the law of God perfectly, or even sufficiently, to merit life, but apparently this *young man* thought he had. He told Jesus respecting God's commandments, "All these I have kept since I was a boy." It seems clear he was a legalist. He thought he was due to inherit the kingdom through earning entrance. He revealed his self-righteousness and his ignorance in thinking that he had done so. So the Lord would reveal this to him.

The man's response reveals the errant thinking of this man with respect to God's commandments and his responsibility before God. It is clear from this man's response that he viewed the laws of God not as a rule of life for the one who is justified through faith alone; rather, he saw keeping the commandments in a moralistic or legalistic manner, believing that he would merit eternal life through his good works, which he saw as keeping the commandments of God.

It is extremely important that we understand the distinction between a right and a wrong understanding of the law of God and our obligation to keep the law. If we attempt to keep the law in a legalistic manner, believing that our obedience will earn us entrance into eternal life, we will be damned on the Day of Judgment. This is what it is to be a moralist, or a legalist. This man wrongly believed that he must keep the commandments *in order to gain acceptance by God*. He wrongly believed that he had kept the laws of God throughout His life. He did not know the full extent of the law. He did not understand the spiritual nature of God's law. He did not understand the sad sinful condition of his own heart and life. He was self-righteous,

⁹ Boston, *Works of Thomas Boston*, vol. 2, p. 69.

because he had wrongly believed that he had faithfully kept God's law and he had falsely thought that this would qualify him to enter the promised kingdom of God.

In contrast to the legalist, as this man, the man of faith keeps the commandments in order to show that he already believes in God's gift of salvation by God's grace alone through faith alone. The believer keeps God's commandments out of love and faith in Jesus Christ as His Lord, who directs him to order his life in the way of righteousness, a life characterized by keeping God's law. The legalist keeps God's commandments because he thinks wrongly that he is keeping terms of the law as a covenant of works, by which he is gaining his soul. The true Christian strives by God's grace to keep God's moral law in order to show that he believes that Jesus Christ is his Lord and Savior and that his Lord who rules according to God's laws within his kingdom governs him.

The man must have thought, "Perhaps there was something I have missed; perhaps there was another commandment that I had failed to recall or give due attention?" Our Lord revealed to this man his error. We read in **verses 22**: "*So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.'*"

The Lord showed the young man that he was not a law keeper, but rather he was an idolater. His wealth was his god from which he refused to part. We see what God requires of those who desire to inherit eternal life, the kingdom of God. Jesus told this young man, "Follow Me." But the man failed to do so.

Our Lord taught that "treasure in heaven" is obtained through abandoning all and following Him. "Treasure in heaven" in this context is eternal life; it is inheriting the Kingdom of God. Here the Lord reveals several things:

a. Keeping the law alone is not enough. That would be pure moralism. People who view entrance into heaven based on law keeping are moralists and legalists. They think they will have just as much, or perhaps a better chance than most, to make it through the gate of heaven someday.

b. Besides, the young man himself was not doing so. He had not been loving his neighbor as himself. And that he would not sell his possessions and give to his neighbors demonstrated this was so. He was covetous. His money was his god. He neither loved God nor his neighbor. In reality he had not kept nor was he keeping the commandments of God.

c. Entrance into life is through discipleship to Jesus. Entrance is gained by following the Lord Jesus in the course He travelled. Jesus said, "Follow Me." Jesus must alone be the Master of your life. No, you do not need to go out and sell everything you have. But if money is a god to you above the Lord Jesus, and money controls the way you live, you would be better off giving it all away; for you cannot serve both money and God. There is not a true Christian here who would not sell everything he has and give to the poor, if he were convinced that it was the will of God to do so.

Our Lord then taught His disciples...

II. The impossibility of fallen man to save himself, and of his need for the sovereign grace of God to bring him salvation (18:24-27)

²⁴And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

Our Lord spoke of the impossibility of a rich man to become saved. The Jews thought that rich people were the most blessed people of God. If Jesus says that a rich man cannot be saved, then who can be saved?

If this rich man who had everything, who was religious in every good way, could not enter the kingdom, who could?

Now, a frequently repeated spurious story is frequently linked with this verse. It is commonly said that there was in one of the large gates of Jerusalem a small gate through which pedestrians could walk which was called “the eye of the needle.” A camel could, but with great difficulty get down and squeeze through. In this way you can also get a few rich men to be Christians without selling everything they have. The story is apocryphal. There never was such a gate by that name. The point the Lord was making is that it is humanly impossible for a rich man (and there for any man) to get into heaven. The disciples’ reaction makes this clear (cf. 18:26).

The Lord Jesus taught His disciples that salvation could only come through the sovereign grace of God in salvation. **Verse 27** reads, **“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”** What man cannot do for himself, “all things are possible with God.” God in His grace can so squeeze the love of money out of a rich man that he can go through the eye of a needle into heaven.

III. Our Lord’s instruction to His disciples regarding the blessing of God that was theirs (18:28-30)

²⁸Then Peter said, “See, we have left all and followed You.”

²⁹So He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.” (Luke 18:18-30)

Our Lord reaffirmed to His followers of their heavenly inheritance. Can a person be assured of his eternal inheritance, his salvation? Of course he can. And here the Lord was assuring His disciples that their inheritance was assured. Followers of Jesus may be assured of eternal life. No doubt about it. Are you truly following Jesus? Then be assured. You have His Word on it.

On the other hand here is a good test as well. People say, “I am saved! I have trusted Jesus as my Saviour.” Our response to them may be, “Well, that’s good. But are you following Him?” If the answer is “no”, you may on the authority of the Word of God tell them they will not inherit eternal life. To believe on the Lord Jesus involves trusting Him for forgiveness of sins and following Him, that is, ordering one’s life according to His teachings, doing His will, which will result in eternal life.

Conclusion:

Salvation is in Christ alone. Because of what the Scriptures say regarding God, ourselves and our sin, we see our need for a Savior and that Savior is the Lord Jesus Christ, Who alone can bring people to glory. We come unto Him, without any reservation or hesitation. We entrust ourselves to Him, for we know that we cannot deal with our sin for only He can. We follow Him, for He is our Savior. He is our Lord.

Man cannot save himself. Although he can do many things, he cannot and will not fully come to Jesus Christ, for he is a sinner. God must act on his behalf. God must work on behalf of the sinner and within the sinner if that sinner is to be converted to Jesus Christ.

As the Apostle Paul once said, “I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” (Acts 20:32)

An excerpt from
“Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ”

by John Bunyan
(1628-1688)

Bunyan wrote this work based upon John 6:37, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” In this excerpt Bunyan sets forth tests by which we can know if we have truly come to Jesus Christ.

Objection. But how shall we know that such men are coming to Jesus Christ?

Answer: Because I endeavour thy conviction, conversion, and salvation, consider: Do they cry out of sin, being burdened with it, as of an exceeding bitter thing? Do they fly from it, as from the face of a deadly serpent? Do they cry out of the insufficiency of their own righteousness, as to justification in the sight of God? Do they cry out after the Lord Jesus, to save them? Do they see more worth and merit in one drop of Christ’s blood to save them, than in all the sins of the world to damn them? Are they tender of sinning against Jesus Christ? Is His name, person, and undertakings, more precious to them, than is the glory of the world? Is this word more dear unto them? Is faith in Christ (of which they are convinced by God’s Spirit of the want of, and that without it they can never close with Christ) precious to them? Do they savour Christ in His Word, and do they leave all the world for His sake? And are they willing, God helping them, to run hazards for His name, for the love they bear to Him? Are His saints precious to them? If these things be so, whether thou seest them or no, these men are coming to Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:9-14; Psa. 38:3-8; Heb. 6:18-20; Isa. 64:6; Phil. 3:7, 8; Psa. 54:1; 109:26; Acts 16:30; Psa. 51:7, 8; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; Rom 7:24; 2 Cor. 5:2; Acts 5:41; James 2:7; Song 5:10-16; Psa. 119; John 13:35; 1 John 4:7; 3:14; John 16:9; Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6; Psa. 19:10, 11; Jer. 15:16; Heb 11:24-27; Acts 20:22-24; 21:13; Titus 3:15; 2 John 1; Eph 4:16; Philemon 7; 1 Cor. 16:24).

Here are the comments of
Matthew Henry
(1662–1714)
On our passage, Luke 18:18-30

In these verses we have, Christ’s discourse with a ruler, that had a good mind to be directed by him in the way to heaven. In which we may observe,

1. It is a blessed sight to see persons of distinction in the world distinguish themselves from others of their rank by their concern about their souls and another life. Luke takes notice of it that he was a *ruler*. Few of the rulers had any esteem for Christ, but here was one that had; whether a church or state ruler does not appear, but he was one *in authority*.
2. The great thing we are every one of us concerned to enquire after is what we shall do to get to heaven, *what we shall do to inherit eternal life*. This implies such a belief of an eternal life after this as atheists and infidels have not, such a concern to make it sure as a careless unthinking world have not, and such a willingness to comply with any terms that it may be made sure as those have not who are resolutely devoted to the world and the flesh.
3. Those who would inherit eternal life must apply themselves to Jesus Christ as their *Master*, their *teaching* Master, so it signifies here (*didaskale*), and their *ruling* Master, and so they shall certainly find Him. There is no learning the way to heaven but in the school of Christ, by those that enter themselves into it, and continue in it.

4. Those who come to Christ as their Master must believe Him to have not only a *divine mission*, but a *divine goodness*. Christ would have this ruler know that if he understood himself aright in calling Him good he did, in effect, call Him *God* and indeed He was so (v. 19): “*Why callest thou me good? Thou knowest there is none good but one, that is, God; and dost thou then take me for God? If so, thou art in the right.*”

5. Our Master, Christ Himself, has not altered the way to heaven from what it was before His coming, but has only made it more plain, and easy, and comfortable, and provided for our relief, in case we take any false step. *Thou knowest the commandments*. Christ came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to establish them. Wouldest thou inherit eternal life? Govern thyself by the commandments.

6. The duties of the second table must be conscientiously observed, in order to our happiness, and we must not think that any acts of devotion, how plausible soever, will atone for the neglect of them. Nor is it enough to keep ourselves free from the gross violations of these commandments, but we must *know these commandments*, as Christ has *explained them* in his sermon upon the mount, in their extent and spiritual nature, and so observe them.

7. Men think themselves *innocent* because they are *ignorant*; so this ruler did. He said, *All these have I kept from my youth up*, (v. 21). He knows no more evil of himself than the Pharisee did, v. 11. He boasts that he began *early* in a course of virtue, that he had continued in it to this day, and that he had not in any instance transgressed. Had he been acquainted with the extent and spiritual nature of the divine law, and with the workings of his own heart,—had he been but Christ’s disciples awhile, and learned of him, he would have said quite the contrary: “*All these have I broken from my youth up, in thought, word, and deed.*”

8. The great things by which we are to try our spiritual state are how we stand affected to Christ and to our brethren, to this world and to the other; by these this man was tried. For, (1.) If we have a true *affection to Christ*, he will *come and follow Him*, will attend to His doctrine, and submit to His discipline, whatever it cost him. None shall inherit eternal life who are not willing to take their lot with the Lord Jesus, to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes. (2.) If he have a true *affection to his brethren*, he will, as there is occasion, *distribute to the poor*, who are God’s receivers of his dues out of our estates. (3.) If he think meanly of *this world*, as he ought, he will not stick at *selling what he has*, if there be a necessity for it, for the relief of God’s poor. (4.) If he think highly of the other world, as he ought, he will desire no more than to have *treasure in heaven*, and will reckon that a sufficient abundant recompence for all that he has left, or lost, or laid out for God in this world.

9. There are many that have a great deal in them that is very commendable, and yet they perish *for the lack of some one thing*; so this ruler here; he broke with Christ upon this, he liked all his terms very well but this which would part between him and his estate: “In this, I pray thee, have me excused.” If this be the bargain, it is no bargain.

10. Many that are loathe to leave Christ, yet do leave him. After a long struggle between their convictions and their corruptions, their corruptions carry the day at last; they are very sorry that they cannot serve God and mammon both; but, if one must be quitted, it shall be their God, not their worldly gain.