

What's in It for Me?

Digital

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Then Peter said to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.

Matthew 19:27-30

What's in It for Me?

I expected a lot from my students in seminary. Frankly, students would not take some of my classes because they knew of the amount of homework I required. Invariably, each time a new person to one of my courses reviewed the requirements, he would say, “You are expecting a lot from us in this course!” However, his real question was “What’s in it for me?”

For the benefit of the new students in the first session I would explain my philosophy of teaching. Former students would turn to each other with that wait-till-they-hear-this-speech look. My approach was you study, I present, we interact, you study, and then you take a test. They had a quiz each session on the material from the previous class. Like you, I had been a student and like most I did not study until the mid-term and final. My professors were primarily lecturers and, as a result I missed out on much of the learning process. I am a presenter/discussion leader. Students were graded on participation. That approach along with study and quizzes provided a much better teaching-and-learning environment. At least, that is my opinion. Fortunately most of my students thought so too.

Peter’s Question

Major Issue #10

What's in It for Me?

Heaven,
eternal destiny

or

Compensation
for obedience

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Not choosing to go, sell, give, return, and follow Jesus, the rich ruler left dejected. Then Peter piped up with the words, “Behold, we [the Twelve] have left everything and followed You” (Matt. 19:27). Peter heard and observed the interaction between Jesus and the rich ruler, so he was keenly aware of Jesus’ instruction to the young man. As we have discussed, the original question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” can be answered in one of two ways. *First*, salvation is either given as a free gift through *childlike trust* in Jesus as Savior or obtained by “following” Christ in *discipleship* (lordship salvation). *Second*, rewards are the result of obedience in *discipleship*. Your conclusion must be based on the evidence in the text.

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As the spokesman for the group, Peter pursued the matter one step further and asked, “What then will there be for us?” (v. 27). Since Jesus’ disciples had essentially done what the rich ruler had been told to do, Peter said, “Let me get this straight. Now, You told the rich ruler to give up 100 percent of his possessions, and we also gave up a lot and we are following you. What’s up?” The fishing expedition by several of the disciples after Jesus’ resurrection might imply that Peter’s family-fishing business was still intact (John 21:3-18). Also a week later, Zacchaeus had to give up only 50 percent of his possessions for Jesus to say that he was saved (Luke 19:8-10). [A side note. Those who hold the position that “all” possessions must be given up in order to have eternal life must deal with the fact that Zacchaeus actually gave his money away. The rich ruler was expected to do the same, not just be willing to do so.] Back to our topic: Trying to find perspective in light of the conversation between Jesus and the ruler, Peter said, “What is ultimately in it for us?”

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Changing the Subject

As suggested previously, Jesus moved the discussion *from* faith in God (instead of possessions) that would bring the rich ruler eternal life and entrance into the kingdom *to* telling Peter that obedience by His followers will merit future rewards. Jesus *first* addressed the issue of coming to initial faith by changing the object of trust from personal assets to God. *Second*, He addressed the subject of walking by faith, resulting in future rewards.

Twice the Benefit

Responding to Peter's question, Jesus tells His disciples that they would be compensated far beyond all that they had forsaken, at this time and in the future. The relinquishing of earthly relationships and possessions "for the sake of the kingdom" had a twofold benefit—now and in the future (Luke 18:29-30). Jesus said,

Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration [the kingdom established at the second coming] when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much [at this time], and will inherit eternal life [in the age to come] (Matt. 19:28-29, insertions from Luke 18:30).

Was this idea echoing what He previous taught in John 10:10b? "I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly." Indeed, a believer in Jesus Christ not only possesses *life everlasting*, but also can experience *enriched life* here and now, if he obediently follows the words of his Savior. This present-life emphasis corresponds

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to the abundant life to which Jesus referred when He answered the lawyer, “Do this [keep the commandments] and you will live” (Luke 10:28), and the rich young ruler, “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:17).

Earning Eternal Life?

Eternal life is God’s free gift to those who simply believe. John 3:16b states, “Whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” The promise of everlasting life is based on man’s belief in Christ for life and God’s work of regeneration. Nevertheless, there are scriptural instances in which eternal life is enhanced

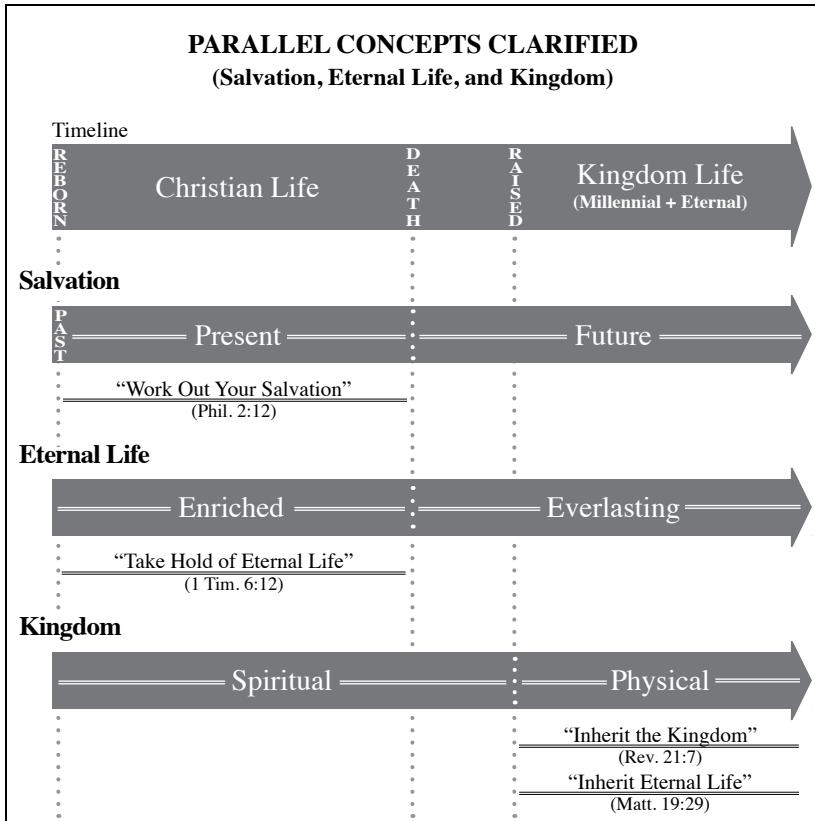
There are scriptural instances in which eternal life is enhanced or intensified, being based on man’s work; it is earned.

or intensified, being based on man’s work; *it is earned*. Occurrences in the New Testament where eternal life refers to an earned merit rather than a gift are Romans 2:7; Galatians 6:8; and 1 Timothy 6:12, 18-19. These passages may create tension if they are not properly addressed and understood.

Actions Can Produce Life

To provide clarity regarding the earning of eternal life, the chart, *Parallel Concepts Clarified* (page 113), shows the relationship between three key theological concepts: salvation, eternal life, and kingdom. The chart gives the timeline of the Christian life from rebirth to death, then kingdom life immediately following the believers’ resurrection and evaluation of their works at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). The three uses of the word *salvation* are evident: past salvation, associated with the new birth (John 3:5; Eph. 2:8); present salvation, “working

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out one's salvation" (Phil. 2:12); and finally future salvation, which is experienced in the very presence of God in paradise and in the kingdom (1 Pet. 1:5). *Eternal life* is also multifaceted, meaning that it can be enriched in the present by "taking hold of the eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12) plus lasting forever (John 3:16). The promised, physical *kingdom* occurs at the end of time, but the spiritual aspect is a current reality even prior to the physical establishment of the kingdom (Rev. 20-21).

From the chart, we can see that believers are both to "work out" (not "work for") their salvation and also to "take hold" of eternal life.

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Both are possible present actions and are synonymous theological ideas. Writing to believers who already possessed everlasting life, Paul said, “So then, My beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). The prior

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context spoke of the perfect obedience of Christ (vv. 5-11), which Paul used as the ultimate example of obedience. He then encourages the believers in Philippi to continue to do the right thing, even commanding them to do so when he says, “work out your salvation.” Paul instructed Timothy to “take hold of the eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:12) and to “take hold of that which is life indeed” (v. 19), or as Jesus would say, “live life abundantly” (John 10:10b). Obviously

both of Paul’s appeals referred to the same idea, living obediently in order to experience a life that is enriched and fulfilling as believers. “Working out” and “taking hold” of what they already possessed could be experienced in a more enhanced and vibrant manner. Each believer is free to choose enriched living by obedience as he allows the Spirit to influence his choices as He fills, leads, and teaches.¹

The reality of everlasting life and salvation can begin to be experienced here and now. Living a godly life in the present time was experienced by those in the Old Testament. To His covenant people, who already had an established relationship with Him, God said, “Keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if does them” (Lev. 18:5).² Obedience to the Law resulted in life lived in spiritual abundance and richness. That is why Jesus said, “Life is more than food...[therefore]...seek His kingdom and His righteousness” (Luke 12:23, 31; Matt. 6:33). The Scriptures teach that salvation is the product of God’s work; fellowship with God is

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the result of man's obedient works. The latter produces enriched-life experiences with God; the former provides everlasting life with God. The former is given freely by God; the latter is acquired by obedience. The former *is* a guaranteed reality; the latter *can also be* a rich reality—today.

Obedience Has Its Reward

On the chart, *Parallel Concepts Clarified*, there is one additional and interrelated idea. "Working out" one's salvation and "taking hold" of eternal life enriches not only the believer's present circumstances but also his future inheritance in the kingdom. In response to Peter's question, Jesus tells the disciples that they would not only experience enriched living as the result of obedience, but they would also receive a future inheritance in the coming kingdom (Matt. 19:29). For these selected disciples (Mark 3:14), their inheritance also included sitting on thrones in which they would rule and reign with Christ (Matt. 19:28).

Obedience has future rewards as well as present benefits. This applies not only to the disciples of Jesus' day, but also to all followers of Christ. Jesus explained this promise in the parable concerning the kingdom (Luke 19:11-27). While the nobleman (who represents Christ) was away to receive his kingdom, he gave his servants resources and told them, "Do business *with this* until I come back" (vv. 12-13). When he returned, each servant was required to give an account of the assets and opportunities he had been entrusted to invest. Each experienced rewards according to his faithfulness. Some reigned over cities, while others forfeited rewards for unproductiveness. Inheritance depended on obedient, faithful service.

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This brings us to a subject that was previously addressed in chapter 4, “Entering the Kingdom.” There we stated that *entering the kingdom* was synonymous with *entering eternal life*, both as a result of faith in God. Even though both the lawyer (Luke 10:25) and the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18) came and asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” why does Jesus tell us that His disciples “will inherit eternal life [in the age to come]” (Matt. 19:28-29, with insertion from Luke 18:30)? We must keep in mind that the use of “inherit eternal life” is an erroneous statement by these two men based on the rabbinical understanding of how to obtain eternal life.³ Remember Matthew did not use “to inherit,” but rather “to obtain,” in the rich ruler’s initial inquiry of Christ (Matt. 19:16); but at the conclusion of the interaction with Peter, Christ says that Peter “will inherit eternal life” (v. 29). Matthew’s variation in the words was used to support a change, from addressing the rich ruler’s need, salvation, to assuring Peter that obedience of the already saved brings rewards. Jesus teaches that to “inherit the kingdom” is equivalent to “inheriting eternal life,” elevating “inheriting eternal life” in this Matthew text to being rewarded in the kingdom and contrasting it from “obtaining eternal life” that pertains only to salvation. This distinction will be addressed in the next chapter, “Back to the Beginning.”

First or Last in Line

In the concluding verse of the section in both Matthew and Mark, Jesus states, “But many *who are* first will be last; and the last, first” (Matt. 19:30; Mark 10:31).

This proverbial saying expresses the reversals that will take place when the King begins to reign in the kingdom. The first and last are positions representing greatness and lowliness respectively. The rich young man and the disciples are

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cases in point. The young man was rich then but would not have received many blessings in the kingdom had he been a believer in Jesus. The disciples, on the other hand, had given up everything to follow Jesus, but they would have a great wealth of blessings in the kingdom.⁴

Keeping It Straight

Some continue to say heaven is “the reward” for saving faith. In one sense, that is true. However, the context of rich young ruler pertains either to receiving eternal life as a gift or to experiencing fellowship with God by obedience.

Chapter 8, NOTES

1. Ken Neff, *Free To Choose* (St. Augustine, FL: LeaderQuest, 2011), 135-73.

The influencing ministries of the Spirit for believers are *filling* (“Myth 9,” 135-46), *leading* (“Myth 10,” 147-60), and *teaching* (“Myth 11,” 161-73).

2. See also Deuteronomy 30:15-20 and Jeremiah 21:8.
3. Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992), 65.

Dillow writes that the use of someone’s spoken statement “does not mean that this is the teaching of Scripture. Error is often accurately repeated under inspiration. Recall the Satan’s words, ‘You will surely not die.’”

4. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Matthew* (www.soniclight.com: 2010), 272-73.