

**What Must I Do?**

**TWO**

CHOOSE TO LIVE

---

---

*What good things shall  
I do that I may obtain  
eternal life?*

Matthew 19:16

---

---

*What shall I do to inherit  
eternal life?*

Mark 10:17

---

---

*What shall I do to inherit  
eternal life?*

Luke 10:25

---

---

*What shall I do to inherit  
eternal life?*

Luke 18:18

---

---

# What Must I Do?

In the twenty-first century we look back at the events in Scripture like the Monday morning quarterback, making decisions about the events that we think should have been as obvious in that day as it is to us now. Sometimes we place too much information from our current perspective into events that would be nonexistent from the viewpoint of those in the first century. One of the biblical occasions that elicits much discussion regarding its intended meaning and the principles that can be derived is the interaction between Jesus and the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:13-30; Mark 10:13-31; Luke 18:15-30).

When we first meet the rich ruler, he is both anxious and curious (Mark 10:17). Running up to Jesus and looking for the answer to an obviously important question, he asks, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Before we can address what the inquiry entailed, we must understand who was asking the question and why.

## Who Was Asking?

### *Major Issue #1*

Who was asking?

Believer asking  
about rewards

or

Unbeliever asking  
about eternal destiny

## CHOOSE TO LIVE

The identical question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25; 18:18), was posed to Christ in two separate instances in the Gospel of Luke. Scholars believe both events occurred in the last six months of Christ’s ministry, just before His crucifixion.<sup>1</sup> In Luke 10:25-37, a lawyer, teacher and defender of the Law, made the request, while the rich ruler stated the identical question in Luke 18:18-30.

To fully understand *what was asked* we must know *who was asking* the question. While the texts tell us the occupation of each, one a lawyer and the other a ruler, our concern here is with their spiritual state. Obviously Christ’s response would depend on the spiritual condition of the inquirer. What was asked will be addressed in the following section, but here we are considering “who” asked and “why.” While most regard both men to be unbelievers, some consider them to be believers in Christ as Messiah. If unbelievers were in view, the question and corresponding answer should concern eternal destiny. On the other hand, if believers were in view, rewards for faithful service would be the concern.

In view of the fact that only Luke addresses the lawyer’s interaction with Jesus in Luke 10, further insight cannot be gained from Matthew and Mark. However, the actual timeframe provides perspective. Late in Christ’s ministry and in close proximity to one another, both the lawyer and rich ruler come with the identical question. Therefore, we should assume that either both men were believers or both were unbelievers. With that as a basic premise, the evidence can be probed to see whether each had a relationship with God.

### *Spiritual Condition*

In the three Gospel accounts the rich ruler “came to Him and said” (Matt. 19:16), “ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him” (Mark 10:17), and “questioned Him, saying” (Luke 18:18). These texts indicate that the young ruler not only had a question

## WHAT MUST I DO?

but also knew the One who could provide the appropriate answer to his question. He came with respect, anticipating an answer. Nevertheless from these texts one cannot determine whether he was a believer or an unbeliever. We must look to other sources to make an evaluation.

The Scriptures tell us that some Jewish religious leaders were believers. In John 12:42, “Many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue.” Joseph of Arimathea, “being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret *one* for fear of the Jews,” and Nicodemus prepared Jesus for burial (John 19:38-39). While Matthew, Mark, and Luke indicated that Joseph of Arimathea requested Jesus’ body for burial (Matt. 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56), none make reference to “believing rulers” or to “Nicodemus.”

Providing an entirely different perspective, the Gospel of Luke suggests that most religious leaders in Israel were not believers. In each of the more than thirty occurrences where religious leaders (e.g., Pharisees, teachers, scribes, and lawyers) are mentioned in the Gospel of Luke with the only exception of Joseph of Arimathea, they are portrayed in a negative manner and as enemies of Jesus. They are consistently depicted as opposing Christ (seventeen times),<sup>2</sup> they continually tried to trap Jesus (six times),<sup>3</sup> or Jesus confronted the religious leaders (six times)<sup>4</sup> and knew their evil hearts and thoughts (four times).<sup>5</sup> These four descriptive lines of argument indicate that the religious leaders in Israel were predominately unbelievers. The weight of the evidence suggests that was the case.

While it is possible that the lawyer who addressed Jesus in Luke 10 was a believer, the overwhelming support noted above

*To understand  
what was asked  
we must know  
who was asking  
the question.*

## CHOOSE TO LIVE

from Luke's account suggests the opposite. Verse 25 particularly provides insight. "And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" As noted, every religious leader who sought truth and believed in Jesus was fearful of discovery (e.g., Nicodemus, John 3:2; Joseph of Arimathea, John 19:38; and many others, John 12:42). Nevertheless this lawyer boldly "stood up" amidst a Jewish crowd and "tested" Jesus with a question about eternal life. To assume that this lawyer was a believer, additional proof to support that claim would certainly be required. But there is not a hint of such evidence. If, as the facts strongly indicate, the lawyer was not a believer (Luke 10), the rich ruler likewise should not be considered a believer (Luke 18).

### *Reason behind the Request*

Understanding the spiritual state of both the lawyer and the rich ruler, whether believers or unbelievers, provides perspective in explaining their individual motivation in asking the identical question. If both were believers, they desired an explanation from Jesus concerning future rewards in the kingdom of God as a result of good works (e.g., Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). On the other hand, if both were unbelievers, the lawyer came *to test* Christ for the purpose of discrediting Him, while the rich ruler, with more sincere motives, apparently came *to assure* himself of his eternal destiny.

### What Was Asked?

#### Major Issue #2

What was asked?

Works  
to gain rewards

or

Works  
to gain eternal life

"What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:17,

## WHAT MUST I DO?

italics added). The identical question is asked of Christ in these two separate instances in the Gospel of Luke: once by the lawyer (Luke 10:25) and the other by the rich ruler (18:18). Here is where tensions begin to rise. The Bible is abundantly clear that a person need not do anything to receive initial salvation. Isn't that the unmistakable message of Ephesians 2:8-9? "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." This clearly teaches that no work of any kind can gain merit before God in earning salvation; only the work of a gracious God brings one into a saving relationship with Him based solely on one's faith in Christ for eternal life.<sup>6</sup>

### *A Believer's Question?*

Those who hold the position that the inquirers were *believers* conclude that the questions therefore were right on target. The queries did not concern earning salvation or eternal destiny. Rather their questions addressed the requirements in following Christ in discipleship as expressed in Luke 9:18-26 and 14:23, after a saving relationship had already been established. Following Christ in discipleship entails "denying self," "taking up one's own cross," and "giving up possessions." While salvation is free, following Christ in discipleship is costly.<sup>7</sup> "Inheriting eternal life" is regarded as a synonym for discipleship and the attainment of rewards for faithful service (see chap. 3).

### *An Unbeliever's Question?*

On the other hand, if both the lawyer and ruler were *unbelievers*, there are two possible explanations for them asking their questions.

*Unbelievers  
consistently, but  
mistakenly, think  
there is something  
they must do to  
obtain eternal life.*

## CHOOSE TO LIVE

*First*, those of the Reformed school of thought understand that the questions indicate that receiving eternal life requires more than just believing the truth regarding Christ as Savior.<sup>8</sup> Using the identical discipleship passages (Luke 9 and 14) for support, they conclude that there is the prerequisite of commitment and submission in obedience to His lordship for salvation.<sup>9</sup> Actions, they say, not just simple faith, are a condition for ensuring one's eternal destiny. Works are a proof of saving faith.<sup>10</sup> Without works there is no salvation. Therefore, the ruler's "what-to-do" question was appropriate.

*Second*, those with the Free Grace view make a clear distinction between salvation being absolutely free and the cost of following Christ in discipleship.<sup>11</sup> They hold the position that both the lawyer's and the ruler's questions originate from unbelievers and concern the issue of eternal destiny. Unbelievers consistently, but mistakenly, think there is something they must do to obtain eternal life. They think, "I am a pretty good person" or "I know I haven't done enough good works, but I just hope my good works outweigh the bad." They cannot imagine that eternal life is absolutely free. This false notion was perpetuated by the rabbinical teaching that salvation is an earned possession.<sup>12</sup>

### Who, Why, and What

Depending on your viewpoint on the first two major issues, the lawyer's and the ruler's question concerned either entry into eternal life or rewards in the kingdom. Resultantly, there are two options relating to man's works. *First*, saving relationship with God is conditioned on works. *Second*, works are the result of obedience in the Christian life and the basis for rewards in the kingdom. These are two different perspectives, based on two different theological positions.



## WHAT MUST I DO?

### *Chapter 2, NOTES*

---

1. A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950). xxiii; and J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 17; W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1973), 68-81; and Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 1925-1932.
2. Religious leaders (Pharisees, teachers, scribes, and lawyers) are consistently depicted as opposing Christ:
  - “The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, ‘Who is the man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?’” (Luke 5:21).
  - “The Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples” (5:30).
  - “But some of the Pharisees said, ‘Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’” (6:2).
  - “The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might have reason to accuse Him” (6:7).
  - “But they [the scribes and the Pharisees] themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus” (6:11).
  - “Others [the scribes and the Pharisees] to test Him, were demanding of Him a sign from heaven” (11:16; Matt. 12:38).
  - “One of the lawyers said to Him in reply, ‘Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too’” (11:45).
  - “They [Pharisees] were watching Him closely” (14:1).
  - “Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them’” (15:2).
  - “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him” (16:14).
  - “When they [the scribes and the Pharisees; 15:2] saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner’” (19:7).
  - “The chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him” (19:47).
  - “The chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him” (20:1).

## CHOOSE TO LIVE

- “The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him” (20:19).
- “And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people” (20:26).
- “And the chief priests and scribes were seeking how they might put Him to death” (22:2).
- “And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently” (23:10).

### 3. Religious leaders continually tried to trap Jesus:

- “And a lawyer stood up and put Him [Jesus] to the test” (10:25).
- “The scribes and Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him, to catch Him in something He might say” (11:53-54).
- “Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, rebuke Your disciples’” (19:39).
- “So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor” (20:20).
- “They [scribes and chief priests] questioned Him saying.... ‘Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?’” (20:21-22).
- “They [scribes and chief priests] were unable to catch Him in a saying” (20:26).

### 4. Jesus confronted the religious leaders:

- “Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places” (11:43).
- “Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear” (11:46).
- “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering” (11:52).
- “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (12:1).
- “And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?’” (14:3).
- “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes” (20:46).

## WHAT MUST I DO?

5. Jesus knew the evil hearts and thoughts of the religious leaders:
  - “But Jesus, aware of their [the scribes and the Pharisees] reasonings, answered and said to them, ‘Why are you reasoning in your hearts?’” (5:22).
  - “He [Jesus] knew what they [the scribes and the Pharisees] were thinking” (6:8).
  - “God knows your [Pharisees’] hearts” (16:15).
  - “He [Jesus] detected their [scribes’ and chief priests’] trickery” (20:23).
6. See Ken Neff, “Myth 5: Faith Causes Salvation,” in *Hold Fast* (St. Augustine, FL: LeaderQuest, 2010), 69-75.
7. See Ken Neff, “Myth 12: Co-Payments Required,” in *Hold Fast*, 155-62.
8. Rejecting the Roman Catholic teaching, the Reformers of the sixteenth century broke from that tradition, understanding that salvation was by faith alone. To counter the Catholic claim that the Reformers were teaching antinomianism (lawlessness), and thus believers could live anyway they wanted, the Reformers began teaching that justification is by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone—meaning that works are a proof of one’s salvation. If a person has no works, then he has no salvation. However, in doing this they mixed the initial coming to faith with a subsequent walk of faith, thus confusing grace with works.
9. See Ken Neff, “Myth 3: Faith Is a Tricky Word,” in *Hold Fast*, 45-52.
10. See Ken Neff, “Myth 11: Works Required,” in *Hold Fast*, 143-51.
11. The Free Grace position is that salvation is by faith alone, really alone—making a clear distinction between coming to faith and walking by faith. Salvation is through faith (trust) in Jesus Christ. However, after that initial act of faith—coming to Christ—one is to walk by faith (in good works) in the Christian life. Coming to faith concerns a relationship with Christ; walking by faith relates to fellowship with Christ. No amount or any type of work by any person is a prerequisite for or sustainer of salvation; but once saved by faith alone, growing in fellowship with Christ is a lifelong journey in good works.
12. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 442; Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 2:235; Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2007), 42; and Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992), 64.

