

The way to eternal life

By Raul Enyedi

“And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For 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. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” (Luke 18:18-27)

From the most ancient times, ever since man began to leave a trail in history, he asked himself questions about what happens after death, about the “life beyond,” the eternal one. This turmoil of his led to the forming of different religious beliefs. The belief in eternal life dwells in the heart of man without palpable proof of its existence.

These lines are not designed to prove by various evidences what is beyond our eyes, our mortal body, our world defiled by evil. The existence of this eternal life is only stated, having as a foundation the Holy Scriptures alone. The rich ruler from our text does not ask the Lord, “Is there an eternal life, is it worth my efforts to gain it?” Eternal life exists! The Scriptures state it, they do not prove it; and our heart, with its turmoil and questions relating to the matter, also tells us it exists.

All religions are founded on what is “beyond.” All religions, starting from a common point, promise the existence of a Heaven, and most of them also preach a Hell, created for the wicked. However, the many differences among religions are also reflected in this matter of eternal life, in regard to the way it is obtained and also the way it is experienced. Every religion is ready to give countless “salvation-giving-prescriptions,” being ready to answer to the question asked two thousand years ago on the road to Jerusalem, “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

The multitude of answers received to this single question, common to all men, make us ask, naturally, “Who is right?” “Where is the truth?” Every religion, or, in our case, every denomination of Christianity offers you its own prescription that will *surely* take you to heaven if, and only if you respect it entirely, in its tiniest detail.

Hence, you are told to go or to come, you are told to take or to leave, to do or not to do, you are told to give or to receive, to accept or to reject, to be or not to be, to try, to

will, to be honest, to pray, and these are only a few examples, all accompanied, of course, by the omnipresent “MUST.” Undoubtedly you also have heard this, you also have received such prescriptions! And what wouldn’t you do, what wouldn’t you give only to be sure that you save yourself, you save your soul. After all, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

The common denominator of all these prescriptions that have eternal life as a *consequence* is YOU! All are addressed to you! You must go. You must come. You must give, take, will, etc. Do you expect to receive another prescription in this article, a new MUST? Well, you might be surprised by what you shall hear. Christ said YOU cannot do anything to inherit eternal life, this matter is not in your hands, the decisive factor is not YOU!

Do only one thing: open the Bible, the only authority by which all teachings of men must be measured and evaluated, the same Book to which most of the authors of the above prescriptions refer, more or less – and check for yourself what you are told.

Do you want to go to Heaven, to inherit the eternal life? Then you must know that no sinner will live eternally on the new earth or in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:8, 27). It was for sinning that Adam was driven out of Paradise, not being allowed to eat from the tree of life. But who is a sinner, and what does it mean to sin?

Sin is disobedience, rebellion against the commandments of God. Sin is transgression of the holy law of God (1 John 3:4). But even this sin, in the multitude of forms in which it manifests itself, is only the fruit of our inheritance from Adam, namely, the sinful nature. This nature is found in our instincts, common to the whole race, and our individual character is molded after the pattern of this nature. This governs every aspect of man’s life, every faculty of his soul. Nothing remains untouched, uninfluenced by it. It is the pedagogue of our reason, the counselor of our will and the model after which our heart is sculpted. This nature is the tree that brings forth the fruit of sin, it is the bitter spring of all wicked and selfish impulses, of all the rebellious acts against God (Matt. 15:19; Luke 6:45; Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 8:7-8).

This nature is possessed by every individual man, without exception. No one can say he never sinned, “for all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23) and “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him [God] a liar...” (1 John 1:10). We all are guilty of sin, and the perfect justice of God requires that every sin that was ever committed be punished. Every sin brings a *debt* before God. Eternal life can be enjoyed only by those whose *debts* are paid.

How can these debts be paid? The answers you receive to this question vary. Some will tell you that you must come to church and go through some rituals. Others will advise you to give alms and do different acts of charity, while others will tell you about a public sorrow for your sins, manifested by diverse signs made to a preacher. Or perhaps they will insist upon a *supreme act of courage* coming from *the bottom of your will*, manifested in coming forward in front of an entire assembly.

Many of the answers you receive to this question come from a totally wrong, unbiblical idea, that of the *scales*. Man imagines that when he is called to judgment God has before Him a set of balances. All his wicked works, words and thoughts are set on one scale and on the other are set all his good works, words and thoughts and his eternal destiny will depend on which side weighs more.

Do not be deceived! God does not use such scales! One wicked act cannot be annulled by a good one, not by ten, not even by one hundred. A wicked act remains a stain that cannot be washed clean through the effort of man's will, no matter how much he would try. A wicked word cannot be wiped out by a thousand songs of praise and a dirty thought cannot be covered by ten thousand times ten thousand prayers. Sin remains a sin, and cannot be covered by a good work, and all the alms in the world cannot cover one single transgression of the Most holy God.

What could you offer to God to make Him wink at even one of your sins? Do you think you can bribe God? Your good works represent also a *duty* you have as *man* before God, your Creator. Can you cover your debt with another? Can you patch your garment with a patch cut from the same garment?

God decided that the wages of sin is death! Neither good works, nor acts of charity, nothing that you do can cause God to determine to spare you. The wages of sin is and will remain DEATH, as long as there will be divine justice. The justice of God cannot be appeased and your sin cannot be altered by good works, or religiosity. It can be erased only through death!

Death is the only way to pay for sin. Is the punishment too cruel or unjust? God forbid! If we could only see what is hidden behind every sin, regardless of how "innocent" it might look. If we could see through God's eyes the flood of iniquity amassed behind a lie. If we could know the rebellion, contempt and disdain toward God that is discharged by a biting word. If we could see the volcano of iniquity that erupts and floods our soul with one thought condemned by conscience. If we only had eyes to see, for the space of a second, the immensity of wickedness that lies in our sinful nature, and see sin the way God sees it, then we would hate it and proclaim God's *justice* in punishing this plague.

But our mind cannot know and our heart is incapable now of fully feeling the gravity of sin. Our tongue does not have words that are expressive enough to describe God's abhorrence of sin. Do you still think that the punishment is too rough? Oh, no! It is appointed according to the measure of offence brought to the King. His justice cannot wink at sin, cannot leave it unpunished, cannot tolerate it, but being justice, cannot exaggerate it either.

Therefore, the perfect justice of God requires death as the *wages* for sin. There is no other way of payment or trade. Anything less is a currency incompatible with the nature of the debt. Money and fortunes cannot buy the freedom of your soul. Morality

and goodness cannot save you from the punishment. A religious life, even one fully dedicated to monasticism cannot replace the death you owe. Nothing that you have can save you, but everything that you have, everything that you can offer, everything that you are, is too little, far too little, to cover such a great debt.

Hence, there remains one price, the supreme but well deserved punishment for your sins, and that is death. Only this death that the sinner must suffer for eternity, called the second death, in a place referred to in the Bible as “the lake of fire,” a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, with Satan, his angels and all the evildoers that ever lived on the face of the earth – only this is the way you will pay for your sins. This is the only way you can satisfy the justice of God.

Once the Judge declared the sentence “depart from me, ye that work iniquity,” then, without possibility of appeal and with no delay, the decision will be executed. The Lake of fire, the furnace that burns with fire and brimstone, that place prepared for the first rebels, the devil and his angels, will open its mouth to swallow you. That place of suffering will be the place where you will spend all the eternity. It is the place where you will stay to pay your eternal debt. A terrible, miserable eternity is the consequence of rebellion against the Master of the Universe. It is the punishment for the disobedience of the creation against the Creator.

This is the place of those who followed false “prescriptions,” of those deceived, who believed until their last moment that are found on the way to heaven. This is also the place of the deceivers, who prescribed false ways of reaching God. Here is what the Savior says: **“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”** (Matt. 7:21-23).

How great is the difference between the place in which they thought they were going and the place to which they came. They thought they were going to Heaven, a place where there is no death, tear or pain and experience its eternal life and the indescribable joys found in the presence of God. But instead they came to a place described as “the second death,” “where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:44). The deceived and the deceivers will meet in the same kingdom of death.

So far we have stated the existence of eternal life and the impossibility of any person to save himself, we have stated the impossibility of anyone paying for his own sins in any other way than the one decreed by God – death. But in this case we can ask ourselves like the disciples in our text, “Who then can be saved?” Who will inherit eternal life, and how?

The Lord's answer, just as true and meaningful today, is: **“The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.”** Yes, salvation is of the Lord, and the glory for it He shares with no one! God does not work with half-measures! God does not have His share in salvation while you have yours.

No man can give you salvation, not even a Church! Salvation comes from the Lord! Only with God all things are possible, for He alone is all-powerful. Only He can pluck the sinner from the claws of death. Only He can set him free from the slavery of sin. Only He can renew him and make him a new creation. Only He can sanctify him through His Spirit and keep him faithful *to the end*. Indeed, “the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23).

The only payment for the debt is death. This is the natural consequence of sin. But eternal life is “the gift of God.” Since we cannot do anything to deserve it, God gives it freely; but just because we do not have to pay anything to have eternal life, does not mean it is cheap, worthless or insignificant or that it did not cost God anything. The verse continues, “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Here is the good news, the Gospel – Christ paid the debt of the sins of his people by the death He suffered. Nothing remains to be paid; the debt of the child of God is totally and eternally erased. God paid an enormous price, even the death of His beloved Son, for His justice to be satisfied, and the proof of His incommensurable love to be made visible in the life of every child of His.

But how can you know if you are a child of God, an heir of eternal life? Look into your heart. What do you see? Do you see the satisfaction of a fulfilled life? Do you see self-contentment for your lifetime achievements, for the choices and decisions you made? Do you see the all-sufficiency of a self-confident person? If such is the case, your eyes are hindered to see your real need – your need of salvation; for this very sight is the beginning of salvation. For Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. If you do not see yourself as lost, you prove by this that He did not come for you, neither to seek you, nor to save you. You give evidence that you are excluded from the favor of God, absent from His blessings, deprived of any promise, encouragement, comfort and hope for the future.

If you see yourself as God sees you, then that is proof that He has begun a work in you. You look in your soul, you see your sin, its causes and consequences, the state to which it brought you. You try to stop sinning, but find that impossible. You are defeated. You look at this picture and tremble. There is no way out. You are locked in this dark world whose just end is the lake of fire and brimstone. In such moments you see that you are lost, unable to satisfy the demands of God's justice, that your state has death as its end. But *look* toward Him that came to forgive sinners, to bring the good news to the captives of sin, to the prisoners of vice. Look toward Him that came to heal the sick in heart, and to give spiritual sight to those who live in darkness.

Now you can look toward Christ and see Him differently than others around you. He is the Savior, the One who came to seek you, to pull you out of your state. He is the

only hope, the only way, He is light and life. *Come* to Him with sorrow for your sins, prostrate yourself at His feet, totally dependent on His mercy.

Do not hesitate to come and do not look back, because it does not matter how great your debt is, how numerous your sins, the blood of Christ washes away all spots and impurities. He levels mountains of sins from your path, dries up oceans of iniquities, erases huge debts. He, the conqueror of death, gives eternal life to all those that come to Him.

Coming to Him in repentance, believing that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior for all those that come to Him, you bring proof that you are a child of God. For you, this is the beginning of a new life that will never end –eternal life. It is a walk with God, your Father, who gave you life through the power of His Spirit. He will nourish, educate and discipline you. He will protect you until everything mortal in you will be swallowed up by immortality, until you will be ready to fully experience that which now, in our present condition, cannot experience – ETERNAL LIFE.

In conclusion, before you start again to run your life's race, analyze your way and the end of it. Ask yourself, "what is my condition? What is my situation?" There are only two camps, only two ways. To keep from being deceived, you must know for sure your position. Therefore, look inside yourself, search yourself. Are you presently following a salvation-giving "prescription?" Do you trust in this matter the precious advices of a "servant of God" who interprets the Bible for you? Undoubtedly, much of the advice you receive is good. Much advice will make you a better person, more moral, more careful, more sincere. But does such advice have as an end eternal life? Can this life be earned by keeping a set of rules, or certain ethical and moral principles, observing certain religious rituals and routines, or the duties you fulfill to certain ecclesiastical institutions?

What do we need to do to inherit eternal life? Do we need human laws, commandments or traditions? Do we need prescriptions for salvation (many of them being only effects of salvation, not causes)? Do we need stereotypical gestures and prayers? NO!!! We need renewal, we need a change of mind, a total transformation of our intellect, emotions and will. All these lead to eternal life. We need the birth of the Spirit, without which we cannot have spiritual sight. We need repentance, without which there can be no forgiveness. We need faith, without which we cannot come to God! Only with Him these things are possible!

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" It would be impossible for you to do anything to merit or earn it, for it is "impossible with men." But life is given freely, being a gracious gift of God. You do not have to pay anything for it! In your present condition call upon Him, and He shall hear you and answer you. Come to Him, and He shall receive you! Listen to the Spirit that says "come;" listen to the invitation of those that have already come and tasted how good the Lord is. Come in repentance and he, in the joy of the entire Heaven, shall receive you as you are, and shall give you eternal life!