

Questions People Ask-02 Questions and Answers

by William MacDonald

Salvation is by faith in Christ, not by good works or human efforts.

Duration: 42:47

Scripture: Leviticus 17:11, Matthew 19:16-22

Topics: "Question Answer"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses a conversation between Jesus and a young man who asks how to obtain eternal life. Jesus tells him to keep the commandments, specifically those related to relationships with others. The young man claims to have kept these commandments since his youth but asks what he still lacks. Jesus then challenges him to sell his possessions, give to the poor, and follow Him. The young man leaves sorrowful because he values his possessions more than following Jesus. The sermon also addresses questions about guilt, salvation, and atonement for sins, emphasizing the importance of God's standards and the shedding of blood for atonement.

Transcript

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 19. Matthew 19, we're going to read verses 16 through 22. Matthew 19, verses 16 through 22.

Now behold, one came and said to him, Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? So he said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments. He said to him, Which one? Jesus said, You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor your father and your mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

The young man said to him, All these things I have kept from my youth, what do I still lack? Jesus said to him, If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Last week we started a little series with the title, Questions People Ask.

And these questions have primarily to do with the subject of the salvation of the soul. Let me just go over the questions that we dealt with last week. The first was this, Why do you always make me feel guilty

because of my sins? Don't you want me to have a good self-image? The second question was, If good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell, then what do I have to worry about? The third was, Do you mean to say I'm as bad as a lot of other people I know? And the one that we finished with last week was, If I keep the Ten Commandments and do the best I can, isn't that enough? A lot of people are depending upon their obedience to the Ten Commandments to save their souls.

And we mentioned last week that nobody is saved by keeping the Ten Commandments. God never gave the Ten Commandments as a way of salvation. He never intended anyone would be saved.

And yet that seems to be contradicted by the portion that we read this morning. So I just want to go over this with you in case some of you had that question in your mind. Matthew 19, verses 16 through 22 seems to say that a person can be saved by keeping the Ten Commandments.

So let us look and see what the passage teaches. This young man comes to the Lord and says, Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? He felt that there was something he could do, something meritorious that he could do to earn and deserve eternal life. Well, first of all, the Lord Jesus wanted to test him on what he thought about Christ.

And so he said, Why do you call me good? There's no one good but God. That was a perfect opportunity for that fellow to say to the Lord Jesus, That's why I called you good, because you are God. But he missed it.

He failed the test. Why do you call me good? There's none good but God. Then the Lord Jesus said to him, If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.

Now, it certainly sounds as if if he could keep the commandments, he'd enter into life. That is the ideal. Actually, if a man could keep the Ten Commandments, he wouldn't need to be saved.

The Ten Commandments are God's statement of perfection. And a person who could keep the Ten Commandments wouldn't be lost. He wouldn't need salvation.

Only unsaved people, only sinners need salvation. And so the Lord said, Look, I'm going to use the Ten Commandments to show you how lost you are. If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.

And he said, Which ones? And the Lord quoted those commandments that have to do with our neighbors. Not with our God, now. He had already flunked the test as far as God was concerned.

So now the Lord quotes those commandments that have to do with our relationship with our neighbors. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery.

Don't steal. Don't lie. Honor your father and your mother.

Love your neighbor as yourself. And the young man said, I've done all of these things from my youth up. He thought he really, imagine the arrogance of the fellow.

He thought he loved his neighbor as himself. He said, What do I still lack? And then the Lord just took a little pin and pricked his balloon. He said, If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have.

Give to the poor. You will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me. Now, it says the young man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

What did it prove? He didn't love his neighbors as himself. If he loved his neighbors as himself, he would have taken some of that money out of the bank and out of the safe deposit box, and he would have shared it with people who were starving. But he didn't.

He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. The real purpose of the law is to convict of sin. That's why the Lord quoted it here.

To show him that he was a sinner, and that he needed a savior. But if it came to parting with his possessions, he wasn't interested. He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

I hope that's clear to everyone, and I think those of us who are Christians in talking to people should use the Ten Commandments. When people profess to be perfect and want to do something to earn or merit salvage, put the law to them. And if they're honest, they say, If that's what God requires, I'm lost, and I need a savior.

It would make them in a hurry to trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. You stand up next to the Ten Commandments, and you don't look very good. Neither do I. We've all fallen short of the glory of God.

The Ten Commandments are an expression of the excellence, the perfection, the glory of God. Nobody but the Lord Jesus himself has ever come up to that standard. That brings us to the next question, and that is this.

Isn't there any way I can atone for my own sins? Isn't there anything I can do or be to atone for my own sins? Well, what does God say? This is the final test, not what man says, but what God says. Would you turn in your Bibles to Leviticus chapter 17 and verse 11? It says in that verse, For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul. Now, this is decree of God, that if there is to be atonement for sins, it must be by the shedding of blood.

That's why the Lord Jesus came into the world as man, so that as man he could shed his blood as a substitute for sinners. If we were to die for our own sins, we'd perish forever. But Christ, the perfect, sinless Son of God, came, shed his blood, and by his blood atonement is made for sins.

It says in Hebrews 9.22, Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. At Calvary the Lord Jesus opened a fountain for sin and uncleanness, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. It's wonderful, isn't it? 1 John 1.7 says, The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.

People don't like that today. In fact, some of the churches have eliminated any hymns from their hymn books that deal with the subject of the blood of Christ. But God's word is true, and God's word stands fast, and no one will ever get to heaven except by the blood-sprinkled way.

If you and I could atone for our own sins, then it wasn't necessary for the Lord Jesus to come and go to Calvary, was it? The reason he went to the cross and died there for us was to atone for our sins. Somebody else might ask this question, Do you mean to say that I have been wrong in doing penance for my sins, doing penance for my sins? The word penance is not found in the Bible. This will come as a shock to many people, but it's true, it's not found in the Bible, and actually the thought of penance is not found in the Bible, either.

Penance means that I go through some religious act in order to lessen the seriousness of my sin or do away with it altogether. Isaiah tells us that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in God's sight. Imagine that.

All the very best we could produce before God, all of those things are nothing but filthy rags as far as God is concerned. It's not penance that God wants, not going through religious ceremonies and rituals. It's not even penitence that God wants.

Penitence means sorrow for sin. What God wants is repentance. Differentiate those three things, penance, penitence, and repentance.

Repentance is a change of mind toward sin and toward God, is doing an about-face, is turning your back on sin and your faith toward God, and it's taking sides with God against yourself. It's saying that all God says about me and my sinful condition is right, and I need a Savior. That's what repentance is.

And that's the message the Apostle Paul preached, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Somebody else will come up with an associated question. Isn't there some way I can earn or merit my salvation? That would please me very much.

Listen to that again. Is there some way I could earn or merit my salvation? That would really make me feel good if I could feel that there was something I could do to deserve salvation or to earn salvation. Let me just say this, that that is why salvation by works is such a popular teaching in the world today.

All religions in the world, except the true Christian faith, teach salvation by works. That is very popular. People flock to that type of teaching.

You can see why. Because it gives a place to the flesh. It gives honor to man's ability to take care of his own sins.

But God will have none of it. There's only one remedy for sin, and that is the crosswork of the Lord Jesus Christ. What does God say? He says, by grace you are saved through faith.

That not of yourself, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. Not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to which mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. I think one of the greatest lessons that man has to learn is that salvation is by grace and not by works.

So that leads us to the next question. You keep saying that salvation is by grace. What do you mean by that? Well, it's a good question.

What is grace, anyway? Grace is God showing favor to a person who doesn't deserve it, but who does deserve the very opposite. Grace is God offering heaven to people who deserve hell. That's really what it is.

It's one of the greatest words in the English language and one of the greatest truths in the whole word of God. Grace is closely linked with the idea of a gift. We read those verses last week at the beginning of our meeting.

Now, to him who works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. I suppose most of you here work in some kind of secular employment. The end of a week, two weeks, or whatever, you get a paycheck.

That's not grace. You earned it, presumably, and you don't bow down before your employer and thank him for his great mercy to you. Deep in your heart, you wish it were more.

You think you deserve more. That works. Now, to him who works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

He owes it to you. Now, listen to this. But to him who doesn't work.

What a shocker, huh? Salvation is for people who don't work for it. That undercuts most religions of the world today. To him who does not work but leans on him who justifies the ungodly, that's it.

His faith is counted to him for righteousness. Those verses say salvation is not by work, salvation is by grace. You don't earn it, you don't deserve it.

God gives it to you as a free gift. You receive a gift and you say, thank you. And grace and work can't be mixed.

That's an interesting thing. Your paycheck is either grace or work, but it can't be both. And the Bible says that.

It says, And if by grace it is no longer of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it's no longer grace, otherwise work is no longer work. In our thinking, we should distinguish grace and justice.

A lot of people say, well, when I stand before God, all I want is justice. The worst thing you could get. Absolutely the worst thing you could get.

You don't want justice, you want grace. You don't want God to treat you the way you deserve to be treated. You want him to treat you according to his great heart of love.

So never entertain that thought in your mind, I'll be all right if I just get justice. In justice you get what you deserve, in grace you get what you don't deserve. And grace is always better than justice.

Well, then somebody will say to me, Do I understand that you don't believe in good works? I suppose it might create that impression. We so come down hard on good works that it might create the impression we don't believe in them. We don't believe in good works for salvation, we believe in good works after salvation.

Good works are not the root of salvation. Good works are the fruit of salvation, they're not the cause, they're the result. And the Bible makes that abundantly clear.

We've already quoted it in Ephesians 2, 8 and 9, it says, For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God, not of works that any man should boast. But the next verse goes on to say, For we believers are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, not saved by good works, saved unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. So the answer is no, we don't believe in good works for salvation, but we surely believe in good works after salvation.

We mentioned last week that in God's sight, the first good work that any person can ever do is to believe in Jesus, and that's true. The sight of God, nothing counts as a good work for salvation until a person believes of the Lord Jesus Christ. Mind you, you see an awful lot of things in the world today, and you

think they're awfully good works.

There's a little girl up in the hospital where in Sonoma County, her father slashed her throat, and now there's all kinds of dolls and money coming into the hospital for that dear little girl. You say, well those are good works. Yes, they're good works as far as the world is concerned, but as far as atoning for sin is concerned, no, they don't count with God.

Grateful for people like that, with hearts of love like that, but they'll never wash away a single sin. Only the blood of Christ can do that. Martin Luther said that the noblest of all good works is to believe in Christ.

I like that. The noblest of all good works is to believe in Christ, and he said from this flow all other good works. And he protested against limiting good works to praying in church, fasting, giving alms, and he held that good works include going about your daily employment, working for the glory of God.

He said, whatever you do for the glory of God is a good work in God's sight. That's true, too. Paul said that.

Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God. And anything that a Christian does for the glory of God is a good work in God's sight. But it isn't a good work that merits salvation, it's a good work that arises out of salvation, and it's a good work that will be rewarded in a coming day.

Now, somebody says to me, I was baptized when I was a baby. Isn't that enough? That's a good question. A lot of people are baptized as a baby and depend on that for their salvation.

So how do you answer that? Well, it's very simple to answer. First of all, baptisms save no one, neither adult nor infant. Waters of baptism have no saving power, whatever.

There's not a single verse in the New Testament that justifies the baptism of infants. Let me say that again. There's not a single verse in the New Testament that justifies the baptism of infants.

People say, oh, wait a minute, didn't Jesus say, suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for as such is the kingdom of God? He certainly did. But if you examine that verse carefully, you'll find not one drop of water in it. You'll find Jesus only.

He didn't say, suffer the little children to come to the baptismal font, to the baptismal tank. He said, suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for as such is the kingdom of God. There's not a single verse in the New Testament where a baby or a child under the age of accountability was ever baptized.

The only people who are baptized in the New Testament are people who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The only people who are ever baptized. Those who gladly heard the word were baptized, and you really have to look in vain for any other baptism.

The teaching that baptism saves infants makes God an unjust judge, because think of all the babies in the world today who live and die without ever having a chance to be baptized. What will God do with them? To teach that the baptism of an infant has saving power makes baptism the Savior and not Jesus, and the Lord will not share his glory with another. Christ is the Savior, and he's the only Savior.

If infants could be saved by having a few drops of water sprinkled on them, then Jesus didn't have to die. The reason he died, as we said last week, was that there was no salvation apart from that sacrificial, substitutionary death. Finally, the baptism of infants doesn't work, because many who have been baptized as infants have turned out to be murderers, thieves, adulterers, and many of them have been executed for their crimes.

Baptized? They were just baptized sinners, that's all. To depend on baptism as an infant for salvation, or even as an adult, is depending on a false foundation. Here's another question that comes up.

You say that the only way to be saved is through faith in Christ. Isn't that narrow-minded, to think that there's only one way? Well, if it is, then the Bible is narrow-minded, because that's exactly what the Bible teaches. It's not what is taught in Christendom today.

In fact, more and more in Christendom today, with a great ecumenical spirit, the attitude is that all roads lead to heaven at last. And it's amazing to hear church leaders today embracing all the world's religions and saying, it really doesn't matter which one you belong to. That's not what my Bible teaches.

Jesus said, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me. Pretty exclusive, isn't it? Other foundations can no man lay, and that is laid with Christ Jesus the Lord.

There's no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. So really, you have to decide whether you're going to choose the words of men, or whether you're going to choose the words of God. And it is true.

If men want to call that narrow-minded, well, it's narrow-minded, but it's true. And better to rest your soul's salvation on the unchangeable word of God than on the changing words of men. Men are oftentimes like chameleons.

They'll just change to adapt to their background, to the culture of the day in which we live. God won't do that. Now, somebody says to me, and this is a question with a lot of people, you've used the word faith a lot in talking.

Now, just what does it mean to have faith? We want to think about that for a while. What does it mean? What does that word faith mean? Well, first of all, faith means belief. It means trust, basically.

When a person has repented of his sins and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his only hope for heaven, he has put his faith in Christ. When he has acknowledged that he is ungodly and doesn't deserve heaven, but believes in the depths of his heart that the Lord Jesus died for him on the cross of Calvary, and that he can be saved simply by receiving Christ as faith. The Bible uses quite a few synonyms for faith.

It uses that word receive, as many as received him. To them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name. To believe means to enter a door.

Jesus said, I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved. That's pretty simple, isn't it? We all know what it means to enter a door. Why do we make such a fuss about what it means to believe in Christ? I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.

Believe means to open the door. Behold, I stand at the door and knock, Jesus says, if any man open the door, I will come in and sup with him and be with me. Not hard.

A more difficult one, Jesus in John chapter six, Jesus used the word eat as a synonym for believe. He said, except you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. And there the word eat and the word drink are both used as synonyms for believing on him.

In one case he says, he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. In another verse, verse 47, he says, he that believes on me has eternal life. To eat his flesh and drink his blood is absolutely the same as believing on him.

It has nothing to do with the communion service, it has nothing to do with the Lord's supper, the Eucharist, the simple matter of faith in Christ. One of the simplest synonyms for believe is the word come. Come unto me, Jesus, of all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

It's one of the first words you say to your child. You reach out your hand to the child and say, come. And really, it doesn't take long for that child growing up to understand what that word means, and he or she toddles over to you.

Or in the case of the prodigal son, to believe means to come home. That was lovely, wasn't it? This son was out in a far country, and he was starving, and he thought of all of the good food that the servants in his father's house were eating, and he repented and said, I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to go back to my father and say, Father, I've sinned against God and in your sight and am no more worthy to be called your son.

Make me, I pray you, as one of your hired servants. And he started on the way home, and he came home. That's really what it means to believe in Jesus, to come back to him.

To believe is to accept a gift. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord, and when you reach out your empty hand and accept the gift, you believe. You receive.

It's amazing, isn't it, that God would use such simple words to teach us what it means. I think he really removes any excuse that we might have. I'm glad he didn't use a big theological word, half a yard long.

He used a simple word, and he uses simple words of synonyms. He uses the word look. Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there's none else.

To believe is to look, to look at Christ suspended there on the cross of Calvary and say, he's dying there for me, he's dying the death that I should die, he's paying the penalty of my sins, and I accept him as my Lord and Savior. To believe is to love. You say, well, I know what that means.

Well, to believe is to love. Because if any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed, the Bible says. There's an anathema on the person who doesn't love Jesus.

To believe is to confess, to confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in our heart that God hath raised him from the dead. To believe is to hear. Fascinating, isn't it, to hear? Jesus said, truly, truly, I say unto you, he that hears my word and believes on him who sent me has everlasting life.

And hear there doesn't just mean the simple faculty of hearing with the ear, it means hearing and receiving, it means hearing and accepting, hearing and embracing Christ as the way of salvation. To believe means to touch. There's a woman there that needed healing badly, and here's Jesus in a crowd, and the people are thronging him, and she works her way through the crowd, and she touched the hem of

his garment.

It was an evidence of faith, and healing power flowed into her life. She only touched the hem of his garment, as to his side he stole amid the crowd that gathered around him, and straightway he was pulled. To believe means to accept an invitation to a wedding.

The Lord Jesus sets a wedding. I think it's so appropriate that the Christian life should be depicted as a wedding feast. So many good things set out for those who accept it.

You know what it means to accept an invitation to a wedding, don't you? You love it. Or to accept an invitation to any great feast. And then to believe means to follow, to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what Matthew did. Matthew was sitting at the Gate of Customs one day, and the Lord Jesus passed by, and Jesus said to him, Come, follow me. Matthew forsook everything and just got up and followed Christ.

He received him as the Lord of his life. So I think it's wonderful that the Lord gives us all of these synonyms in the word of God for what it means to believe on him. We really shouldn't have trouble.

Sometimes I think it's excuses when we say we don't understand. You had faith in an automobile today coming here to Sun Valley. You believed that car would take you here, and you entrusted yourself to it, didn't you? You have faith in somebody you've never met, the person who built that chair you're sitting on.

The very fact you're sitting there means you have faith in. You're putting your weight on the chair. Tomorrow some of you will go to work, and you'll get on an Otis elevator.

You've never met Mr. Otis, and yet you put your faith in that elevator, but it's not going to plunge down several stories to your death. Some of you will be taking a flight in a plane. Talk about faith.

I think of that every time I get in one of those wretched flying machines. You don't know the pilot? You don't know what he was drinking last night? You don't know whether he's on drugs? Terrible thought, isn't it? You get on that plane, and you believe it's going to take you to Buffalo. Faith.

Listen, the plane could fail, the elevator could crash, your car could break down on Route 24, but the Lord Jesus can never fail. Nobody ever trusted him in vain. He hasn't lost a case yet.

And you won't be the first. And today, if you're here, and you've never put your faith and trust in him as your only hope for heaven, we would invite you to do it today. Most wonderful thing that could ever happen in your life.

Greater than the day of your birth, greater than the day of your marriage. Nothing else in life can compare to that. When a sinner comes, trust the Lord Jesus Christ, and when his path is wiped out.

When he hears God saying to him, your sins and iniquities I will remember no more. As far as the East is removed from the West, so far have I removed your transgressions from the East. I don't know anything that comes terrible for that, do you? Maybe that you're here today, and you still have questions about this, not clear in your mind.

Feel free to stay behind afterwards. I'll just wait down here and be glad to talk to you. God has been speaking loudly to you in your life, and you know you should make this decision.

Feel free to stay behind and talk to us. Let us show you, from the word of God, how you can know before you leave this place this morning, that you've passed from death. Don't make it more difficult than it is.

God so loves the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever, what? believe upon him, does not perish, but has everlasting life. You reach out your empty hand, and you see Christ as your Savior, and God will save your soul, shall we pray. Father, we thank you again today, as we have so many times, for the simplicity of the gospel.

We thank you for the Savior of whom it tells, the only way of salvation, man's only hope. We do pray for any who are with us today, who have never made their calling in the election sure, they're still going on in darkness, groping without the light, pray that today they might come to the light of the world, who is Jesus, that they might receive, that they might believe, that they might hear, that they might look, that they might eat, that they might drink, that in simple faith, by a definite act of faith, they may receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We pray in his name and for his glory.

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