

This parable relates to His warning about the many who will be denied entrance into heaven, for He connects them by saying “therefore.”

If you examine the two groups of people identified in this parable, it all comes down to one slight difference. Both hear His words, but the first group “does them.” The second group “does not do them.” Both houses are made of the same material—the same teachings. They both look identical in worship and service. The critical difference is the foundation. One house was founded on the lordship of Jesus Christ. The other remained attached to an evaluation of what was determined to be good and evil—the same “tree” of philosophy Adam and Eve turned to.

It’s sobering to think that the same folly still repeats itself, from the garden to the present day. It takes on a different form, but it’s the same root.

Again, it comes down to this: *do we think we know best about how to live, or do we believe that God knows what’s best?*

Such a popular mindset in today's world—even in the church. Simple fact is this: we don't know what's best for us: only GOD does! Am I trusting my judgment over His?

IS DESIRE ENOUGH?

So now finish doing it, that your [enthusiastic] readiness in desiring it may be equalled by your completion of it...

—2 CORINTHIANS 8:11 AMP

The golden rule for understanding spiritually is not intellect, but obedience.

—OSWALD CHAMBERS

Consider this: A young man is dating a young woman. She’s attractive, healthy, organized, a gourmet cook, great with children, and—best of all—has a delightful personality. He’s in love and decides she’s the one he’d like to spend the rest of his life with. He creates a special moment, kneels down on one knee, opens a small box to reveal a sparkling diamond ring, and proposes to her.

Much to the man’s delight, the young woman breaks out in a huge smile, lets out a shriek of joy, bursts into tears, and after gaining a little composure excitedly responds, “Yes! Yes! Yes! I can’t believe this! I’m shocked and overwhelmed. This is the happiest day of my life! I love you so much! Yes, I’ll marry you!”

They embrace each other in sheer bliss. With emotions still running high, she looks into his eyes and passionately promises, “We will have such a great life. I’ll be the best wife, create a beautiful home, keep it spotless, make

delicious meals for you and the kids, stay healthy, dress fashionably, and make beautiful love to you anytime you desire."

The young man thinks, *Wow! Amazing! I have to be the most fortunate guy alive.*

She then makes one more attention-grabbing statement, "Of course there are other boys I still like, so I may date them periodically."

Stunned, the young man stammers, "That's not going to work!" "Why not, honey?"

He's dumbfounded. The special moment is ruined. The ecstasy is gone. His mind is racing. *Could she be joking? But why joke about something like this, especially after I've just proposed?*

After an awkward silence, which seems like an eternity, she tries to recapture the mood by enthusiastically offering a compromise. "Okay, how about if I just spend one day a year with my other boyfriends? I'll give myself exclusively to you for 364 days a year. Just give me one day with them."

The young man can't believe what he's hearing. It's now obvious she's not pulling his leg; she's serious. So he again replies, "No, that doesn't work either." She's puzzled, but because she loves him so much, she offers an even better deal. "Okay, what about four hours a year? Just give me four hours every calendar year to spend with my other boyfriends."

"No!" the young man says, even more firmly this time. Again, she counters, "How about twenty minutes a year? Just one good fling in bed with another boyfriend!" "No!"

In hopes of bringing resolution, she pleads, "Honey, I do love you; in fact, I'm crazy about you. I love you more than any other man. But I have this need. I just have to be with other guys. I simply can't be a one-man woman. I sincerely *desire* to be loyal to you, and I know it's the proper thing to walk away from all other relationships, but let's be real. There are so many great guys, and I love their attention. Why should I have to give this up? Why can't I have both?"

The young man is so disappointed that this time he doesn't answer; he

just hangs his head. After a few more awkward moments, she softly states, "I just have to be honest, I think you're asking too much. I want to enjoy a full life."

The young man's heard enough. "This is preposterous. We're not getting married. In fact, I'm through dating you."

They go their separate ways.

Let's think this through. This young man's getting a gorgeous woman with a great personality. She's superb in all aspects of domestic life, loves him, is willing to serve, and wants to give her best to him. She's ecstatic to marry him. All of this adds up nicely. All he needs to do is give her twenty minutes a year with another guy! Why isn't he agreeing to her terms?

Of course the answer is obvious: she isn't giving him her entire heart and life. She knows it would be the right thing to do, and on some level desires it; but the reality is that she's too attached to other guys. It's one thing to desire it's another thing to actually do.

No healthy man would ever marry a girl like this, so why would we believe Jesus is coming for a bride who acts the same way? Let's again look at His words:

"Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." (Mark 8:34-35)

Notice that just desiring to save our lives will cost us everything. Jesus didn't say, "Whoever desires to lose his life for My sake will save it." Just desiring to lose your life isn't enough. It's no different than the girl in the proposal story.

To enter a covenant relationship with the most wonderful Person in the universe, you have to give yourself fully to Him, which certainly includes all aspects of His leadership. Interestingly, the Bible compares our relationship with God to a woman's relationship with her husband. Paul writes:

As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother to get married, and he becomes like one person with his wife." This is a great mystery, but I understand it to mean Christ and his church. (Ephesians 5:31-32 CEV) *(we'd know / when in 2, they p 1 or NAB)*

Even though Paul used this to instruct a husband and wife in their marriage relationship, he also made clear it's truly written to illustrate our relationship with Jesus. No man would marry a woman who merely has a desire to give herself entirely to him but in actuality won't do it. Do you think we can do the same with Jesus? Perhaps this is why James writes:

You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. (James 4:4 NLT)

Again, he was strongly emphasizing this point, for he stated it twice. This is not a trivial matter; it's a core part of a true relationship with God.

An adulterer is one who has a covenant with one person, yet in violation of the covenant seeks out a relationship with another. This person is not devoted to the binding agreement of the relationship.

The covenant we make to follow Jesus is to deny our self and walk away from the world system that surrounds us. We can do nothing less than give Him our complete allegiance and obedience. This means we embrace His will and desires over our own. In exchange for giving Him our lives, we in turn get His life. This is like a healthy marriage between a man and woman.

I Still Want My Life

There are many who would gladly receive the benefits of salvation if only they could keep their own lives too. Interestingly, most realize there is a forsaking that must be done to follow God, and they're not ready to pay the price. They are being honest with God and themselves.

for my life!

I once had a neighbor (I'll give him the name Kevin) who was one of these people. He was a WWF wrestler, one of their superstars. He and his family lived three doors down from us. When they first moved into the neighborhood, his wife warned him to stay clear of us. "They're Jesus Freaks," she said.

A couple months later, while suffering an intense panic attack, the lady collapsed, weeping, into Lisa's arms. This incident opened the door for Lisa to share Jesus with her, and the wrestler's wife was gloriously saved. Shortly afterward the couple's two boys gave their lives to Jesus as well. *— thank you, Lord!*

Our families continued to grow close, and Kevin and I became good friends. We spent a lot of time together. We hung out frequently and often played basketball, street hockey, and golf with our boys.

One evening God showed me some events that would soon occur in Kevin's life. It was late, about 10 p.m., but I felt compelled to talk to him.

When he answered the door, I shared the three things that would happen in his life within nine months.

Sure enough, all three came to pass. I thought, *Certainly now Kevin will give his life to Jesus Christ.* But still there was no change.

A few months later God showed me another event that would take place in Kevin's life. I again spoke to him about it. This time I probed further. "Kevin, you've witnessed God foretell three things that have now taken place in your life. You can see He is reaching out to you. Why aren't you giving your life to Jesus?"

Kevin was 6 feet 4 inches tall, weighed 240 pounds, and had only 4 percent body fat. Visually, he was intimidating. He looked down at me and said, "Because I know there is a price to pay. I know that you have to give Jesus your life and submit to Him, and I'm not willing to give up my lifestyle."

He then said, "John, there is a well-known wrestler in our organization. He says he is a born-again Christian, and he's talked about God on the same TV program that you've been interviewed on. Yet I know he's using drugs and is sexually loose. Come on, man, how is he any different than me? I just refuse to be a hypocrite like him. I'd rather enjoy my life in the spotlight of fame and the accompanying perks than put on a facade."

for my life!

I was devastated by Kevin's report, yet his story is not isolated. There are countless people who attend church, call Jesus their Savior, and declare they are children of God but have not given their lives to His lordship. Are they truly saved?

Is it possible to birth converts in our Christian circles who aren't children of God? Jesus stated to the leaders of His day, "You cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are!" (Matthew 23:15 NLT) I'm not saying our leaders in the Western church are children of hell. However, what I'm asking is, what kind of converts are we spawning?

The consequence of not calling for seekers to lose their lives is converts who have found an improved lifestyle and the promise of an afterlife. Once the familiar "sinner's prayer" is recited, a new convert's conscience is appeased. In theory, he or she is no longer distant from God. Such converts belong to a community of fellow believers and share a common bond. Now on the side of apparent *good*, they are concerned for—and even sometimes participate in caring for—victims of social injustice, the poor, and the needy. Add this to the perks of hearing motivating teachings and the promise of heaven, and you have an attractive package most would want to be a part of.

But are these converts truly saved or are they deceived, thus making it more difficult for them to hear the actual truth? Could this message be what ^{the impression of} produces the misled followers mentioned in Matthew 7 who will hear Jesus ^{of His/their} declare, "Depart from Me, I never knew you"? ^{and the} ^{100% church}

Is Our Message the Same as His?

Is this the way Jesus reaches out to the lost? Let's return to the story of the wealthy young leader who is commonly referred to as the rich young ruler.

A few years back I was addressing a conference of a couple hundred pastors who oversee some of the largest churches in the United States. I asked this group, "Let's imagine the rich young ruler's approach to Jesus. Can you

see him getting out of his Rolls-Royce chariot, wearing an Armani cloak, sporting a Rolex wrist sundial? Several personal assistants follow him as he saunters up to Jesus. With a cool, reserved, slightly arrogant tone, he asks, "Good Teacher, what must I do to be saved?"

"Do you think that's how the scene might look today?" I asked the pastors. Sadly, the majority of them raised their hands in agreement.

"That's not the way Scripture reports it happening?" I said. Then I read how it's actually recorded:

Now as He was going out on the road, one came *running, knelt before Him*, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17)

In front of the crowds of people, this man came *running* after Jesus and *knelt before Him* and pleaded to know what he must do to be saved. No arrogance with this guy.

I thought it best to illustrate how this went down. I asked one of the leaders in the audience to stand on the opposite side of the large platform from me. I then ran at him full speed, and when I was only a few feet away, I slid to my knees, grabbed his shirttail, and loudly and passionately pleaded, "What must I do to be saved? What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

To this day, either in my personal life or in ministry, I've never had any person, rich or poor, chase me down, fall to his knees, and cry out, "What must I do to get born again?" Without a doubt, the young ruler was both passionate and sincere!

So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God" (Mark 10:18).

As I stated earlier, the man hoped to invoke a favorable response by honoring Jesus with the title, "Good Teacher." Yet Jesus would not allow this flattery to blind His discernment. Salvation was not to be "dumbed down" to the rich man's evaluation of good and bad.

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On the other hand, this man did have a good measure of integrity. He did not call Jesus Lord or King. He knew that to call Jesus Lord, he would need to do exactly what Jesus asked him to do! How many today possess this much character? They may call Jesus Lord and confess their belief in the Bible. Yet they'll evaluate life choices through their own knowledge of what's good and evil rather than carefully following what the Lord asks of them in Scripture. They smile and say *amen* to biblical teaching, but if it doesn't suit their purposes, they conveniently block it out as if it doesn't apply to their life. They hear but don't apply to themselves what the Spirit says. Many times they feel the message is appropriate for others they deem "worse off" than they are.

Hear how Jesus addressed this man who passionately desired eternal life:

"You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'"

And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." (Mark 10:19-20)

Jesus quoted the last six of the Ten Commandments, all of which deal with human relationships. The wealthy man eagerly replied that he had kept all of them his entire life. I believe he had. By these standards we can see he was a good, honest, and upright man. He was leaning on these good character traits, hoping they would be enough to earn him favor with God.

However, Jesus purposely omitted the first four commandments. These deal with a man's relationship with God, the first of them being to have no other gods or idols before Almighty God. In other words, nothing in our lives should come before our affection and love for, and commitment and submission to, Him. This young man had not fulfilled these commandments, nor at that moment was he willing to. Jesus was about to expose something in his life that would eventually keep him from finishing well.

Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." (Mark 10:21)

Notice, Jesus loved him! But how did He show His love for the rich young man? He warned this seeker. Jesus knew that inevitably there would come a day when this man's money would sway him from obedience to Jesus's authority (lordship). Jesus was more concerned for him to stay the course, not merely to start well.

For this man the hurdle was his money. For others it could be a girlfriend or boyfriend, sports, shopping, business, philosophy, education, food addiction, or sexual preference. In fact, the stumbling block can be anything we give our affections and strength to more than we do to Jesus.

Did Jesus love the young man by broadening the message to accommodate his other love? Did He ease up the truth in order to not offend him? Why didn't He just have him pray the sinner's prayer, hoping he would forsake his love for money at a later time? After all, he was a prime candidate showing great interest in being saved. All Jesus had to do was draw in the net and He would have had a wealthy, hard-serving, prominent Christian!

But Jesus truly loved this man. He gave him truth—a very strong word—and ran the risk of losing this excited, powerful man. Jesus looked into his eyes and told him he lacked something, and it wasn't passion but the readiness of heart and mind to obey the King of Kings no matter the cost.

I believe this man merely regarded Jesus as Savior, in which case obedience was optional. If by his estimation Jesus's counsel was *good*, he'd heed it. However, if he concluded that Jesus's counsel was *not good*, he could walk away.

Can you imagine telling an eager seeker they lack something and it will keep them from eternal life? However, if you truly love someone, you must be truthful, even if you know it means rejection.

Many Christians and ministers flatter for fear of being rejected by their listeners. They crave acceptance. Honestly, I used to be like this. Everybody I met liked me because I always told them what they wanted to hear. I hated confrontation and rejection and wanted everyone happy. Then God exposed my insecure, selfish motives. He revealed the focus of my love. It was myself, not the people I spoke to.

It is much better to tell the truth than to compromise truth and have someone believe a lie. It is far better they hear the truth now than that they believe they can keep other idols in their life—and then one day when it's too late, shockingly hear the Master say, "Depart; I never knew you, you who were deceived!"

Now observe the passionate seeker's response to Jesus's message to him:

But [the rich young ruler] was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:22–23)

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This man who was so eager walked away full of sorrow! "Oh, Jesus, how could You do that? The man came excited, and after hearing Your talk, he left sad! Don't You know You're supposed to bring a positive message to seekers? Your conversations or speeches should lift people up and make them feel good, not sadden them. Pastor Jesus, Your church's attendance will drop if You keep treating eager men and women like this, especially wealthy and influential ones. Go after him and soften the message; surely he will embrace the whole truth after a while!"

That is what Jesus might hear today from His leadership team or board members in the Western church! Jesus would be called on the carpet and His resignation requested.

How dare He offend this potentially huge giver who with one stroke of the pen could sign a check that would underwrite all the church's outreaches for the year! He could be the one to pay off the several million dollars of

building debt. Pastor Jesus just doesn't understand the dynamics of building a big, effective ministry. Maybe He's even forgotten how to positively influence people. He should tone down His talks and teach motivational messages—give uplifting speeches that build self-esteem.

Does this sound like what could happen in the Western church? We've fallen into the trap of doing almost anything to get a convert and create a following. We employ accommodation techniques to build church attendance, gain followers on Twitter, increase our fan base on Facebook, or get people to read our blogs. This is nothing less than communicating to God that our wisdom is sounder than His. Again, it's choosing the good over God.

It's true: invitations for people to choose Christ are needed—but they must be based on truth. We must realize God never called us to broaden the message of the New Testament, making it easier for people who still want to live independently of His ways to get saved. Salvation is not found in the tree of the knowledge of what we evaluate as good and evil. It is only found in the tree of life, according to His Word. Other lovers and idols must be forsaken, just as the girl who says yes to a marriage proposal must say goodbye to relationships with any other men. Jesus must be received as Lord, not just as Savior. This is the tree of life!

Now observe what Jesus did after this wealthy man walked away:

Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23–24)

One day I was contemplating this event, and the Holy Spirit directed my attention to a significant point. I visualized this wealthy man, respected in his community, slowly walking away from Jesus in sorrow, his head down and a dejected look on his face. I realized that the Master didn't run after him, grab him by the shoulders and say, "Wait a minute, My friend. Let Me

remind you of the wisdom of Solomon. He wrote in Proverbs 19:17, 'If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you!' (NLT) I told you to sell what you have and give it to the poor; but remember, according to Proverbs, whatever you give to the poor, the Lord will repay you. Not only repay, He'll give you one hundred times as much as you gave away!"

This rich young man was most likely a good businessman. So if Jesus had approached winning him in this way, he might have perked up and responded, "Really?"

Jesus then could have said, "Yes! Can you now see I'm just trying to position you for a huge blessing, a harvest of finances? You will be the wealthiest man in the nation, not just this community." At that point the man would have been more than likely to sign up to follow Jesus.

It is true that the Word of God tells us that when we give it will be given back to us, just as a seed returns back much more to the farmer than what he started with. This truth was confirmed immediately after the man walked away, for Peter—half protesting, half questioning—blurted out:

"We've given up everything to follow you," he said.

"Yes," Jesus replied, "and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life." (Mark 10:28–30 NLT)

At this point Jesus looked at these who had already forsaken all to follow Him and said, "You will receive a hundred times as much of what you have given up now in this life—houses and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life."

Why didn't Jesus say these words, or Solomon's words from Proverbs, to the rich young man who eagerly wanted eternal life? Why did it appear He was withholding this information? The answer is simple: Jesus never used

the blessings, perks, rewards, or benefits of the kingdom to entice people to follow Him. When He called Peter, James, John, and the others, it was simply, "Follow Me." It wasn't, "Follow Me and I'll give you blessings, peace, prosperity, a better life, and more." It wasn't, "Follow Me for what I can do for you." It was, "Follow Me for who I am. I'm Jesus Christ, Your Creator, the Master, and King of the universe."

If money had been the motive for Peter, James, John, and Andrew to follow Jesus, they would never have left their business. The day they left their business had been one of the most profitable days of their fishing career. Thanks to Jesus, they'd brought in two overflowing boatloads of fish! They were not aware of the "hundred times as much" promise. This was the first they'd heard of it. What they did know was that Jesus had the words of life, so they left all. Money was not the deciding factor.

God has never demanded a person be perfect in order to follow Jesus. He only asks for the willingness and commitment to obey Him! This young ruler probably possessed characteristics much more polished than Peter's. However, Peter was willing to do anything the Lord asked of him. This is still what Jesus means when He calls us to forsake all to follow Him.

My Plan versus His

When I received Jesus Christ as Lord in 1979, God immediately began dealing with me about the ministry. I was majoring in mechanical engineering at Purdue University where I was on the dean's list, started on the varsity tennis team, and had plans to attend Harvard for an MBA. My personal plans were to marry a great girl and eventually move into corporate sales or management. I wanted nothing to do with the ministry. All the ministers I had met were men who I thought couldn't do much else in life. They lived in smelly houses and their kids were weird. I had grown up in a town of 3,000 people, and this was the limited model I had of ministry. I had never met and spent time with a good minister, of which I've since learned there are many.

But then the Spirit of God came on me during a church service and said, "John, I have called you to My ministry. What are you going to do about it?"

I thought, *My family will disown me; they're all Catholic. I'll end up like all the other ministers living in poverty and filth.* But obeying God was paramount for me, so I bowed my head and prayed, "Yes, Lord. I will obey You and preach no matter what the cost! I will go wherever You tell me to go and say what You tell me to say."


The reality of that decision has been nothing like what I presumed, but God didn't show me that up front. He just wanted to know if I would for-sake all to follow Him.

If you study the ministries of Peter, Paul, and the other disciples in the book of Acts and the epistles, you will see that their messages lined up exactly with what Jesus preached to the wealthy young man! Today we have deviated from this path. It is the root reason for America's failing spiritual condition. It's the reason so many think they belong to Jesus when in reality they don't. We have to return to the lordship of Jesus so we will have a healthy foundation. We are still eating from the wrong tree. What passes as *good* is robbing us of what is best for our lives.

We miss many of the great blessings God wants for us because we've substituted a marketable message for the accurate scriptural message. Let's be honest, if this rich young man came to many of our cutting-edge churches today, he would have been "saved," and before long he would be considered a prized member and perhaps asked to join the church board.

Too often the church today has offered a good message of salvation apart from lordship. For the sake of not deceiving people, for the sake of many who otherwise might someday hear "depart from Me," for the sake of the strength of the church, and for the sake of truly walking in the blessings of God, let's forsake our inadequate, "good" gospel message and return to the tree of life—the biblical message of salvation.

MANMAN



OUR INTERNAL GPS

I've got my eye on the goal,
where God is beckoning us onward. . . .

—PHILIPPIANS 3:14 THE MESSAGE

To fall in love with God is the greatest
romance; to seek him the greatest adventure;
to find him, the greatest human achievement.

—ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Our foundation is the lordship of Jesus Christ. All aspects of our lives should be built upon this firm footing. If so, they will last. If not, they will eventually erode or pass away.

The next stage of building a house is the framework, and every aspect of this phase is built upon the foundation. This part of the construction process holds everything together. The flooring, walls, ceilings, cabinets, lights, trim, windows, bathtubs, and all the other finishing materials need a strong framework to last. With a solid foundation and strong framework we can build an enduring, successful house: *life*.

Your Internal GPS

To introduce this second aspect of a thriving life of faith, we'll divert away from the building illustration to a different analogy.