

# Finding God Forever

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In between the two covers of the Bible, a lot of people ask a lot of different questions, but perhaps the very best question of them all is the one the rich young ruler asks Jesus in Mark 10:17. As we will soon see, things quickly go downhill for the rich young ruler, but here, he shows that he's thinking in the right direction. Let's put this in perspective. The Bible tells us that our life on earth will typically last for about 70-80 years. That's a big chunk of time. However, it pales in comparison to the expanse of eternity. Eternity is immeasurable. It goes on forever and ever, and according to the word, we will spend that time in one of two states. Either we will enjoy eternal life, or we will suffer eternal death.

What's more, whether we face eternal life or eternal death is totally up to us. It is, in fact, dependent on the decisions that we make in our 70-80 years on earth. In the financial sphere, we often talk about return on investment. All other things being equal, we want to put our money where it will make the most money for us. That's the same concept we're dealing with here, and if we have the chance to invest 70 years here in order to gain an eternity of happiness, that is a very, very good return on our investment. Basically, the rich young ruler wants to know how to invest.

Of course, this question is no less important to us than it was to him. In fact, the question of how to inherit eternal life should shape the entire course of our lives. No matter what great things we do in this life, unless we succeed in winning the prize of eternal life in heaven, our lives will be a failure. After all, long after earthly joys and accomplishments have been forgotten, we will still be stuck in the misery of hell. Likewise, no matter what we do here, if we make it to heaven, our lives will be unqualified successes. Let's look, then, at finding God forever.

## Overall Perspectives.

If we want to find God forever, the first thing that we must do is **BELIEVE**. The Hebrews writer hammers this point home in Hebrews 11:6. It is flat-out, point-blank impossible for us to come to God in heaven without faith. In other places, the Scripture describes what this faith must entail. We must believe in God, in His Son, and in His word. Unless we believe in those things, we will certainly not inherit eternal life. All of those "good people" out there who are not disciples of Jesus, all of those devotees of other religions, they don't stand a chance in the hereafter.

This life without faith is a life without hope because of sin. In His word, God has told us how He expects us to live. When we violate His word, we sin, and that sin always carries with it the penalty of eternal death. One sin is enough to condemn us forever. The only way we can escape this death penalty is through faith. We trust in the power of Jesus to justify us, to make us righteous through His blood, even though our actions have not been righteous. No matter how holy we seem to others, we still must acknowledge that Jesus is the only one who can save us from our sins.

However, this doesn't mean that we lie back and let the waves of grace roll over us. Instead, if we want to inherit eternal life, we must also **OBEY THE GOSPEL**. Paul approaches this from the negative perspective in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8. What we see here is that when Jesus returns in judgment, He will destroy everyone who did not know God, along with everyone who did not obey the gospel. This leads us to an obvious conclusion. If the gospel tells us to do something and we want to go to heaven, we had better do it. For instance, Peter commands the Jews in Acts 2 that if they want to be saved from their sins, they must repent and be baptized. Likewise, if we want to be saved from our sins, we must repent and be baptized. If we refuse to do that, for whatever reason, we have not obeyed the gospel.

An awful lot of churches out there teach that faith without obedience is enough to save us. They say that if we do anything, we're trying to save ourselves and not relying on God to save us. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. When we're baptized, we don't earn our own salvation. The water in the baptistery isn't magic water, so that it somehow saves us. Instead, baptism is the way that we express our faith and our reliance on God. God has promised us that we will be saved if we are baptized, and it is our trust in those promises that leads us to be baptized. We don't save ourselves. He does all the saving. However, if we want Him to save us, we must obey His gospel first.

Third, if we want to find God forever, we must **PUT HIM FIRST**. This is where the rich young ruler failed. Look at how his story winds up in Mark 10:21-22. The rich young ruler's problem wasn't that he was rich. His problem was that he loved his money more than God. In the same way, anything that we love more than God will keep us from inheriting eternal life too. Nor is it hard to tell if we love someone or something more than God. The way that we actually live will tell us the truth. Let's pick just one example: the assembly of the saints. Whenever the doors are open here, where are we? Are we putting God first by making His worship the number one priority in our lives? Do we do everything we possibly can to be here? Or are there other activities, other priorities that we focus on, so that when the opening prayer begins, we're off doing those other things instead of worshipping here? God is not mocked, brethren. He sees through all of the lip service, straight to the life service. He is also a jealous God. He does not tolerate being put in second place to money or family or recreation. If we don't reserve the first place for Him, He will have no place for us.

## Specific Actions.

As part of putting God first, if we want to inherit eternal life, we're going to have to **FIGHT**. Paul makes this point to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:12. Of course, this is not a literal warfare. Our Lord's kingdom is not of this world, and our warfare is not going to be of this world either, so don't get too excited about exercising your Second Amendment rights in the name of Jesus. Instead, the fight is a spiritual one. If we want to make it to heaven, we have to go toe to toe with the devil and his minions every day. We fight this fight in our own lives, against our own sins and temptations, constantly struggling to become more righteous than we were in the past. We fight this fight for our families, doing everything we can to bring our loved ones closer to Jesus, even when they don't especially want to go. Finally, we fight this fight for the lost of the world, as we look to bring our friends and neighbors into obedience to God's will too.

As all of this makes clear, being a disciple of Jesus isn't some abstract, ethereal thing, where we prance around from cloud to cloud on our way to heaven. Instead, Jesus' path to eternal life leads through the battlefield. After all, Jesus Himself wasn't any kind of wimp. He was tough, He was aggressive, and He was fearless. If we want to follow in His footsteps, that's what discipleship is going to demand from us. We're going to have to go to war for eternal life.

In any war, there are going to be casualties, and if we want to inherit eternal life, we should expect to **SUFFER** for the gospel. Look at Paul's perspective on this in Romans 8:16-17. The point is that if we want to follow Christ, following Him through His sufferings is an inevitable part of that. Sometimes, this suffering will come at the hands of those who are hostile to righteousness. Jesus Himself promised in John 14 that the same kind of people who persecuted Him will also persecute us. At other times, though, the suffering will arise simply because of the hard decisions that God requires us to make. Let's say that we're in a difficult marriage, so difficult that we would divorce our spouses if it were up to us. However, the Bible teaches in Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7 that the only time divorce is acceptable in God's eyes is when our spouse cheats on us. If we want to obey God, we have to remain in that difficult marriage, and sometimes, that isn't going to be fun. People in that situation will often make all kinds of excuses. They'll say things like, "God wants me to be happy." Well, it is true that God wants us to be happy, but even more than that, He wants us to be righteous, and if being righteous will cost us something that makes us happy, that's the choice He wants us to make.

Third, if we want to find God forever, we will have to **ABOUND IN LOVE**. Paul explains the importance of love in 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13. We need to remember this as we work to become better disciples. There are all kinds of commandments in Scripture, but the greatest commandment is the commandment to love. If we focus so much on the other commandments that we forget to love, or if we forget to understand those commandments in the most loving way possible, we're missing the point. What's more, it's not enough for us just to reach some level of love that we imagine is good enough and stay there. Day by day, year by year, we have to increase in love and we have to abound in love. This means that if we can't look at our lives and show that we're more loving this year than we were last year, we're really missing the mark as Christians. Only as we live this life of love can we hope to win eternal life too.

Similarly, we must **PURSUE HOLINESS**. Look at the Hebrews writer's instruction in Hebrews 12:14. If we are not holy people, we will not get to see the Father's face forever in heaven. Holiness begins, of course, with our behavior. If we've been Christians for any length of time at all, we know what our spiritual strengths and weaknesses are. We know where Satan can defeat us. In our quest for holiness, we need to be willing to fight those battles over and over again, until we start consistently doing what's right instead of doing what's wrong.

Even beyond that, though, we must pursue holiness in our thoughts. This is much harder. After all, if we surround ourselves with godly friends as we should, in many areas of our lives, it's actually going to be difficult to live in an unholy way. Our thoughts, though, are a different matter. We can lust after someone who is not our spouse or covet someone else's fine new car, and nobody else on earth can tell. There's no external check on those evil thoughts and emotions. God, of course, always does know, and whether or not there are physical consequences for our lusts, there are always going to be spiritual consequences. This means, then, that we must dedicate ourselves to winning the battle between our ears too. This is going to be a lifelong struggle for all of us. We are never going to be able to get our thoughts perfectly in line with what God wants them to be. However, He wants to see us pursuing that goal. He wants to see us making that effort, even if we never succeed totally. Then, He will grant us eternal life with Him in heaven.

Finally, if we want to find God forever, we must **REMAIN STEADFAST**. James describes the spiritual significance of steadfastness in James 1:12. We need to remember, friends, that just because we've decided that we want to inherit eternal life doesn't mean that the devil is going to give us a free pass. He doesn't stand aside and let us go skipping up the strait and narrow to heaven. Instead, he's going to do everything he can to keep us in hell with him, and indeed, there are many, many Christians who start out on the road to glory and never get there. They get tripped up by all of Satan's temptations, and without perseverance, that will be us too. We must decide now that, no matter what, the devil and his sins are not going to entangle us, and we must keep going in accordance with that decision. After all, that's what Jesus did, and He won through to heaven despite all the temptations. We must do the same if we want to go there too.