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## Our Real Quest

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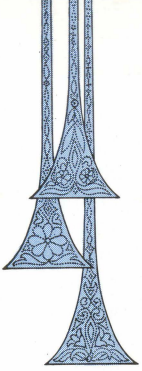
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# Our Real Quest



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# Our Real Quest

It has been the object of man's quest since Adam's fall. It possessed the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob. The prophets envisioned it. Men in Jesus' day asked about it: "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Motivating every serious religious question, man's thirst for life remains the human family's greatest quest. Throughout the New Testament we hear: "For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?" (Matthew 16:26); "Teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16); "Lo, we have left all and followed thee; what then shall we have?" (Matthew 19:27); "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37); "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10); and "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

Man's inquisitiveness never ceases to astound me. By nature, he must be the most inquiring of all creatures. In fact, man's ability to step back and look at himself, asking all kinds of questions about himself and God's creation around him, is part of the fulfillment of that "image of God" in which he has been created (Genesis 1:27).

But no thirst compares with mankind's longing for immortality, for life everlasting. Such concern is universal-

ly attested. The Great Pyramid, built by the second Pharaoh in ancient Egypt's Fourth Dynasty, measures more than seven hundred-fifty feet on one side of its square base and soars more than four hundred sixty feet into the air. In the heart of this pyramid, one of the seven wonders of the world, is the Egyptian ruler's sarcophagus or burial vault, and to the east of the pyramid part of a great funeral temple has been found. Underneath this pyramid the remains of a boat almost one hundred-fifty feet long have been uncovered. The fabled pyramids testify to the extreme lengths to which man has gone in search of immortality.

The Indian Mounds in the United States have told a full story about the religious beliefs and aspirations of America's Indians. Buried with the necessary hunting weapons and cooking vessels, these burial grounds speak of man's continuing hope for more life, eternal life.

Modern man may scoff at what the Pharaohs in Egypt built. He may laugh at the superstitions of the American Indians. But he keeps on giving colleges, towns, buildings, scholarships, teaching chairs, foundations, and other contemporary monuments his name in an attempt to perpetuate his influence beyond the limitations of his own short life. Whether we are willing to recognize the drive or not, men in every age, including our own, have sought life everlasting.

Interpreted in this light, the Jewish lawyer's question to Jesus, on one occasion, does not sound out of place at all. "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and made trial of him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). In answering this question, Jesus led the lawyer to further inquire, "And who is my neighbor?" Out of this discussion came the famous story of "the Good Samaritan."

Today, however, in view of what we have just discussed, I want us to consider the verses immediately preceding this well-known story. Listen as we read *Luke 10: 25-28*. "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and made trial of him, saying, teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And he said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And he (Jesus) said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live" (Luke 10:25-28).

The "eternal life" about which the Jewish leader asked represented the very opposite state or condition of death. Yet, death is repeatedly associated with man from his de-

cision to rebel at God's plan for him in the Garden of Eden. In *Genesis*, chapter three, one reads of physical and spiritual death which man, then and now, has to face. Since that fateful occasion sin and death have been partners. Of spiritual death Ezekiel said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezekiel 18:20).

The "eternal life" which concerned the Jewish lawyer was also the opposite of separation from God and all that is good. When Adam and Eve refused to abide by God's counsel, they voluntarily separated themselves from His presence (Genesis 2:8, 9). It thus became necessary for God to banish them from Eden severing their ties with Him (Genesis 3:24).

Men who sin create a gulf between God and themselves. The lawyer's question talks of destroying that separation.

It was a question about something completely different from man's alienation from God. Isaiah says, "Behold, Jehovah's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1, 2). Spiritually sensitive and genuinely obedient men have always known a personal God's forgiveness, life and power. Only in sinful rebellion against His way for us do we experience loneliness and isolation. When the Jewish lawyer asked Jesus, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" he voiced all our desires to repudiate death, separation, and alienation from real meaning and life. Yes, he revealed in that question what is "our real quest."

Jesus answered with a revolutionary principle: eternal life comes through love. He directed the questioner to the Old Testament, God's inspired revelation for that age. "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" Jesus asked. To which the lawyer rightfully replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27). Love is the vital ingredient in any meaningful relationship, Jesus taught His student, whether that relationship is between man and God or man and man.

The best New Testament commentary on love is found in John's *First Epistle*. Repeatedly, in this first letter, the

apostle talks of love of God and love of man. The relationship between eternal life and love, as indicated in our text, is clarified by this truth from John's writings: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (I John 5:3). Or, as another translation states, "For this is what love for God means: it means that we obey his commands" (I John 5:3, TEV).

Disobedience cost Adam and Eve their home in Eden, their personal relationship with God, and the continuation of their lives. Obedience, the *Hebrew's Epistle* states, unlocks the saving power of Jesus Christ for our lives (Hebrews 5:8, 9). But obedience, how and from where does it come? The lawyer wanted eternal life. Jesus pointed him to the Bible. God's Word said, "Eternal life comes through love of God and neighbor." John finally explains the origin of obedience: "When we love God, we obey God."

But this principle is also effective and operative in another dimension. Love not only prompts our surrender to God; but, this obedience, in turn, matures and increases our love. In chapter two of John's *First Epistle* we read: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him: but whoso keepeth his Word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected" (I John 2:4, 5). At this point we see the wisdom of the principle that eternal life comes through love more plainly. Not only does our love of God prompt surrender to Him but as we obey Him and walk with Him, following the counsels of His Word, that love grows and deepens through involvement in God's plans for us and in our relationship with Him.

But a further truth must be recognized at this point. The love we have for God also creates love for our fellow man. John, again in his *First Epistle*, comments: "We love because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen cannot love God whom he hath not seen" (I John 4:19, 20). Meaningful life that contributes to the welfare of others, creating and strengthening personal relationships in life, comes through our love of man. Eternal life, the result of personal and continuing contact with God, comes from our obedient relationship with God.

With Paul, in *I Corinthians* 13, we can also say that the love required of the lawyer by the Old Testament is the necessary condition for all spiritual reality and maturity in our lives. "Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude; never

selfish, not quick to take offence. Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other men's sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance" (I Corinthians 13:4-7, NEB).

Everything that we have said about love of God must also be applied to our relationships with other men. If love promotes involvement in God's plans for us, we also involve ourselves in others' needs. If love of God matures in our personal relationship with Him, so love becomes stronger among men who will interest themselves in one another's needs and will work at deepening their relationship with one another.

God loved us enough that Christ went to Calvary on our behalf. When no human being, according to man's standards, would have dared die for us, that is, while we were weak, sinful, and hateful, God loved us (Romans 5:6-10). "But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). By this act and by our appropriation of the benefits of Christ's death, we are "saved from the wrath of God" and "reconciled to God" (Romans 5:9, 10).

The "word of Christ" is one of freedom from sin, eternal life, new meaning and joy here and hereafter. This "word," Paul says, creates faith in every heart that listens honestly to Christ's claims on our lives and His gift of eternal life to us (Romans 10:13-17). Do you believe that Jesus is God's Son, the Lord of heaven and earth, today?

But the awareness of what Jesus did to free us from sin and give us life eternal somehow makes our own lives appear even more ineffective and uncertain than first we thought. All the past, with its sins, all the future, with its unnamed threats, we can commit to God with the decision to live for Him. But this change requires an honest decision of one's mind coupled with the conviction of one's heart which, in turn, produces a new direction of life. The Bible calls this repentance. Jesus says, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish" (Luke 13:3).

This new direction of life, however, must be made clear to all. And so we pledge allegiance to Him as our new Master or Lord (Romans 10:9). We publicly affirm that He is the Son of God (Acts 8:37).

At this point, in the New Testament description of our obedience to God, our surrender to Christ, our loving response to God's love, we answer Christ's invitation to become one with Him in baptism. Only at baptism, the immersion of a responsible, penitent believer, are the bene-

fits of Christ's death appropriated (Romans 6:3); the gift of Christ's life received (Romans 6:4, 5); and all one's sins forgiven (Acts 2:38; 22:16). If you believe in Christ; if you will now make the decision to live for God instead of sin; and if you will confess this faith and commitment; do not hesitate to completely and fully receive God's promised gifts in baptism. It takes no special individual to baptize you into Christ (Galatians 3:27). You need only a willing, loving, believing, penitent heart that yearns for full communion with God through Jesus Christ. And thus, "our real quest" for eternal life is answered by God.



John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program.

He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.