

New City Catechism

Question 15: Since no one can keep the law, what is its purpose?

Answer: That we may know the holy nature of God, and the sinful nature of our hearts; and thus our need for a Savior.

Romans 3:20

Begin today by reading the following story of the Rich Young Ruler taken from the Gospels...

As the rich young ruler entered the Judean town where he had heard that Jesus was teaching, he came upon a man surrounded by children near the town well. The man held the children close to him and gently touched the heads of those on the edges of the circle. Even from a distance, the power of this man's touch was unmistakable.

Surprising himself as much as the servants that accompanied him, the rich young ruler ran to the man and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he said to Jesus, "what must I do to gain eternal life?"

"You know the commandments," Jesus answered. "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie, honor you parents."

Any God-fearing Jew knew those laws, thought the ruler. And if anyone had kept them, he had! Why, who could claim that he had been dishonest in a single important dealing? Who could point to another man's possession that he had ever coveted or taken? If obedience to those laws was all that was required, surely he had already won eternal life!

"Teacher," he answered Jesus hopefully, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

But Jesus looked back at him with doubt in his eyes. Doubt, or sadness? "One thing you lack," Jesus said.

The man strained to hear what was going to come next.

"Go sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me," Jesus said quite tenderly, considering the harshness of what he was asking.

Had the young ruler heard correctly? Jesus wanted him to give away his riches? If he did that, he would surely forfeit the happiness he now enjoyed! No longer would he have important dealings to engage in. No longer would he have more than other men, or be able to do good to others. Faced with the costly invitation Jesus gave, the young man realized how attached he was to all his fine things and the influence they gave him over others. He could not let them go. After a last, longing look at Jesus, the young ruler walked slowly away, his shoulders drooping.

Using the Ten Commandments, Jesus had gently shown the rich young ruler that he had failed to obey even the first of God's laws. He loved his riches more than he loved God! Thus, he fell short of the standard required to merit eternal life: a pure heart. In fact, all people fall short...

- Did the rich young ruler keep the Ten Commandments? Why do you think the way you do? Why did he think he had?
- Why did Jesus tell the rich young ruler that he needed to give all he had to the poor in order to gain eternal life? (*Jesus showed the young man his idolatry and greediness, revealing that he did not deserve eternal life based on his own merit*)
- Can we get to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments? Then why did Jesus bring up the Ten Commandments in a conversation about eternal life? (*The Commandments help us see how woefully short we fall from God's character and standards and help us recognize our need for a Savior*)

Read Romans 3:20

- What do we learn from Paul about the purpose of the law?

In closing, watch the video from the New City Catechism app or website. Please make use of the other materials on the app or website as you see fit. Remember to pray with your family before you finish.