

The Narrow Way

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Jesus, in Matthew 7:13,14)

When it comes to the important things, like our eternal life —our salvation, we would be well advised to follow the directions given to us. If we follow directions, and go the “narrow way” Jesus spoke of, we’ll be on the way to life . . . life both now and forever.

So, what are the directions? What are we told to do? Paul answers in one verse:

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30)

If we follow instructions and come to God in repentance, *then* we’ll enter His mercy and grace, as promised:

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” (Proverbs 28:13)

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him . . .” (Isaiah 55:7)

We’ll receive mercy: we’ll have “remission of sins that are past” (Romans 3:25). We’ll be “purged” of our “old sins” 2 Peter 1:9). Our past sins will be blotted out, and we’ll be redeemed - by His blood - from the death penalty we had earned for those past sins:

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19, NKJV).

That's right: our sins were *not* blotted out - past, present and future - the moment Jesus died on the cross. Our sins *remain* - neither forgiven (1 John 1:9) nor blotted out nor paid for - unless we come to repentance.

We enter “the presence of the Lord” when we receive the gift of the holy spirit, which God gives “to them that obey Him” and “repent”:

“And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” (Acts 5:32)

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:38)

That is how we enter *justification*:

“Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we

shall be saved from wrath through him.” (Paul, in Romans 5:9)

“Through Him” works only as long as we abide in Jesus, and - in repentance - follow the holy spirit. As long as we abide in Him and follow the holy spirit, we remain in justification —not under condemnation:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1)

As long as we abide in Jesus, and in repentance follow the holy spirit, Jesus leads us out of slavery to sin. Outside of repentance, He can not work with us:

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” (Jesus, in Revelation 3:19)

This is the “narrow way” that leads to life. An ongoing relationship with Him

“. . .yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11).

That is how we are *sanctified*, made ready to receive the gift of eternal life as the Father's sons and daughters. Creation is not finished: it is still in process, through Jesus. He is the potter, we are the clay. He can not work with us if we are not repentant.

As long as we abide in Jesus, and in repentance follow the holy spirit, He continues - present tense - to cover any new sins with His blood:

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

As long as we abide in Jesus, and in repentance follow the holy spirit, Jesus - as our living high priest (Hebrews 8) - will faithfully redeem us by His own blood, the sacrifice He made available on the cross:

“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” (Titus 2:14)

As long as we abide in Jesus, and in repentance follow the holy spirit, we have “the hope of salvation”: the promised gift of eternal life, to be received at Jesus' “revelation,” —His return:

“But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 5:8,9; also Acts 15:11).

“And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life” (1 John 2:25).

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you

at the revelation of Jesus Christ;" (1 Peter 1:13)

But if we no longer abide in Him, and return to a life of un-repentance and willful sin, then there is no blood, no sacrifice to cover our new sins:

"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:26,27).

In that case we return to condemnation. We are no longer "in His goodness" or grace, and we'll be "cut off." And we'll forfeit that "hope of salvation":

"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." (Jesus, in John 15:6)

"For if God spared not the natural branches [the Israelites], take heed lest he also spare not thee.

Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." (Romans 11:21,22)

The apostle Paul understood that even after preaching to others, he could possibly return to a life of sin and therefore be rejected, a "castaway":

"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Corinthians 9:27)

That's why we have so many warnings to "give diligence to make our calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10,11), to "continue in His goodness" (Romans 11:22) and not to "fall away" (Hebrews 6:4-6).

Outside of repentance, we are outside of His promised mercy and have no redemption. We will perish, paying our own death penalty. That's why Jesus warned:

"except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Jesus, in Luke 13:5)

Peter makes it clear: come to repentance, or else perish:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

Judgment is on "the house of God" - the church - *right now*:

"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)

“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” (Hebrews 4:1)

So you may be wondering, “How does faith fit in? How does faith tie into justification?” We come to justification —and saving grace, *through* faith . . . not just because we *have* faith:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8)

If we have faith - trust that God exists and rewards - then we might decide to “come to God” on His terms, in repentance: confessing and forsaking sin. Without faith, however, we would not “see” the choice, and therefore could never decide to come to Him:

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

Even with faith, many choose to remain in their old lives, preferring the approval and the attractions of the world instead. That's *dead* faith.

It is the decision to obey and “come to God” on His terms that pleases Him (Hebrews 11:6) . . . and for which we enter His promised mercy (Proverbs 28:13) . . . and for which we have our past sins blotted out (Acts 3:19) . . . and for which we receive the gift of the holy spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32) and enter a relationship with Jesus (Acts 3:19). That is how we enter justification.

Faith is necessary, but it is not enough: we must obey and “come to God.” Otherwise, our faith is dead.

True *believers* - like Abraham - are those who act on their faith and obey God. Abraham's “works” was his obedience to God: he obeyed and left for the promised land (Hebrews 11:8), and later offered Isaac. The apostle James cited Abraham's example, writing:

“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” (James 2:20-24)

So we see that true believing goes beyond “faith only.”

Note how Peter describes non-believers: not as faithless, but as “disobedient”:

“Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner” (1

Peter 2:7).

So now, when we read “believe” John 3:16, we see that more is required than “faith only”:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

Today, Jesus is

“. . . the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9).

Like Abraham, we today are called to journey: to leave behind the ways of this world and take the narrow way that leads to life . . . eternal life in the promised land, the Kingdom of God.