

The Way to Eternal Life



In the Biblical record we read that Jesus spoke of two roads, the narrow and the broad; two gates, the small and the large; two destinies, life and death; two types of people, the saved and the lost. These two people groups are described in various ways:

The Righteous and the Wicked

The Godly and the Ungodly

The Saints and the Sinners

The Wheat and the Tares

The Sheep and the Goats

The Wise and the Foolish

Jesus taught that *“these [the unrighteous] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”* (Matthew 25:46)

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Such teaching may be disturbing, especially if one finds himself on the side of the unrighteous. But people generally acknowledge good and evil, and they realize that there must be some sort of final justice in the end. People may argue about the criteria, but we intuitively sense there will be a final day of reckoning.

Furthermore, we must remember that Jesus did not say these things to criticize; He was warning people to turn from evil, and hence, not be numbered with the unrighteous. Everyone is given the free choice to turn and be changed. We can no more condemn Jesus for His warnings than could a parent who warns his child not to cross a busy highway.

Having established that there are two groups, the main message in the Bible is how to get out of the evil group and into the good group—simply put, “how to be saved.”

OUR CONDITION

To the surprise of the philosophers and intellectual moralists of the world, the Bible teaches that everyone begins in the bad group. This is our default condition.

There is none righteous, not even one. There is none who understands. There is none who seeks for God . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:10-11)

This is not to say that all people are as bad as they could be. Due to culture, upbringing, or inner discipline, some people are better behaved than others. Nevertheless, the Bible still teaches that because of willful disobedience, every man has within himself the seed of evil. The problem is more than sinful acts; people have a sinful nature. Anyone who has ever struggled with what is often called “inner demons” knows that our sin is truer than one cares to admit.

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As expected, the doctrine of man’s depravity is not universally accepted. Part of man’s sinful bent is to think too highly of himself. Humanism generally teaches that “man is basically good.” However, the first step in coming to God begins with agreeing with God’s assessment of our condition.

Jesus sought to correct those who considered themselves righteous.

And He (Jesus) also told this parable (parable of Pharisee and tax-collector) to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous; and viewed others with contempt. (Luke 18:9)

In this parable, Jesus taught that the Pharisee (religious clergyman), who considered himself good, was not saved; but the tax-collector, who considered himself bad and cried out for mercy, was saved. Rather than seeking the mercy and forgiveness of God, self-righteous people seek heaven through their own supposed righteousness.

This is the battle of the ages; will mankind accept God’s assessment of our lost condition, or will mankind continue in denial? Unfortunately, many reject God’s assessment. They are even bitter at God for even suggesting that humanity is not right. Some even blame God for sin. Man in his fallen condition naturally opposes God, His holiness, His law, and even His way of salvation.

Admitting one’s sin is the first hurdle a person must get over before he can enter the Kingdom of God. This is more than simply regretting mistakes made. This is a full, agonizing, heart-felt grief over one’s sinful attitudes and actions.

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

One must recognize that he is lost before he can be saved. God is saving the humble, contrite soul who sees his need. As Jesus taught in the parable, the self-righteous Pharisee was lost, but the humble tax-collector was saved.

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I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:14)

The Kingdom of God is for those who acknowledge their sinfulness and, subsequently, have a sincere desire to forsake sin. Why isn’t everyone entering the Kingdom of God? As you might guess, people are either too proud to admit their depravity or too satisfied with their sin to be concerned over it. The prerequisite to salvation is humility and repentance.

THE WAY TO SALVATION

The second Biblical truth that must be embraced is the means through which God chooses to grant forgiveness and salvation. Salvation does not come to all automatically. Because mankind lives in sinful rebellion, God first requires our repentance from old beliefs and a heart-felt acceptance of His truth. Salvation comes by personal faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

1. There must be true faith in the person of Jesus Christ – He is Lord.

The Gospel (good news) is that God came to earth in the form of the man Jesus Christ. We discover in the Bible that God is three persons in one. The plurality of God is seen in the first Biblical book. God said, “Let Us make man in Our image (Genesis 1:26).” There are three persons of the Godhead: “The Father,” “The Son,” and “The Holy Spirit.” The Trinity of God is a great mystery, but all that we can know about God must be accepted from the Biblical record. “God the Son” is no less God than “God the Father.” “God the Son” took the title “Son” because He was born into this world. As the angel told Mary, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that*

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reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35)." Jesus, the Son of God, willingly took a position of submission to "God the Father." God grants salvation to those who correctly believe in the person of Jesus Christ.

"And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20)

Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins. (John 8:24)

2. There must be true faith in the work of Jesus Christ – He is Savior.

Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, performed many miracles, was rejected and crucified, was resurrected to glory, and will return to bring believers into His Kingdom.

Jesus came not merely to be a teacher of truth; He came to die on a cross to take our penalty for sin. He is our substitute. In the justice of God, God decreed that the punishment for sin can be taken away only by a perfect sinless substitute. As would be expected, the Biblical teaching of Christ's substitutionary death is either confusing or offensive to much of the world. Many stumble over the doctrine of the cross. Every other world religion repudiates forgiveness through the cross. The assumption is that God should forgive sin by a wave of His hand. But the Bible teaches that for a soul to be saved from judgment, God Himself has to take the penalty for man's sin upon Himself. This is not hard to appreciate once one fully wrestles with the reality of evil, death, justice and sacrificial love. It is no surprise that God must make a sacrifice to save us.

Deliverance always comes through a special work of God!

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For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God. (1 Peter 3:18)

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

To be saved one must choose to accept Jesus Christ's death on the cross as the only way sin can be forgiven. This means choosing to make Jesus Christ your Savior rather than making "self" your own savior.

A common misconception is that heaven is guaranteed as long as a person either makes a good faith effort to live rightly or simply believes in the existence of God. In a Christianized culture, there are many who generally believe in Christ; but they fall short of salvation because they continue to seek heaven through personal merit, good deeds or some sort of religious sacrament. Even some professing sects of Christianity have abandoned the true Gospel of grace for a works-based salvation similar to what is taught in world religions. It is the old lie that "if your good works outweigh your bad works, you will make it."

Does such a trust in one's own self-righteousness offend God and exclude a person from God's Kingdom? Absolutely! Remember in Jesus' parable, the Pharisee who trusted in himself was not justified. The Scriptures clearly teach that the one who attempts to establish his own righteousness will not be saved. Salvation is granted only when it is received as a free gift. Those who consider themselves good enough to earn heaven surely do not believe (1) their own sinfulness and (2) the person and work of Christ.

For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:3-4)

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For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Helping people understand salvation by faith in Christ is no easy task. Even after hearing the Gospel message, there will still be those who insist heaven is their destiny because they have lived a good life. Such a response shows that they don't "get it." But when a man finally renounces self-trust and trusts Jesus as Lord and Savior, at that point he is born again. God writes the believer's name in the book of life and fills him with the Spirit of God.

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Now What?

If you have truly believed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, you don't need to work to maintain your salvation. Your faith has saved you.

"And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." (John 10:28)

But if you have truly received Christ, you will find that you have a desire to learn the Bible, fellowship with Christians, and serve God. This is the natural response to the change God has made in your soul. There are many more truths to discover about this new life. Your next step is to attend a Bible-teaching church so that you can grow in your new faith.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

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How do we know it is true?

It is helpful to provide proofs for the Christian faith since mankind, being evil, is predisposed to create false religions. Jesus Himself said, "Beware of false prophets (Matthew 7:15)." Jesus, therefore, substantiated His message with miracles. He said, "If I do not the miracles of my Father do not believe me (John 10:37)." The miracles of Jesus are attested to by the testimony of the apostles who wrote the New Testament. This is significant, but this does not provide first-hand evidence for our generation. However, fulfilled prophecy is first-hand evidence for every generation. We can examine the Old Testament prophecies of Christ written centuries before His birth. No natural man could have arranged prophecies about the time of his own birth, life and death. Biblical prophecy is too accurate to be coincidental. Many have come to believe in Christ on the basis of prophecy alone.

Consider also that Christianity is not some new religion but the one true faith that originated in the Garden of Eden. The promise from the beginning was that God would send a Messiah to deliver mankind from sin and death.

There are enough practical and theological proofs in Bible to convince the willing, but not enough evidence to convince the unwilling against their will. This partial veiling of truth is actually part of God's plan. Jesus taught His disciples that God would only reveal Himself to those who love Him (see John 14:22-23). This explains why God does not show Himself in the sky. God is working quietly in those who are pure in heart. The same God who reveals himself to those who love Him, hides Himself from those who hate Him.

God has so made the world that being part of God's family is not based upon one's IQ or powers of investigation, but upon one's attitude. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3)."

B.E. Winship

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