

## **The Unconverted “Believer” (6): The Narrow and Broad Ways**

### **Introduction:**

Let us read the passage that we began to address last Lord’s Day--Matthew 7:13 and 14. Jesus taught,

<sup>13</sup>“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. <sup>14</sup>Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:7-14)

Toward the end of His Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus set forth the two destinies of mankind, eternal life and eternal damnation. Jesus used the metaphor of two roadways on which all people travel that would bring them to their final destination. The road most traveled is the broad way, which is perceived by all to be the easy and the best way, but the end of this road is “destruction”, in other words, damnation. The Lord described the other road, which is least traveled, as more “difficult” than the broad way, but it leads its travelers unto “life”, that is, eternal life.

A gate stands at the head of each road. The broad roadway has a “wide” gate, to allow for many to enter. The difficult roadway has but a small (“strait”) gate at its entrance, a gate that is not easily discovered, even for the few that do find it. The Lord urged His hearers to enter this narrow gate. It is not easy to enter, for the Lord Himself must open this gate to them who would enter, and the Lord does not open this gate to everyone. Jesus is quite selective whom He enlists to be His followers. But for those who truly desire to go through this strait gate and who are importunate in asking, seeking, and knocking at this gate, Jesus promised that He would open this gate to admit their entrance (Matt. 7:7). Last week we gave attention to the meaning of the narrow gate itself. This week we will consider the difficult roadway to which the gate opens. But first we will review a few details about entering this gate.

Entrance through this small gate is a metaphor of the conversion of a sinner becoming a true Christian. It sets forth the biblical teaching that only the one who abandons all thought of personal merit or of personal qualification will enter. Only the sinner who calls upon Jesus to be his Savior and Lord, is permitted entrance unto this way that leads to life. The Lord only opens this gate to those who repent of all their sin; that is, they turn from living for sin and are willing to submit to Jesus Christ as both their Savior and Lord. This is a far different understanding of conversion than what is popularly proclaimed in evangelical churches that by simply “believing” on Jesus Christ as Savior one is saved. **Arthur Pink** (1886-1952) described conversion, the entering of this narrow gate:

What is denoted by entering this narrow gate? Chiefly three things. First, acceptance of those teachings of truth, of duty, of happiness, which are unfolded by Christ: the honest and actual receiving into the heart of His holy, searching and flesh-withering instructions. Those teachings may be summed up in His emphasis upon the righteous claims and demands of God upon us and His instance upon our depraved state and wicked enmity against Him. No one can become a Christian while he entertains any doubt upon the Divine inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, or while he refuses to bow to the verdict which God has pronounced upon him. We must know ourselves to be utterly lost before there can be any desire for salvation...

Second, the exercise of true repentance... The Gospel is not less holy than the Law and therefore requires that our hearts bewail our former transgressions of the Law and be firm and sincere in its resolution against all future sin. “You and your sins must separate, or you and your God will never come together. No one sin may you keep. They must all be given up: they must be brought out like the Canaanite kings from the cave and hanged before the sun. You must forsake them, abhor them, and ask

the Lord to overcome them” (Charles Spurgeon). It is by abandoning our idols and the pleasures of sin that we pass through the straight gate.

Third, the complete surrender of ourselves to God in Christ... To believe savingly in Christ is to receive Him as Prophet to instruct us, as Priest to atone for us, and as King to rule over us... It is by a complete surrender of ourselves unto God that we pass through the straight gate.<sup>1</sup>

Now we must not assume that when one becomes a true Christian that he immediately becomes a mature Christian or that he no longer struggles with sin. In some ways the true struggle against sin begins with conversion. Before conversion one may have felt guilty and regretful for his sin, but he could not say that he really fought against it. But after he was converted, when he truly began to fight against the current of sin that had governed his thinking and living, the battle then became real and intense. And this Christian’s fight against his sin continues throughout life. And although he wins many battles against sin, while losing others, he never stops striving after holiness, although he never achieves complete deliverance in this life. But as a Christian he looks forward to the day when he will have his true desires fulfilled. Paul expressed his own struggle with sin yet optimism in Christ when he exclaimed, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:24f).

### **I. A few more words regarding the Lord preparing a soul to come unto Him.**

Last week we spoke somewhat of God’s preparation of the sinner before the Lord opens and grants entrance through this narrow gate. This work of preparation may take place over a brief (an hour?) or long (years?) period of time. But lest anyone misunderstand what is meant by this work of “preparation”, let us state clearly this point. Preparation to enter this gate is not our preparation of ourselves to qualify us for entrance; rather, it is God’s work of grace in preparing us for entrance. His work of preparation is that of stripping us of any other hope apart from Jesus Christ. Before the Lord will permit our entrance--our becoming true Christians, He must squeeze out of us wrong thinking about ourselves and about Him. He must wring out of us any sense of personal worthiness or ability in ourselves to obtain His acceptance of us. We are only prepared to enter the door of conversion when our hands are empty and our desire is acute. He accepts us only due to His mercy alone granted to us through His grace alone in Jesus Christ alone.

**Thomas Hooker** (1586-1647) wrote much on the Lord’s preparation of the sinner prior to his conversion.<sup>2</sup> In 1632 he first published, *The Soul’s Preparation for Christ*, in which his chapter titles depict this work of God’s grace prior to conversion:

1. God is Capable of Breaking the Hearts of the Most Stubborn Sinners on Earth
2. A True Sight of Sin is Needed
3. Some Means by Which We Can See Sin Convincingly
4. The Necessity of Exposing the Evil of Particular Sins to Men’s Consciences
5. Serious Meditation on Your Sins is a Special Means to Bring the Soul to a True Sight of and Sorrow of Sin
6. More Helps in Meditating on Your Sins
7. Of Soul-Piercing Sorrow
8. The Heart Prepared for Christ
9. How God Supports the Hearts of Those Broken for Sin with Hopes of Mercy
10. The Heart Truly Broken for Sin Will Make Free and Open Confession of Sin
11. Sound Contrition of Heart Brings a Thorough Hatred of Sin

In the Lord’s work of grace of our preparation for conversion, He does for us what John the Baptist did for the people of Israel. John prepared the people for the coming King and for their entrance into the

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Pink, **The Broad and Narrow Way** (International Outreach, Inc., 2014), pp.6f.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hooker, **The Soul’s Preparation for Christ** (International Outreach, Inc., 1994), 204 pp. He was the founder of Hartford, Connecticut.

kingdom of God. John called upon the people to repent of their sins, or they had no hope that they would enter the kingdom of God. And if they failed or refused to repent, then their certain destiny would be God's condemnation in judgment. John proclaimed to the people individual responsibility and accountability, that each one would be judged according to his works. He said to the people, "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt. 4:10). Similarly the Lord Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, convinces people of their sinfulness, of their guilt and condemnation before God due to their sin, and of their inability to live unto the righteousness that God requires of all people everywhere. The Holy Spirit Himself is the direct agent in this preparatory work, whom the enthroned Lord Jesus sends to bring His people unto Himself. Jesus said of Him,

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:7f).

The result of God's preparation is the sinner longing for forgiveness of his sins, of the desire to be delivered from his sinning, and to be accepted as a follower of Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord.

If there is no repentance from sin before God, there is no forgiveness of sin by God. Therefore, in this work of God's preparation of sinners to ask, seek, and knock at this narrow gate to gain entrance into the way that leads to life, He must bring us to be desirous and willing to forsake all of our sin and to begin a life of humble, trusting, following and obeying Him through life unto our promised inheritance—eternal life. If we are telling people that they can come to Christ any other way than this narrow gate of forsaking sin and trusting and yielding to Him as Lord in all areas of life, we are promising a way of salvation that is not taught in the Word of God. But sadly, this is the cause of so much nominal Christianity in churches. They claim to believe on Jesus Christ as their Savior, but they are not journeying on the narrow and difficult way that leads to life. They are attempting to gain eternal life other than the narrow and difficult way that Christ has prescribed. Their hope and efforts are futile.

And so, the work of preparation for coming to Christ is not you preparing yourself in order to become acceptable to Him. It is His work of grace in preparing you, so that you see and believe your only hope is if He accepts you. Preparation is not being cleansed of your sin; you cannot do that. God's preparation of you is to show you that there is no other way to be cleansed from your sin apart from coming to Jesus Christ alone. His work of preparation is to show you just how defiled and filthy you are and that you have no ability to change your condition. He prepares you by showing and convincing you that Christ alone is the fountain that can cleanse you from sin. As the prophet once declared: "In that day", that is, in the day of the coming of Jesus Christ, "a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). The Lord convinces sinners, who are without any other hope, that there is mercy and grace in Jesus Christ alone. He enables us to see that the streams of blood and water that flowed forth from His side, when He hung on His cross, alone provide a full atoning sacrifice whereby we may be forgiven and cleansed from our sin. It is with that knowledge and that hope that you find that small gate and you ask, and seek, and knock, and then the Lord opens that narrow gate of your conversion and grants you entrance into this new way of living that will end in the gift of eternal life.

But let us now turn our attention from the gates of entrance to consider the roadways themselves.

## II. The way that leads to life

There is a difficult way of life that ends in eternal life and there is a broad roadway of life that ends in one's damnation. Again, here is **Matthew 7:13** and **14**:

<sup>13</sup>"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. <sup>14</sup>Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

The Lord Jesus declared that the difficult way, which is the life of a true disciple of Jesus Christ, leads to “life”, that is, the end or destination of this way results in “life.” Of course Jesus was referring to eternal life.

Now, according to the Word of God, what is eternal life and when is it received or experienced? The answer to this question is that the Scriptures set forth eternal life in two different ways. Eternal life is in some places set forth as the *present possession* of the true Christian. In other places of Scripture eternal life is set forth as a *future inheritance* in the age to come, upon the day of the resurrection and final judgment of mankind. Both of these presentations of eternal life are of course true, but it is important to understand both concepts and to keep them both in view and in balance. And so, let us consider...

## **A. Eternal life as a present possession and as a future prospect**

The Lord Jesus taught that completion of one’s journey on this difficult road would result in attaining “life”, in other words, eternal life. Here the Lord Jesus sets forth eternal life as a future blessing to be received after completing the life of faith. This statement itself betrays a very deficient understanding of eternal life that is held by most evangelicals. Most evangelicals think of God’s gift of eternal life only as a present possession rather than the promise of a future blessing at the end of a life of faith. Their understanding is not wrong, but is right, in one sense. But it is not the complete understanding of God’s gift of eternal life that is set forth in the Holy Scriptures. When we were working through the Gospel of John we repeatedly stressed its emphasis that eternal life is set forth to be the present possession, or rather, the present state of the true believer in Jesus Christ. Eternal life is spiritual life, that which we enter through the new birth, God regenerating us by the Holy Spirit. And so, the true believer presently has everlasting life. Let us consider more carefully...

### **1. Eternal life as a present possession (reality)**

Here are several expressions in the Gospel of John that reflect this truth that eternal life is presently enjoyed by true Christians. Jesus taught,

“He who believes in the Son *has everlasting life*; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (John 3:36).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me *has everlasting life*, and shall not come into judgment, but *has passed from death into life*.” (John 5:24)

John expressed the true believer’s present possession of eternal life not only in his Gospel, but also in his shorter epistles. He wrote,

“And this is the testimony: that *God has given us eternal life*, and this life is in His Son.” (1 John 5:11).

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, *that you may know that you have eternal life*, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” (1 John 5:13)

The eternal life of which John wrote speaks of *the quality of life* that we presently possess. Life is what we enjoy as Christians as we live in faith while in God’s presence and by the power of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Scriptures also present...

### **2. Eternal life as a future prospect**

Apart from John’s Gospel and his epistles, most of the New Testament writers set forth eternal life to be received and experienced in the future. Eternal life is an inheritance that all true Christians will one day

receive when they pass from this life into the presence of their Savior, more specifically, upon their future bodily resurrection from the dead and their glorification as the children of God. Consider the following passages from the Synoptic Gospels and from Paul and Peter's epistles.

The Lord Jesus spoke of eternal life as a future inheritance:

“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and *inherit eternal life*.” (Matt. 19:29)

The apostle Paul also wrote of eternal life as the believer's inheritance:

“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, <sup>5</sup>not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>that having been justified by His grace *we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life*.” (Titus 3:4-7)

The Lord Jesus spoke of the righteous on the Day of Judgment entering eternal life. “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but *the righteous into eternal life*” (Matt. 25:46). He also referred to eternal life to be received by His disciples “in the age to come.”

“So Jesus answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, <sup>30</sup>who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time-- houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions-- and *in the age to come, eternal life*.’” (Mark 10:29)

The apostle Paul almost exclusively wrote of eternal life not as a present possession, but as a future blessing of God's grace conferred upon true believers who had completed successfully and triumphantly their life of faith. Paul wrote the following:

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, <sup>6</sup>who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’: <sup>7</sup>*eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality...*” (Rom. 2:5)

“Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup>so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness *leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*.” (Rom. 5:20)

“But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and *the end, everlasting life*.” (Rom. 6:22)

“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but *he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life*.” (Gal. 6:8)

Paul also wrote of eternal life as the realization of the believer's hope, that for which the believer long anticipated with joy. To Titus Paul wrote:

“Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, <sup>2</sup>*in hope of eternal life* which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:1f)

Later in the same epistle, Paul wrote,

“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, <sup>5</sup>not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>that having been justified by His grace *we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*” (Titus 3:4-7)

We see in these many passages that eternal life is set forth not as a quality of life presently enjoyed by Christians, as in John’s writings, but eternal life is a future blessing assured to all true disciples of Jesus Christ. And this is how the Lord Jesus set forth eternal life in Matthew 7:13 and 14. Jesus said,

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. <sup>14</sup>Because narrow is the gate and difficult is *the way which leads to life*, and there are few who find it.”

Eternal life is the outcome of a life of faith on the narrow and difficult way, for it leads to “life”, even eternal life. But because many, many “Bible-believers” focus on the present possession of eternal life only, and that was given to us by God at the moment we first believed, they do not understand and they are being told the biblical truth that the Bible frequently sets forth eternal life as granted to them who live a life of faith in Christ, enduring unto the end. Sadly, there are many of these nominal Christians who thereby think that they have the gift of eternal life. But if their lives are not characterized by a vital, living faith, that believes upon and follows Jesus Christ throughout life, they will die in their sins and be condemned before the Judge of all the earth. The Lord has prescribed the way of life that will result in everlasting life. Those who refuse or fail to follow this road way of faith and obedience will not inherit life, but rather will be consigned to everlasting damnation.

But not only does the biblical meaning of *eternal life* have both a present and a future aspect, but this is also true of the word and concept of *salvation* also. There is a sense in which Christians have been saved--past tense. But the Scriptures also speak of Christians becoming saved in the future when they stand before their Judge at the final general judgement of mankind. Let us, therefore, consider...

## **B. Salvation as a present reality and a future pledge**

### **1. Salvation is a present reality.**

Let us first recognize that the Bible teaches that those who have repented of their sins and have believed upon Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, have been saved. Salvation is a present reality. The wicked and despised tax collector, Zacchaeus, upon his faith in Jesus Christ, experienced salvation. We read in Luke 19:9, “Jesus said to him, ‘*Today salvation has come to this house*, because he also is a son of Abraham.’” It is clear that Zacchaeus had become saved through his faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

On the day of Pentecost 3,000 people had repented of their sin and believed upon Jesus Christ. They are described as having repented of their sins, believed on Jesus Christ as Lord, and then confessed their repentance and faith in public baptism. We read in Acts 2:46f these words: “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily *those who were being saved.*” They were *then* being saved.

The Apostle Paul wrote of Christians having been saved, using the past tense to refer to the time of their conversion. Paul wrote, “For *we were saved* in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?” (Rom. 8:24). And to the church at Corinth Paul described believers as ones who were being saved. He wrote, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us *who are being saved* it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). And later Paul wrote of his ministry among them, “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those *who are being saved* and among those who are perishing” (2 Cor. 2:15). To the Christians in the church at Ephesus, he wrote that they

had been saved, which is in the past tense: “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace *you have been saved*)” (Eph. 2:4f). This is stated also in verse 8 of the same chapter, “For by grace *you have been saved* through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...”

Paul wrote this same truth to two young men in the ministry. To Timothy Paul wrote:

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, <sup>9</sup> *who has saved us* and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began...” (2 Tim. 1:8).

And then to Titus he wrote, “

“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, <sup>5</sup>not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy *He saved us*, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior...” (Titus 3:4-6)

True believers in Jesus Christ may say with biblical authority that they have been saved. But in the same way that many look to the meaning of “eternal life” only as a present possession, many Christians view salvation in terms only of their present possession. But the Word of God declares in numerous places salvation is a future pledge that will not be received until the future time when we are saved from the wrath of God on the final Day of Judgment. And so, let us consider...

## 2. Salvation is a future pledge.

In the Synoptic Gospels the Lord Jesus spoke of salvation as a future pledge granted to His disciples who continue in faith, overcoming all challenges and obstacles. Jesus told His disciples, “And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But *he who endures to the end will be saved*” (Matt. 10:22). He said similarly in the Olivet Discourse, “But he who endures to the end *shall be saved*.”

The Apostle Paul wrote of God’s promise of salvation that will take place on the final Day of Judgment. Of the work of Christ Paul wrote, “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, *we shall be saved* from wrath through Him” (Rom. 5:9). And to the Christians in the church at Corinth Paul exhorted the church to deal faithfully with a church member caught in egregious sin. The church was to discipline him in order that he would be saved on the future Day of Judgment. Paul instructed them,

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that *his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*.” (1 Cor. 5:4f)

Paul also wrote to the church at Rome that our salvation has not yet having been realized. “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for *now our salvation is nearer* than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11).

The epistle to the Hebrews describes salvation as a future inheritance of the elect, to whom God has sent angels to protect and preserve. “Are they (angels) not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will *inherit salvation*?” (Heb. 1:14). And Peter wrote of our salvation not being revealed to us until we stand before our Lord one day. Peter wrote of Christians, that they “are kept by the power of God through faith *for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*” (1 Pet. 1:5). A few verses later he declared that salvation would be granted to Christians in the future as the outcome of their life of faith. “Though you have not seen Him (Christ), you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, *obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls*” (1 Pet. 1:8f).

And so, the Word of God teaches that eternal life is both a present possession and a future prospect, and also that salvation is both a present reality and a future pledge. If we could take the time we could show similarly that this is also true of the biblical understanding of the kingdom of God. The Scriptures declare that we have already entered the kingdom of God through the new birth. But the Word of God also teaches us that one day we will inherit the kingdom of God after our exoneration on the Day of Judgment. In Matthew 25 Jesus taught that on that Day of Judgment He will grant the “sheep” on His right hand entrance into His kingdom. He will say to us who are believers, “Come, you blessed of My Father, *inherit the kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

The point that we are making is that all too often evangelicals only give emphasis to the present possession and reality of our salvation in terms of our forgiveness and righteous standing before God in Christ, but fail to give due emphasis to the future realization of God’s promise that we will be saved and that we have not yet entered eternal life that God has promised to His people. But the Holy Scriptures set forth the great need for us to exhibit faithful, responsible, and obedient living through which we will one day inherit His promises. And the Scriptures declare that if we fail or refuse to order our lives in this matter, God gives us no promise of our entry into His coming kingdom. God gives no promise that those who live in disregard of his Word will inherit eternal life. God gives no promise of full and final salvation to the one who fails to accomplish this journey through life of faithful obedience unto Jesus the Lord. The narrow gate is but the entrance into a way of living that will end in eternal life only for those who successfully complete this journey of faith.

We have addressed the “way” that leads to life. Let us now consider...

### **III. The difficulty of way that leads to life**

Jesus spoke of two gates and two roads. The Lord Jesus declared, “Enter by the narrow gate” (Matt. 7:13a). Why should this be done? Jesus said, “for (because) wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.” To refuse or to fail to enter this narrow gate of conversion means that you will have chosen the wide gate and the broad way that leads to “destruction”, that is, eternal damnation.

When the natural man views these two roads side by side, one is obviously wider, and it appears more desirable and to be the best course to take. To the natural man the broad roadway is thought to be the right, proper road. But the Scriptures declare, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 16:25). To the unconverted it appears to be the road which leads to a happy and fulfilled life. Everyone says that it is. His own heart and mind agree. But when he looks at the narrow road, it does not appear to be the right way. He says,

“It looks to be such a little thing, and a difficult way in comparison with the superhighway over here. And it appears that only a few, misled persons mistakenly think it leads to life. It does not appear to lead to life. Surely, that is the way of the fool, the weak, the uneducated and ignorant. Surely, any who have chosen that way have abandoned all good sense and the reason that they were given at birth.”

The one who walks the difficult way is a stranger to others in this world. He thinks strange things. He asserts that all are condemned and that God will regard no man’s good work, but only regard His Son’s atonement for sin as the basis on which He will receive anyone. This is foolishness and repugnant to the natural man. The man on the difficult road affirms that he is no more deserving of God’s favor than the worst reprobate that has ever lived. To accept this as the gospel and submit to coming to God on grounds other than one’s own merit is not desirable or reasonable.

This narrow road permits only one kind of traveler. In contrast to the broad way that permits all kinds of people, all manner of behavior, and all kinds of religion—it is very inclusive, the difficult way makes allowance for one kind of person only—a disciple of Jesus Christ. There is not room on this road for every kind of religion, every kind of philosophy. Travelers are not permitted to conduct themselves in any kind of behavior they choose. The difficult way is the way of intolerance--God will not put up with anyone that



refuses to submit to Him. There is a broad way over there that will allow for that--choose that path if you want to live that way. Travelers on this narrow and difficult road order their lives according to the teachings of their Master. Indeed, this narrow road is a difficult road. But, you can be assured, that if you embark on this road and persevere in it, you will inherit everlasting life. Every pilgrim following this course comes to its desired end--the grace of God will see to it.

But Jesus gave another reason for entering this narrow gate unto this other way of living. He said, "Because narrow is the gate and *difficult* is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt.7:14). Jesus said that the way unto eternal life is one of difficulty. On many occasions Jesus warned His disciples of the great hardship and difficulty they would encounter as they lived as His disciples in this fallen world. But they were to endure, overcome, and persevere, onto the saving of their souls.

"But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. <sup>10</sup>And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. <sup>11</sup>But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. <sup>12</sup>Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. <sup>13</sup>And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. *But he who endures to the end shall be saved.* (Mark 13:9-13)

The Scriptures teach that the Christian in this present age is living in the time of *tribulation*. Most evangelicals do not understand this fully. They view the tribulation as a future, endtime 7 year period of the great tribulation that will come upon the earth. But the Lord Jesus declared to His apostles that they would encounter great tribulation in their lives. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The Lord Jesus warned the church at Thyatira that those who refused to repent of their sins He would cast them into "great tribulation" (Rev. 2:22). He was not speaking of a future 7 year tribulation after a supposed rapture of the church, but He was referring to the difficult days that lie before them as Christians living in the Roman world toward the end of the first century.<sup>3</sup>

After Paul had evangelized the city of Lystra, he was stoned by them who rejected him and his message, and they drug him out of the city leaving him as a dead man. But God raised him up. After he had preached elsewhere he returned to Lystra in order to tell the new Christian converts that what had happened to him was not unusual, but that it was consistent with the kind of trouble that all Christians face in this fallen world. Here is the account:

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.*" (Acts 14:21f).

They declared that the course of this life for Christians was one through *many tribulations*.

Jesus said that this narrow road way to life was a *difficult* one. But true Christians must persevere, continue in faith through all of the hardship and difficulty that they encounter. As **John Bunyan** (1628-1688) set forth the pilgrimage of Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, on our journey we must climb hills of difficulty, pass by lions on our way, travel through the valley of the shadow of death and the valley of humiliation unto the Celestial City that lies before us. Some of us may have to contend with Apollyon more

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<sup>3</sup> The Bible does not teach that the second coming of Jesus Christ will occur in two stages-- the rapture of the Church and then seven years later at His revelation. It is popularly claimed that the rapture is a secret event when only those saved from Pentecost onto the time of the rapture will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, but that He will not physically and visibly return until seven years later at His second, second coming. The Scriptures speak of one future return of the Lord. The future rapture is of all the redeemed through history and it takes place at the one event of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

directly and severely than others. Some may have to contend with Giant Despair. We all must be vigilant through the Enchanted Ground. But we must continue on this way for it is the only way unto our full and final salvation. This is why we read warnings such as are in the book of Hebrews:

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. <sup>36</sup>For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

<sup>37</sup>“For yet a little while,  
And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.  
<sup>38</sup>Now the just shall live by faith;  
But if anyone draws back,  
My soul has no pleasure in him.”

<sup>39</sup>But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, *but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.* (Heb. 10:35-39)

Our Lord declared that the Christian life we are to exhibit, this road way that leads us unto eternal life, is “difficult.” It may be a farther or shorter journey depending on what stage of life the Lord brought us to faith. It may be more difficult for some or for many of His people than for others that know Him, but all must make this journey overcoming all difficulties through faith as we journey unto our Promised Land. The people of Israel did not immediately pass from Egypt into Canaan in its exodus, but had to travel through a barren wilderness and then pass over the Jordan River before the promises of God were fully realized by them. Between our initial faith commitment to Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, when we were saved from the penalty and alienation of sin, unto the reception of our full and final salvation, a great deal of ground must be traveled through this fallen world, this “wilderness.” There are a great number of foes that we must defeat and overcome. Perhaps a great period of time must be endured in faith, before we reach our promised land of eternal rest.

The writer to the Hebrews used the Old Testament experience of Israel to depict the spiritual life of true Christians and their need to persevere in faith in order to inherit the promise of eternal life.

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; <sup>13</sup>but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup>*For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,* <sup>15</sup>while it is said:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,  
Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

<sup>16</sup>For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? <sup>17</sup>Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup>And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? <sup>19</sup>So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

The Apostle Paul also used the failure of the generation of Israel that came out of Egypt but who died in the wilderness having failed to enter the Promised Land, as a basis of exhorting Christians to live holy lives.

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup>all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup>all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness.

<sup>6</sup>Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. <sup>7</sup>And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” <sup>8</sup>Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; <sup>9</sup>nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; <sup>10</sup>nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup>Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Cor. 10:1-12)

Salvation is not to be understood as a one-time decision to believe on Jesus, but a life-long commitment of faith to believe upon and to follow in obedience the Lord Jesus Christ. He leads His people out of this fallen world unto our heavenly Zion, our eternal home.

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The LORD bless you and keep you;  
The LORD make His face shine upon you,  
And be gracious to you;  
The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,  
And give you peace. (Num. 6:24-26)