

## 22. The Two Step Gospel

The devil has concocted what is perhaps his most pernicious deception from the doctrines of eternal salvation. One can easily observe the fruit of this false gospel – it is most readily seen in those who preach or espouse the doctrine of eternal salvation but have nothing of the Spirit or life of Christ within them. If you disagree with anything these people say, they respond with snide, sarcastic or even rude retorts to display your stupidity for ever disagreeing with them and to shame you into silence and submission. The source of this strange dichotomy has its roots in a two-step “gospel.”

Jesus said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life.” (Mt. 7:13-14)

There are so many errors and misconceptions floating around about salvation that one cannot hope to address them all. But let us consider this saying of Jesus in the light of other Scriptures that touch on the same issue:

- There are two gates, two ways, two destinations. Adam faced this same choice in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:16-17, 3:22), Moses presented the Israelites with this same choice (Dt. 30:15-20) and Jesus pressed this choice upon His disciples. (Jn. 6:66-67)

- The broad gate opens to the broad road that ends in destruction. The many works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) are the characteristics of those who have gone this way and these are excluded from the kingdom of God. (also see Eph. 5:5)

- The narrow gate is small and opens to the narrow road that leads to life. The singular fruit of the life lived on this road, made possible only by and through the power of the Spirit of God, is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23) Why is this list the *singular* fruit? Because they are the only valid expression of the life and Spirit of Christ coming out from within. They are the living water that flows forth from the depths of one’s innermost being. (Jn. 7:38)

- To enter the gate is to be born anew from above. (Jn. 3:5-7) This transaction (Jn. 1:12) or translation (Col. 1:13) places us upon the road that leads to eternal life. Christ’s life has been given to us but we must choose what we will do with that life. “Everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.” (Mt. 25:29) The life of Christ *is* the large sums of money given to the three servants and we do well not to mistakenly assign any other interpretation to that parable. (Mt. 25:14-15 and following)

- Eternal life is found at the end of the narrow road. We have abundant life now (Jn. 10:10) and “theologians” like to assure us that, no matter what we do or say or how we live, we have that eternal life now and no one can take that

eternal life away from us. But this is not entirely accurate. We who have the Spirit of Christ do have His life within us (Rom. 8:9) and for we who are His sheep, no one can snatch us out of the Father's hand (Jn. 10:28-29) nor can any thing separate us from the love of God that is in Christ. (Rom. 8:38-39) But the one who refuses to pursue holiness will not see the Lord (Heb. 12:14) and those who are godless and immoral will, like Esau, forfeit their inheritance. (Heb. 12:16-17) Anyone who shows up for the wedding feast of God's Son who is not appropriately and obediently attired in a wedding garment as was provided for him will be removed and cast out into the darkness. (Mt. 22:12-13)

- The narrow path that leads to eternal life is the will of God. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 7:21) He also said, "Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple." (Lk. 14:27) Jesus Christ is the author or source of eternal salvation for all who *obey* Him (Heb. 5:9), not for those who disobey Him.

It is here that we can see the deceptiveness of the "two step gospel." It is taught or practiced in different ways but the result is that the people are compelled to enter the gate but not to walk the path. In many cases, one cannot even be certain they've even come in through the right gate (Jn. 10:1-2) but it is very evident that the path they take has nothing to do with crosses, sufferings or the life and Spirit of Christ. Yet these are the very ones who are most likely to know the words of the Bible verbatim, giving yet more evidence that the letter, even of the New Covenant, kills, whereas the Spirit of God gives life. (2 Cor. 3:6)

Corrie Ten Boom has wisely observed, "The growth of the Christian life does not stop at the first surrender any more than marriage stops at the wedding ceremony." (*Each New Day*, Oct. 14) How ludicrous it would be to think that one should live one's married life at the altar or bench in front of the preacher, priest or judge where one first said one's wedding vows and were pronounced man and wife! Entering the gate, coming into the newness of life that is in Christ, is only the first surrender. Many more surrenders are to come as we put our flesh to death (Col. 3:5) and live as slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6:18) living *for* Him who died for us. (2 Cor. 5:15)

The deadly evil quality of the false "two step gospel" is most visible when the people are taught to take the first step – some even euphemistically refer to this as "fire insurance," a virtual "get out of hell free" card – and these "accept" or "receive" Jesus as their "Savior." How gracious ***of them!*** But the second step – where Jesus is truly enthroned as King and Lord – is neglected and ignored. Those who actually take this second step often soon find themselves unwelcome or even estranged at their "church" Under the "two step gospel" deception, those "believers" who have taken the first step – or at least done outward signs like saying a "sinner's prayer" (which cannot be found in the New Testament) or joining a "church" (which cannot be found in the New Testament either) or baptism (which is supposed to be an outward sign of inner repentance and entry into the new life in Christ – Gal. 3:27, etc.) – are not required in any way to take the second step toward obedience and the subjective reality of the Headship and Lordship of Christ Jesus. The devil has been so successful at separating the term "salvation" from ideas of *responsibility*, *duty* and *obedience* that some "theologians" now preach "faith alone" and "eternal security" and deride what some now call "Lordship theology"! It is all part of the devil's scheme to get us off the path, the will of God, that leads us to eternal life!

There are various aspects to the will of God that we must pursue but these are readily divided (for our understanding, that is) into two categories – individual and corporate – yet even this division overlaps each other when we recognize that above all things we are to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. (Eph. 4:22-24, etc.) With this conformity to Christ governing our pursuit of the will of God, we can also see that both our individual and corporate pursuit of the will of God readily divides into two categories – general and specific. That is, we are all, individually and corporately, called to purity (1 Ths. 4:3), honesty (Eph. 4:25), obedience to God (1 Jn. 5:3), good works (Tit. 2:14), submission to one another (Eph. 5:21), etc. – and, for those who have the Spirit of Christ and have read anything of the New Testament, these general requirements are pretty much a “no-brainer.” Knowing the will of God specific to each individual and corporate body, however, can be more difficult to know and requires a progressive intimacy with God and persistent willingness and even insistent demanding for God’s will to be revealed and brought about in our life. And though the will of God involves aligning our choices with His, perhaps the most difficult aspect to submit to (largely because it goes beyond our ability to know and understand) is how we ourselves actually *become* an expression of His will. That is, by virtue of what we become in Christ, we – with or without words, with or without our conscious awareness of what is going on – have a divine impact on the people and circumstances surrounding us.

How far can we deviate from the will of God, or how much sin can we practice and still be saved? About the only answer that can be given to these questions is: Are you willing to wait until judgment day to find out whether you have deviated too far from His will or practiced too much sin? Think about that one! But know also that the question of “how far?” and “how much?” are the questions the flesh or the demonic will raise in opposition to the truths expressed here. These questions, which have no quantifiable answers and certainly no answers that we could make a religion out of, can still remind us of our duties and responsibilities before God. But to respond to these questions in fear or anxious dread is to misunderstand the *process* of being saved. “Saved” is a past-tense word and there is no possibility of our being eternally saved until we are beyond the realms of time and stand in the infinite present of eternity. Until we are actually there, however, the work is not complete and requires our diligence and attention. (see 2 Pet. 1:5, Phlp. 2:12, etc.) In this life, we make our choice to enter the gate and then we follow through on that decision by walking the road that takes us to our destination, eternal life. We receive affirmation or denial of our progress toward eternal salvation by accurately recognizing which road we are on.

If we believe anything else, we must dismiss Christ’s words as meaningless and consider Him to be just another foolish and mistaken teacher of philosophy and religion. Or we can simply receive the truth, take up our cross and walk the path that He has chosen for us to follow. The choice is ours but we must not delude ourselves into thinking we have any other alternatives before us.

Let he who has ears hear.

Chapter 21: The Eternal Gospel

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Chapter 23: The Test of Obedience

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