

# THE WAY

By

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In the early church, Christians were known as people of “the Way.” Jesus had told his disciples, “Where I go, you know the way. Thomas responded, O’Lord, we know not where you go: how do we know the way?” He answered, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:4-6).

By “the way” is not meant a highway which will take everyone on it to the Father. Rather, the Way is the manner of our going. It is a way of living. It is the way of life demonstrated by Jesus.

When Jesus said to enter in by the narrow gate, he was talking about the beginning of the journey, not the end. Unfortunately, the 20th Century church has painted the wrong picture of the Way. People are told to simply “ask Jesus into your heart,” and have overlooked Christ’s call to “follow me.” Like the bumper sticker that asks, “Have you tried Jesus?” The aim of many has not been to follow him, but to use him.

The Way is not all accomplished when one becomes a Christian. One may want to make the confession of faith, be baptized, and get it all settled and done as quickly as possible so he can get on with all the other plans for life. But to enter the narrow gate is to begin a life of following Jesus. He said, “For narrow is the gate and straight (difficult) is the way that leads unto life, and few are they that find it” (Matt. 7:13-14).

It is as if Jesus were saying to us, “This is the way we were created to live. It is not the way the world lives, so when you live this way you will be criticized, opposed, or persecuted. If you want to be in the majority and in favor with the world, don’t follow this path. It will require sacrifice. You will have to give up many things that your peers think are necessary for a successful and happy life. Some may think you are a fanatic, a religious nut, or even an enemy of the State. Don’t be surprised if people hate you, because the way you have chosen exposes the evil of the way they live. But I will be with you, and in the end, you will be given life that is glorious and eternal; while those who took the broad way – the many ways of their own design – will be destroyed in the Day of Judgment.

**JOY AND SUFFERING.** The broad way that ends in destruction is crowded with the multitudes who think that the god life is to be found in seeking pleasure and self-gratification. Many churches are ready to accommodate them with programs to make them feel good and keep them entertained.

There is great joy in the narrow Way, but it is found only by those who learn the purpose and value of the suffering that accompanies it. It is a joy not found by seeking joy, but by seeking to know Christ and to be conformed to his likeness.

When things have gone wrong, when instead of pleasure there is pain, and instead of joy there is sorrow, one may be discouraged and say, “God doesn't hear my prayers. He hasn't healed me, nor lifted my burden. He has left me to suffer while others enjoy peace and prosperity. I have devoutly prayed and served, yet I have suffered loss, while others have gained. I have had to struggle and suffer and toil for the bare necessities, while others prosper and have leisure for pleasure and rest.

We are challenged by the words of Jesus to deny self, take up the cross and follow him, and we would answer the call, only with certain disclaimers: denial must not include our favorite sports, or our choice conveniences, and the cross is okay, so long as it doesn't cause pain.

How easily we forget. God suffered for us. He gave His only Son that we might not perish. Jesus suffered, the godly for the ungodly, “leaving you an example that you should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:21-24). Suffering is the nature of the Way, but we remember Paul's words: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).

**THE INDIVIDUAL WAY.** To follow Jesus in the Way requires that one be responsible for his own decisions and his own conscience. The trend of the age is to see that no one suffers guilt. For every failure and every sin the responsibility must be traced to some other element in society - one's parents, or environment, or access to guns, or to drugs, etc. The individual loses his conscience as the responsibility is fixed somewhere else. The majority actually becomes the conscience. Atrocious acts are excused on the basis that they were committed under the influence of a mob, or a gang, or in the confusion of war.

But before God, the majority, the mob, the gang and even the government all disappear. Each individual suddenly is confronted with his own conscience. Judgment is not concerned about your environment, or whether your neighbor tempted you – your neighbor will answer for that – but judgment will have to do with whether or not you yielded to the temptation. And remember that “There has no temptation taken you but such as man can bear; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10: 13).

In eternity one may look for support and security from the crowd, but in vain. For in judgment each one stands alone, even as Jesus suffered and died alone, as the one to undergo judgment and death in our place. The judgment will consider whether you have transferred your responsibility to society, or if you have lived as a pilgrim of the Way.

In the end we will be judged by the means we employ, not by the things accomplished. One may serve humbly and faithfully every day, proclaiming the gospel, sacrificing all for the sake of the Kingdom, and yet never see one life submit to God, or any signs of accomplishment. But before God he has been faithful and has been transformed into God's image. Another, by cleverness and the power of personal charisma, may be able to manipulate people so that thousands respond to his appeal, and the world hails him as a great success because of his great accomplishments. But before God he must give account of himself. Whether or not those who responded are saved will not be the issue, but before God he must account for the means he has used. Those who buy into the smart marketing touted by the "church Growth" expert might want to take a second look.

**THE ONLY WAY.** As someone has said, Jesus doesn't negotiate. This is the way; there is no other. Today one cannot read a newspaper or turn on the TV without being propagandized with the doctrine of multiculturalism and religious pluralism. The politically correct teachers and journalist are convinced that any way to God and any religion is legitimate as long as it makes no claim to be the right way. Exclusiveness is the worst kind of sin in the bible of the New World Order. This excludes the way of Christ, who insisted that his is the way, and the only way to God.

With Jesus there is no compromise – we either walk in the way or we don't. It is not for us to alter it, to add conditions or make exceptions. There is only the one way. We will stumble, and fall. We may stray from it from time to time. We may make only slow progress, and maybe sometimes fall back. But we are never alone in the Way. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins...If any man sin, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins" (2 John 1-2)

**WAY OF LIFE.** There is significance in the fact that Jesus combined the three things: "the way, the truth, and the life. The way to the Father is the way to life. contrary to the pagan belief that man is endowed with some kind of immortal substance, and therefore will survive death to live forever in one form or another, the fact is that mankind is mortal (Job 4:17). Only God has immortality (1 Tim 6:16). Jesus warned that the broad way leads to destruction, for the punishment for sin is death; and at judgment that death, described in Revelation as "the second death," will be eternal (Matt. 25:46; Rev. 20:14).

The way of Christ is the Way of life. The Bible contains no promise of eternal life for anyone except those of the Way. ..For this is the will of my Father, that every one that beholds the Son, and believes on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40).

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