

November 21, 2021

## **Two Ways**

*“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. (14) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the **way** which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13,14).*

These very familiar Scriptures constitute a portion of that famous “Sermon on the Mount” (recorded in Matthew 5-7), which was preached by Jesus near the beginning of His earthly ministry. The verses just cited occur in the latter part of that great sermon, and they clearly refer to two contrasting **gates**, two contrasting **ways**, and two contrasting **destinies**. In view of the nature of the two contrasting destinies, it surely behooves every accountable person to “*enter by the narrow gate*” and to “*find*” the “*way which leads to life*.”

Such contrasting ways and destinies, as depicted by Jesus, are not peculiar to Jesus. Prophets and inspired men had alluded to contrasts of this nature during Old Testament times. For example, through Moses, God said this to the Israelites: “...*I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live*” (Deut. 30:19). To the apostate kingdom of Judah, God said: “*Behold I set before you **the way of life** and **the way of death***” (Jer. 21:8). Through their decisions and conduct the citizens of Judah chose “*the way of death*,” but the fact remains that two contrasting ways were set before the children of Israel. And the same holds true for people living today — regardless of what decisions we make, in the broad spectrum of time and eternity there are but **two gates** to enter, **two ways** to travel, and **two destinies** which are reached at the end of the journey. In this article we shall now consider two ways:

### **The Way of Death**

**1. It is entered by the “wide...gate”** (Matt. 7:13). To enter this “*gate*” nothing has to be surrendered or sacrificed. This basically is a think-as-you-like, do-as-you-please “*gate*” which bars no one from entering. In a real sense, this “*gate*” doesn’t have to be found. Any person who highhandedly blasphemes God, pursues the course of immorality, embraces the false religions of men, or simply follows the path of least resistance (either deliberately or inadvertently) enters this “*gate*.” For those who are not deliberately and scripturally seeking the opposite “*gate*,” this one is too “*wide*” to miss!

**2. It is a “broad” way.** It is “*broad*” enough to accommodate any, and all travelers. Though it will cause the travelers to become both “*weary*” and “*heavy laden*” (Matt. 11:28), this “*way*” is “*broad*,” inviting, and appealing. An adulterer can continue any and all illicit relationships and travel this “*way*.” A thief can travel on this “*way*” and retain his ill-gotten gain. While traveling this “*broad*” way an alcoholic can stay on

his booze, a drug addict can continue his addiction, a criminal can pursue his life of crime, a false teacher can remain in his error, etc.. No one has to give up anything (except forgiveness of sin, peace of mind, and the hope of eternal life) to travel this way. In fact, in a real sense, any fool can travel this “way” and all “fools” (in the biblical sense) do travel this “way!”

**3. It “leads to destruction”** (Matt 7:13). “*Destruction*,” as used here, is not the loss of being; rather it is the loss of **well** being. “*Destruction*” (from APOLEIA, Greek), denotes the loss of eternal life (Phil. 3:19; 2 Peter 3:16), and it is used to refer to the fate of “a man doomed to eternal misery” (Thayer). In view of the destiny and fate of those who enter the “*wide*” gate and travel the “*broad...way*,” it is incumbent upon us to warn every person accordingly, while making every effort to make sure that we neither enter this “*gate*” nor travel this “*way!*” If, in the wildest stretch of imagination, we felt obligated to recommend this “*gate*” and this “*way*,” we could only recommend (?) it to one who loves misery so much and loves the devil so much that he would be willing to “spend eternity” in that “*everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matt. 25:41)!

## The Way of Life

**1. It is entered by the “narrow gate”** (Matt. 7:13). In the KJV it is called the “*strait gate*” — not straight from the standpoint of not being crooked, but “*strait*” from the standpoint of being pent up, and narrow. “*Narrow*” or “*strait*” (KJV) is translated from THLIBO (Gk.), and it is defined as “hemmed in like a narrow gorge between rock” (Vine). That this “*gate*” is narrow, strait, or difficult is confirmed by the fact that God “*now commands all men everywhere to repent*” (Acts 17:30). In the words of the Savior, it is either “*repent*” or “*perish*” (Luke 13:3,5). And genuine repentance requires that a person “*bear fruits worthy of repentance*” (Matt. 3:8). While “*godly sorrow produces repentance*” (2 Cor. 7:10), repentance itself is more than just “*godly sorrow*.” True repentance reflects what happens when “*godly sorrow*” moves one to give up and to cease practicing anything involving either sinful living or sinful (false) doctrine. Mindful that the “*gate*” is “*narrow*,” Jesus said “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me*” (Matt. 16:24). One simply cannot enter this “*narrow gate*” with the world on his back!

**2. It is a “difficult” way.** Jesus, Who is “*truth*” personified (John 14:6), said the way is “*difficult*” (Matt. 7:14). Because it is “*difficult*,” Jesus also said “*there are few who find it*” (Matt. 7:14). Some people seem to have the notion that they, in some mystical, indescribable manner, can simply give their “heart to Jesus,” sacrifice nothing, live as they please, and then go to heaven “like greased lightning!” But that whole idea is foreign to the Bible. God’s people must present their bodies as “*a living sacrifice*” (Rom. 12:1), “*put off the old man with its deeds*” (Col. 3:9), and “*live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age*” (Tit. 2:14). Whatever is too sinful to bring in as one enters the “*narrow gate*” is too sinful to pursue as one travels the “*difficult*” (confined) way. Let us not forget that the apostle, who said “*the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of heaven*” (I Cor 6:9), said it in his letter to “*the church of God...at Corinth*,” (I Cor. 1:2). Through their obedience to the gospel, the saints at Corinth had entered the “*narrow*” gate, and then they were to travel that “*difficult*” way. Anyone can live for the devil and travel that “*broad*” way, but those who travel that “*difficult*” way are a people of commitment and dedication, a people who “march to the beat of a different drummer!”

**3. It “leads to life”** (Matt. 7:14) “*Eternal life*” (Tit. 1:2) in that celestial city of the redeemed where “*there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying*” (Rev. 21:4). “*Eternal life*” in that heavenly abode devoid of sin (Rev. 21:27), where one can drink of “*the water of life*” and eat of “*the tree of life*” (Rev 22,14), basking eternally in the blissful sunlight of God’s eternal love!

### **Which “Way” Will You Take?**

In this article we have discussed and described both “the way of death” and “the way of life.” Both in the here, and in the hereafter, one can find no greater contrast than that which exists between “**the way of death**” and “**the way of life**.” If you were simply an animal whose total existence ended at the grave, perhaps it wouldn’t make a lot of difference which “way” you might choose. But you are **not** an animal! You were created in the “*image*” of God (Gen. 1:27), and you are a creature of eternity (Matt. 25:46). So it makes a difference which “way” you choose — an **eternal** difference — so in that last day you surely don’t want to be “*weighed in the balances and found wanting*” (cf. Dan. 5:27). Dear reader, no one — but **you** — can decide which “way” you will travel. Hence, in the words of that ancient soldier of God, we urge you to “*choose **this day** whom you will serve*” (Josh. 24:15). If, by chance, you have questions about “*the way of life*,” and how to enter it, we would be thrilled to study with you on a one-on-one, face-to-face basis, using the Bible alone as our sole standard of authority in matters pertaining to the soul.

\*\*\* —B. Witherington

“It is more difficult for a man to lose his shirt if he keeps his sleeves rolled up.”