

ACCORDING TO JESUS...

Christ's Teachings on the
Narrow Way That Leads to Life

**“For the gate is small and the way is
narrow that leads to life, and there are few
who find it.” (Matthew 7:14)**

By

Ed Nolan

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Foreword

Thank you for considering this book. I felt compelled to write it due to the many confusing and conflicting church teachings about salvation---the central issue for all hoping to spend eternity in the kingdom of God.

What better way to understand the narrow way “that leads to life” (Matthew 7:14) than through the words of Him who made that eternal life possible?

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Introduction: Principles of Bible Study

Acts 17:10-11: The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. [all underling is for author's emphasis]

We should always do as the Bereans did, and examine everything we hear from the pulpit, are told in Bible studies, or read in a commentary like this one by checking it against Scripture. We humans are all imperfect. Only God's Word can be trusted:

2 Timothy 3:16-17: All Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Don't take my word for it. Check my conclusions against Scripture. But not just a few cherry-picked verses. Against ALL of Scripture. And do it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit:

John 16:13a [Jesus speaking to the faithful eleven disciples] ***"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth;"***

For me, trying to understand Scripture without the guidance of the Holy Spirit is like trying to read it without my reading glasses: it's blurry, and very hard to comprehend.

How to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit? I can only share with you what I do.

1. Confess any unconfessed sin to God.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

2. Submit my will to His will, by telling Him I am consciously doing so.
3. Ask Him to guide me in His truth as I open His Word.

Perhaps you have another way that works for you.

We cannot expect to be led by the Holy Spirit into His truth if we refuse to let go of our preconceptions about what the Scripture teaches. For example, if you have always been taught that $2 + 2 = 5$, because that is what your mother taught you, what your family has always believed, what your pastor and your school teachers all taught you, you will always struggle with math. The same is true of many of the doctrines about Christianity taught in our families and churches today. As Jesus said to the Pharisees,

Matthew 15:9 [Jesus speaking] ***"But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men"*** (Also in Mark 7:7)

There is way too much of the same thing in our Churches today. Therefore, we must strive to put aside our preconceptions (which may be based on incorrect understanding of Scripture) and seek the Holy Spirit's guidance to learn the truth of what Scripture is actually teaching.

1 Cor. 2:12, 14: Now we [believers] have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.... But the natural

[un-believer, unsaved] ***man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them....***

Chapter One: Faith – The Small Gate

Most people claiming to be Christians are at least familiar with the concept that salvation is based on faith, even if they do not know the biblical passages on point. Here are a couple:

Ephesians 2:8-9: 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.

Hebrews 11:6a: And without faith it is impossible to please Him...

But faith in what and whom?

In many churches in America today the message from the pulpit is, “There are many paths to heaven,” implying that people of many different (non-Christian) faiths, if they are sincere in their beliefs, will spend eternity with God.

Christ taught the opposite:

Matthew 7:13-14: [Jesus speaking] “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

John 14:6: Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

John 6:47 [Jesus speaking] “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.”

John 3:16 [Jesus speaking to Nicodemus] ***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”***

Jesus made it clear that He is the “small gate” of Matthew 7:14:

John 10:9 [Jesus speaking] ***“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved***

The Greek word translated “believes” in these verses is *pisteuo*, which is in the continuous present tense, active voice, participle mood. In the present tense with the participle mood, the word is better translated “trusting,” making a better translation in this verse “is trusting,” which would indicate a continuing trust, not a one-time event. This will be significant later when we examine Christ’s teachings on endurance.

Peter explained it to the religious leaders in Jerusalem this way:

“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12.

Why must our faith (trust) be in the person of Jesus of Nazareth? And what must we trust about Him?

First, that He is the promised Messiah:

Matthew 16: 13-17: ***Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” He *said to them, “But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living***

God.” And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

The word “Christ” is, of course, the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” Here Peter states and Jesus affirms that He is indeed the promised and long-awaited Messiah. To understand what this means requires a review of the Old Testament passages about the person and mission of the Messiah.

The earliest passage thought to refer to the Messiah is found in the passage where the LORD [*Yehovah*, a Hebrew word for God] is speaking in the garden to the serpent [indwelted by Satan] after the fall:

Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He [thought to refer to the Messiah] shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

The next passage thought to refer to the Messiah occurs in last line of what is called the Abrahamic Covenant:

***Genesis 12: 1-3:
Now the LORD said to Abram,
“Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father’s house,
To the land which I will show you;
And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;***

*And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*

Isaiah 49:1-7:

*Listen to Me, O islands,
And pay attention, you peoples from afar.
The LORD called Me from the womb;
From the body of My mother He named Me.
He has made My mouth like a sharp sword,
In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me;
And He has also made Me a select arrow,
He has hidden Me in His quiver.
He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel,
In Whom I will show My glory."
But I said, "I have toiled in vain,
I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity;
Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD,
And My reward with My God."
And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be
His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to
Him
(For I am honored in the sight of the LORD,
And My God is My strength),
He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones
of Israel;
I will also make You a light of the nations
So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."
Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One,
To the despised One,
To the One abhorred by the nation,
To the Servant of rulers,*

***“Kings will see and arise,
Princes will also bow down,
Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who
has chosen You.”***

There is a great deal of information about the promised Messiah in this passage. We will examine some of the most important items.

The person described is identified as the Messiah by the part that says:

He [the LORD] says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant; To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

We see that the Servant’s mission is to be light to the world [John 1:4-9], and to bring salvation to the whole world, not just to the nation of Israel. Thus we have Jesus’ mission explained over 700 years before His birth.

1. The Servant will be born of a woman: ***From the body of My mother He named Me.***
2. He is here to do the will of the LORD: ***“You are My Servant...”***, to carry out God’s plan of salvation for the fallen human race.
3. He will be ***despised and abhorred by the nation*** [Israel]. See the gospel accounts of the trials and execution of Jesus for the fulfillment of this part of the prophecy.

4. ***He has made My mouth like a sharp sword.*** This prophecy will be fulfilled at the battle of Armageddon described in Revelation 19:21.

His salvation will be available to the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles.

Daniel 9:26a: [the angel Gabriel speaking to Daniel] ***“Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing.***

The timing mentioned begins with the issuing of a decree to rebuild Jerusalem in 445 B.C. and works out to around the start of the Passover week in which Jesus was crucified. The phrase “cut off and have nothing” is an emphatic Old Testament way of saying He will die. Somehow the Jewish religious leaders in Jesus’ day missed or ignored this prophecy and were looking for a conquering king to free them from the Romans, not the suffering Servant who came to die for the sins of the world, even though they had Isaiah’s prophecy below:

Isaiah 53 gives us a detailed account of the mission, accomplishment, suffering and death of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth:

***Who has believed our message?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.
He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;***

*And like one from whom men hide their face
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*

*Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;*

*Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.*

*But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;*

*The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.*

*All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;*

*But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.*

*He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;*

Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,

*And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.*

By oppression and judgment He was taken away;

And as for His generation, who considered

That He was cut off out of the land of the living

*For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was
due?*

His grave was assigned with wicked men,

Yet He was with a rich man in His death,

Because He had done no violence,

Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

But the LORD was pleased

To crush Him, putting Him to grief;

If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,

He will see His offspring,

He will prolong His days,

And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

***As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see it and be satisfied;
By His knowledge the Righteous One,
My Servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear their iniquities.
Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors.***

There are many other Old Testament prophecies concerning what theologians call the “first coming” of the Messiah. Isaiah 11:1-10 prophecies that the Messiah will come “from the root of Jesse,” King David’s father, thus telling us that the Messiah will be a descendant of David. Micah 5:2 prophecies that the future ruler of Israel (the Messiah) will be born in Bethlehem. David’s Psalm 22 describes Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion in detail.

All of these and many other Old Testament prophecies were completely and literally fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. There can be no doubt that He was the promised Messiah and the One we must put our trust in for our salvation.

But exactly what must we believe about Him? That only through Him and His work in coming to earth in human form and dying on the cross for the sins of the world do we have any chance of spending eternity with God.

God’s plan for offering salvation (eternity with Him) is given in detail throughout the New Testament, beginning with John 1:11-14:

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So the starting point for a saving faith is belief in (putting your trust in) the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It can be compared to the small gate of Matthew 7:14, quoted above. But if that is all that is required from God to be assured of an eternity with Him, why does Jesus speak of the “***narrow way that leads to life***”?

Saving faith requires belief in and acceptance of God’s plan of salvation, which is built on several truths:

1. ***Romans 3:23: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*** We must first admit that we are sinners, incapable of meeting God’s standard of holiness required of those who will spend eternity with Him.
2. ***Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** Because God is a God of absolute justice (Psalm 7:11; 33:5; Romans 9:14; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Timothy 4:8), that penalty of death had to be paid. Since all mankind sinned, that penalty could only be paid for others by someone not under that penalty, i.e., someone free of sin. For that reason, God Himself had to come to earth in human form so that he could die to pay that penalty of death for the sins of mankind. And He died a criminal’s death to make it clear that he was dying for our guilt, taking the condemnation of death which was due to all of us. (Isaiah 53:6) The faith

required for salvation, then, requires acceptance of God's gracious gift of salvation on His terms, not ours.

Jesus put it this way:

John 6:53-54: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

In other words, the faith required of each person seeking salvation is a personal, heart-felt faith in and acceptance of His sacrifice on the cross as payment for the sins that he himself has committed. In doing so, a person acknowledges his sin (violation of God's law) and need for a redeemer. He must repent of his sin:

Luke 13:3 [Jesus speaking] ***"I tell you, no, but unless you repent (the Greek word "metanoeo" meaning literally: "change your mind" about your sin), you will all likewise perish."***

These verses and many others tell us every individual has a choice, and must affirmatively choose to receive God's gracious gift of salvation. Every person has to make that choice. Theologians call it "free will."

John 5:39-40: "You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe [pisteuo=trust in] Him whom He sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;"

Matthew 23:37: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling."

An intellectual belief in Christ and His work on the cross is not enough.

The thief on the cross at Jesus' right apparently had more than an intellectual belief, because Jesus told him, ***"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."*** He was saved by his faith in the person and work of Jesus, just as we all are when we first genuinely have that saving faith.

The thief had no more time to walk the narrow way. But we do, and our failure to do so may have eternal consequences, in spite of what we have been taught and have believed all our lives since first coming to Christ. We must put aside our preconceptions, hard as that may be, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us as we examine our Savior's teaching on this crucial topic.

Jesus wasn't "just kidding" when he talked about the ***"narrow way that leads to life"*** in Matthew 7:14. Coming through the small gate is not the end of the story. Many of Jesus' teachings in the gospel accounts describe that narrow way. We ignore them at our peril.

The apostle Paul described his own journey down the narrow way in Philippians 3:8-14:

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the

resurrection from the dead [i.e., salvation—referring to the resurrection of believers at the rapture of the church].

Not that I have already obtained it [salvation] or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it [salvation] yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Notice that three times Paul states that he has not yet attained his salvation, but is pressing on toward that goal.

Here is a quotation that seems to illustrate what the Scriptures, as a whole, actually tell us about salvation:

The Christian is in a similar position to a sailor who has fallen overboard, has caught a line thrown to him by his mates, and is being pulled through the water to the safety of his ship. He can say, "I was saved when they threw me the line." He can also say, "I am being saved as they pull me through the water." And again he can say, "I will be saved when I stand again on the deck of the ship."—Carl Bridge, Jr.

The sad fact is that many who consider themselves Christians believe they are guaranteed a salvation they cannot lose the instant they truly place their faith in the person of Jesus the Messiah. We all wish that were true.

Unfortunately, Jesus Himself tells us there is more to it. Jesus tells us we must demonstrate our love for Him by following the narrow way that leads to life. As we examine His teachings, we will see what that road looks like and learn how we can know if we are on it.

The question for us is: Do we have enough faith to walk the narrow way?

Are we prepared to “lose this life” for the sake of the next?

Chapter Two: Putting God First - The First Step

Exodus 20:3: You shall have no other gods before Me.

Deut. 8:6:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Luke 14:26-27 [Jesus speaking] “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

Luke 9:23-24: And He [Jesus] was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”

John 8:12: Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”

John 10:27: [Jesus speaking] “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

John 12:25-26: [Jesus speaking] “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.

If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

Luke 17:33: [Jesus speaking] ***“Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.***

Luke 18:29-30: ***And He [Jesus] said to them, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life.”***

Matthew 10:32-39: [Jesus speaking] ***“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.”***

Putting God first also involves a clear understanding of who God is and who we are: the Creator of this universe compared to a member of the fallen human race, deserving an eternity in something called “the lake of fire.” This should inspire in us a feeling of awe, respect, and yes, genuine fear. Yes, God is our

Father, our Savior, our Helper (John 16:7), but He is our ultimate judge, and He holds our eternal destiny in His hands.

Proverbs 1:7: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction. The word “fear is a translation of the Hebrew word *yir’ah* which means dread, fear or terror. Nowhere is it translated as “respect.” In the Old Testament, fear (*yir’ah*) of God is a sign of righteousness (Genesis 20:11, 2 Samuel 23:3, Nehemiah 5:15, Job 4:6).

Proverbs 3:7: Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear (yare, the verb form of yir’ah) the LORD and turn away from evil.

Other verses advising fear (*yir’ah*) of the LORD are Proverbs 14:27, 16:6, Job 1:1, 28:28, Psalm 34:11, Ecclesiastes 12:13 (*yare*).

Matthew 10:28: [Jesus instructing the twelve] ***“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”***

The Greek word translated “fear” is *phobeo* from which we get our English word “phobia.” The root meaning is “to put to flight by terrifying.” It is not a word indicating merely respect or reverence. The apostle Paul advises us to perfect our holiness “in the fear (*phobeo*) of God” in 2 Corinthians 7:1.

Do you fear God’s wrath enough to put Him first in your life?

Do you have that healthy respect, literally fear of God, recognizing who He is and who you are? Or do you worship the smiling, kindly false god of love (and nothing but love) taught from so many pulpits? The God of the Bible is so much more. His attributes of holiness and absolute justice alone should give us reason to fear Him. We know that we are at His divine mercy, that we deserve

nothing but eternal condemnation. We should revere and respect Him. And yes, fear Him and the consequences of wandering from the narrow way.

Do you put God ahead of yourself, your family, your friends, your church, your job, your finances, your recreation and everything else you value in life? Or are you “too earthly-minded to be any heavenly good?” You can only do what Jesus demands if your focus is on the eternal, putting God first.

Chapter Three: Obedience – The Next Step

Sadly, we humans are not naturally prone to obedience. Think of the old song, “I did it my way.” We in America honor “rugged individualism” and “the self-made man,” which reminds me of the quotation, “He is a self-made man, and worships his creator.” Seriously, we all have the problem of wanting to indulge our flesh instead of obeying God’s commands (Paul’s struggle is described in Roman 7), yet the teachings of Jesus tell us we do so at our eternal peril.

Matthew 7:21-23: [Jesus speaking] ***“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.*”**

Luke 17:10: [Jesus speaking to His disciples] ***“So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”***

John 14:15: [Jesus speaking to His faithful 11 disciples] ***“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”***

John 14:21: [Same discourse] ***“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me***

will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

John 14:23-24: [Same discourse] ***Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.***

John 15:10: [same discourse] ***"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."***

John 15:14: [same discourse] ***"You are My friends if you do what I command you."***

Mark 3:35 [Jesus speaking] ***"For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."***

God makes a connection between love and obedience. We cannot have a meaningful relationship with Him unless we obey His commandments out of the love we have for Him. To do that, we need to be led (not just indwelt) by the Holy Spirit. Without that relationship, we are in the same position as the people Jesus talks about in Matthew 7:21-23 (above), whom He will condemn on the day of judgment by saying, ***"I never knew you."*** The relationship based on mutual [*agape*] love was never there. These are the words we never want to hear. How is your relationship with God?

Luke 11:28 [Jesus speaking] ***But He said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."***

John 8:51 [Jesus speaking] ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death."***

Matthew 28: 19-20 [Jesus' final instruction to His disciples] ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”***

The apostle Paul stated it this way:

Romans 6:16, 19b, 22: Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

The apostle John summed it up:

1 John 2:17b: [T]he one who does the will of God lives forever.

The words of Jesus are clear. Obedience to God's commands is the next step on the narrow way that leads to life. Make no mistake, we are not saved by works, but by faith.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*: “only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.... For faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience.” (p. 69 of McMillian Publishing Company 1963 paperback edition).

In short, obedience to God's commands out of love is not works, but demonstrated faith. This is clearly demonstrated in Hebrews

Chapter 11. We know that God looks at the heart (see, e.g., 1 Samuel 16:7, 1Chronicles 29:17-18, 2 Chronicles 34:27, Psalm 44:21, Matthew 22:37). Yet over and over in the Old Testament God judged people and the nation of Israel on the evidence of their faith demonstrated by obedience or lack of it.

Did Jesus really give His followers specific commandments He expects us to obey? Here are three examples:

John 13:34: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Matthew 6:19-21: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 22:21b: “Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”

Do you live a life of obedience that demonstrates your love of God? Is your faith such that you want to live a life of obedience to His commands?

Jesus tells us in the gospels that He expects us to demonstrate our faith through obedience. And that our failure to do so puts us in eternal peril (Matthew 7:21, quoted above). But that is not all He expects of us. There is more to travel on the narrow way.

Chapter Four: Endurance – Keeping on the Narrow Way

“The longest journey begins with a single step.” But we must continue down that narrow way that leads to life, according to Jesus...

Matthew 10:22 [Jesus sending out the twelve] ***“You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.”***

Matthew 24:13 [Jesus speaking to His disciples in the Olivet discourse] ***“But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”***

Luke 9:62 ***But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”***

Luke 21:16-19 [the Olivet discourse] ***“But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.”***

We find the admonition to endure emphasized in the epistles:

Hebrews 10:23: ***Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering....***

1 Corinthians 15:1-2: ***Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in***

which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you....

Hebrews 12:1-2: Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 10:35-39: Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

***FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE,
HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. BUT MY
RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH;
AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.***

[Old Testament passages quoted in the New Testament in the NASB are capitalized, here quoting Hab.2:4.] The word “faith” is a translation of the Hebrew word *emwnah*, which is better translated “faithfulness”.

But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Hebrews 6:4-6: For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance....

As he was awaiting imminent death in prison, the apostle Paul wrote of his journey down the narrow road this way:

2 Timothy 4:6-8: For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Isn't that the goal we should all be pressing on toward? Isn't it what our Savior said He expects of us?

Chapter Five: Bearing Fruit – The Final Guidepost on the Narrow Way

All of the things discussed in the preceding chapters are signs we are on the narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:14). But perhaps the greatest assurance that we are on the narrow way is our relationship with God when it results in our bearing fruit for Him.

Jesus described this relationship in this passage:

John 15:1-7, 9: [Jesus speaking to the faithful eleven] ***“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you [i.e., “you are already believers”]. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.... My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.***

This raises the all-important question: Exactly how do we “abide in Christ?” Taken as a whole, this passage indicates our salvation may depend on it. “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He takes away; (v.2). “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned. (v.6).

We cannot do this on our own. The good news is: we don't have to. God has provided the Helper (John 16:7), the Holy Spirit, who will guide us in all truth (John 16:13). The apostle Paul explained the interaction between the Holy Spirit and abiding in Christ this way:

Romans 8:1-4: Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The passage appears to say that “walking according to the Spirit” is in fact “abiding in Christ.” But it goes further. It suggests that “the requirement of the Mosaic Law (God’s standard which no one can meet on his own) is fulfilled (met, satisfied) in those believers who walk according to the Spirit.

Does that mean that those who walk “according to the Spirit” will have eternal life, but those, although they truly believe, that walk “according to the flesh” will not?

The apostle addresses that very question in verses that follow the passage.

Romans 8:5-14: For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not

subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

We know one important fact this passage makes clear: if we are walking according to the Spirit, we “will live.” There can be no doubt the passage is speaking of spiritual life and spiritual death. Some will say the passage is not clear on the point of whether believers walking “according to the flesh” will not spend eternity with God. (Remember, Romans is written to believers, **to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints—Romans 1:7**, a fact Paul reaffirms by his use of the word “brethren.”) Verse 12 seems to suggest they will not, but why debate the issue? It is clear that their eternity is in question. I liken walking according to the flesh to skating out in the middle of the pond, where the ice is thin. Your eternal destiny may be at stake. Why would you want to do take that risk?

Looking back at passage quoted from John 15:5, we see Jesus declaring that those who “abide in Him” bear fruit, and those who don’t can’t bear fruit. Remember, He is speaking to the eleven faithful disciples. We have no reason to think they are not all true believers at this point. Or to think the passage does not apply to

all true believers. And when we look at the places in the passage describing what happens to the branches that do not bear fruit, if we are rational it should literally “put the fear of God” into us, and motivate us to be led by the Spirit so we can bear fruit for Him.

And even without that motivation, why would we not want to faithfully and lovingly serve the God of our creation and our salvation, the One who suffered and died a horrible death of pain and shame to make a path for us to spend eternity with Him?

He makes it clear in the passage that He wants us to abide in Him, *i.e.*, be led by the Spirit, so we can do His will, and allow Him to bear fruit through us, just as the vine bears fruit through the branches. So how do we walk according the Spirit? This is the all-important question.

Romans 12:2: And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We can only know the will of God by submitting our will to the will of the Holy Spirit, which will result in the “transforming” and “renewing” of our minds. Scripture does not give us step by step instructions on how to submit to the will of the Holy Spirit, but there are some clues.

1 John 1:6-10: If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; (v7) but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (v8) If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. (v9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (v10) If we say

that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Here is my understanding of what the apostle John is articulating in this passage

1. (v.6) If we (believers) are walking according to the flesh, we have no communication with or guidance from God.
2. (v7) When we are walking in the Spirit (being led by the Spirit), we are walking free of sin and in a manner pleasing God.
3. (v8) As long as we are still in our flesh while in this world, and are still burdened with our “free will” ability to disobey or rebel against God (sin).
4. (v9) God has graciously provided a remedy for believers when they sin: they can confess that sin to God, be forgiven, and be restored to righteousness and fellowship with God, enabling them once more to “walk in the Spirit.”
5. (v10) If we have somehow bought into the idea that we, as children of God, can no longer displease Him by sin, or that we have no sins in the eyes of God because our Savior already forgiven all our sins (through believing false doctrines like “When you come to Christ, all your past, present and future sins are forgiven), we are believing a doctrine contrary to God’s teaching.

On the error of that teaching mentioned in point 5, the apostle Peter explicitly states that when a person comes to Christ, his PAST sins are forgiven (2 Peter 1:9). And why the need for forgiveness and cleansing in 1 John 1:9 if our future sins are already forgiven?

Countless passages in Scripture tell us they are not. Here is one example from the New Testament.

Galatians 5:16-21: But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In the Old Testament, look at ***Ezekiel 18:24: “But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.*** (See also Ezekiel 33:12-16)

Note that “righteous man” in the Old Testament is synonymous with “believer” in the New Testament. For examples, see Genesis 6:9, 2 Samuel 4:11, Psalm 5:12, Proverbs 9:9. There are countless others. This then is why we are told to fear the LORD. If we are not on the narrow way, we are in serious danger of not spending eternity with God. And we need not quibble about whether living on the “broad way that leads to destruction” indicates that “we were never saved in the first place” or whether we had and “lost our salvation.” The result is the same—eternity in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14).

So the first step in bearing fruit for God is being led by the Holy Spirit, i.e., “abiding in Christ.” Why does Christ tell us that abiding

in Him is necessary to be able bear fruit in John 15:5, above?
Because, as stated above, the vine (Christ) produces the fruit, not the branches (us). Jesus says that clearly in John 15:1-5, above. We are the conduit through which He produces fruit. As Isaiah wrote:

***Isaiah 26:12: LORD, You will establish peace for us,
Since You have also performed for us all our works.***

Interesting thought, isn't it? The God of our salvation is also the One who does all the works that count in God's eyes. But only if we let Him use us by submitting to His will, so we can be led by the Spirit, and develop a relationship of love with Him.

Are you consciously confessing your sins (1 John 1:9) and being led by the Spirit in your daily life? If so, you should be seeing evidence of the fruit He is producing through you.

Chapter Six: Preparing for the Journey – Examining Your Faith

2 Corinthians 13:5: Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

Is your faith a true, saving faith that leads to eternal life? How can you know with absolute assurance? Should you just assume that because someone has told you that when you first came to Christ, your eternity with Him was guaranteed?

Not according to the words of Jesus. Go back and review His teachings quoted above. Many of them either state explicitly (e.g. Matthew 7:21) or imply (e.g., John 15:1-6) that not all who believe they will spend eternity with God will in fact do so. That is the reason the apostle Paul exhorts us to examine our faith.

The bottom line is that if we have the faith necessary for salvation (eternity with God), it will be demonstrated in our daily walk in the Spirit—in our thoughts, attitudes and actions. If we are indeed walking in the Spirit, our primary focus will be on God and eternity. We will sometimes lose our focus and start to sink, as Peter did when he looked away at the wind and waves, but we should always endeavor to bring our focus back where it belongs. When we do, the things of this world will all be secondary. Our primary motivation will be to follow Him, to seek His will in our lives, to submit to His will and ask Him to use us to accomplish His purpose (bear fruit), to obey His commands, and to stay strong in the faith to the very end.

That is what Jesus' teachings tell us a Christian's walk on the narrow way looks like. That is the relationship based on love that God earnestly desires to have with us. And that is why He went to some much trouble, pain and suffering to reconcile us to Himself.

Is that the relationship you have with God that you see when you examine your faith?

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