

The Way To Hell

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Turn please with me in your Bibles to the book of Proverbs. Proverbs chapter 14.

Recently I overheard two men talking. One was about to leave the other and so one asked the other, “Where are you going?” just a plain question. “Where are you going?”

And the other, very quickly responded to that question and said, “To hell, if I don’t change my ways, to hell, if I don’t change my ways.”

And he said that in jest, I am sure. But I thought, as I reflected on what he had said, this is what most people really think, that salvation depends on something that they do. And it depends, in their minds, on their ways.

And sadly, I thought, it just shows that with what this man said and how he viewed it so lightly, that he was obviously spiritually dead, without understanding.

Two times here in the book of Proverbs the Lord God gives statements that ought to come to every one of us as a sobering warning. Look down here in verse 12 of Proverbs 14 where he says:

“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.”¹

And if you look over in Proverbs 16 and the 25th verse he says it again. He repeats it exactly again.

“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.”²

And not only are these two statements found here in the book of Proverbs, but the same thing is said many times and in various ways all through this book. And we have this warning because every person born in this world is born religious. You can go in the

¹ Proverbs 14:12.

² Proverbs 16:25.

very darkest part of Africa where no religious figure has ever traveled and you will find a religious people and idolatry of one kind or another and imagined worship of one kind or another because everyone by nature is born religious.

But that spiritual condition in which we come into this world is such as we are born blind and spiritually dead as sinners and all our natural thoughts about God, all of our natural thoughts about salvation and about ourselves are false. They are absolutely false.

But that does not keep us from sincerely believing them and defending them and promoting them and trusting them and even dying with them.

A multitude of people will die a confident death believing that which is absolutely false and go out into eternity to meet God. And if you notice here, the Spirit of God directs the writer to make us know that this way seems right to us. It seems right. It seems logical to us and natural to us and appealing to us and because we are all the same as sinners, it is always generally accepted by all of us. It seems right. It just seems right.

But the truth is it is not right to God who alone knows what is right and who is himself alone right. I wish we could all be brought to an understanding that we do not know right by any earthly measurement. We know right by what God does and what God says. God as the judge of all the earth, Abraham said, will do right. And that is why he has given to us the Scriptures. That is why we have his Word.

And when we preach what God says, what he really says, people say, “You think you are the only ones that are right, don’t you? You people, you grace people, you think you are the only ones that are right.”

No, we think and believe that God himself is the only one that is right and that he has said to us not only what he says to us in these verses, but he said to us in another place:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.”³

And there is a man by the name of Naaman who is an excellent example of this. He was a leper and he sought a cleansing and a healing for his leprosy and when he came down to the prophet of God who prescribed for him at the command of God that he go down into a muddy river and dip himself seven times. He got mad. He said, “I thought surely the man would tell me something to do. I thought surely he would wave his hand over my fleshy or say some other words, maybe an incantation. I thought he would do it like this.”

One of the servants said, “You know, if he told you to do some great thing, you would have done it.”

No, he is living in this. I thought.

³ Isaiah 55:8.

But finally he is convinced and he goes down and does just exactly what he thought as foolishness and wrong. He goes down to that river, dips himself in it and when he comes up that last time it says his flesh, that leprous flesh is like a baby's skin. But that wasn't what he thought would cure him. That wasn't the way he thought it should be done.

And, likewise, in another place in Proverbs chapter 12. Listen to what it says here. It says:

“The way of a fool...”⁴

Nobody wants to be thought of as a fool. But he says:

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.”⁵

He is always right. Can't tell him anything. Can't teach him anything. Knows everything that needs to be known.

But he follows it with this. He says:

“...but he that hearkens unto counsel is wise.”⁶

In other words, if we ever find out what is right, if we ever find out the truth, it will have to be taught to us by somebody outside of ourselves. God will have to teach us. As a matter of fact, that is what he says of all that he saves, all of his people. He says

“And they shall be all taught of God.”⁷

Have we been taught of God?

Well, there are three things that I want us to notice in this and the first is that he says here that there is a way, a way, one singular way that seems right to each and every one of us, but it always ends in eternal death. This way always ends in eternal death. And we do not get far in the first book of the Bible before we see this way that he first talks about in contrast to the way of God. We find it demonstrated in the first two people that were born in this world. They were two brothers by the name of Cain and Abel. And all the way over to the book of Jude when we read that little brief epistle, we find in that book these words, this warning. He says:

“Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain.”⁸

⁴ Proverbs 12:15.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ John 6:45.

⁸ Jude 11.

In other words, we have got in these two first children, these two men born into this world of the same parents, we have a contrasting picture here of this one way and another way.

What is the way of Cain? Come back over to Genesis chapter four. The way of Cain we find here in Genesis chapter four, listen beginning with verse one. It says:

“ And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.”⁹

She was familiar with the fact that God had revealed that there would be a man that would come from God to be their Savior even at this point. So what she is actually saying here is, “I have gotten that man. I have gotten that man.”

“And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.”¹⁰

Abel was a herdsman, a keeper of sheep. And Cain was a farmer. But God here is not condemning farming. He is giving us this picture to show us it says:

“And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.”¹¹

This man came to worship God. But it says:

And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.¹²

I don't know exactly what Cain brought, maybe a bushel of apples, maybe a handful of carrots, maybe one thing or the other thing that he had labored and tilled on his land to raise up, but God rejected his offer. And here is Abel and he simply takes of that firstling of the flock, slays that animal and pours out its blood as sacrifice. God accepts his sacrifice, but he is angry at Cain.

“And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth?”¹³

He knew why he was angry, but he asked this man so that he might see.

“Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?”¹⁴

⁹ Genesis 4:1.

¹⁰ Genesis 4:2.

¹¹ Genesis 4:3.

¹² Genesis 4:4-5.

¹³ Genesis 4:6.

Now look at this next statement.

“If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?”¹⁵

If you do well, will you not be accepted? Does that mean if you live right, if you act right, if you speak right, if you do, as men say, your very best you will be accepted?

No, the truth is that this picture, as well as our text, is showing the exact opposite because doing well here is the same that we find elsewhere in Scripture being described in this way. He that doeth righteously...

What was the difference? Well, to do righteously is to do exactly the opposite of what Cain did which was to depend upon the works of his own hands and the labors of his own self to stand as a ground of acceptance before God and worship God in contrast to Abel who offered up the sacrifice God appointed, that God had required.

And so here is Abel. He simply goes before God and to worship God in that way that was prescribed by God and appointed by God and approved by God and God accepted his sacrifice. He did righteously. Why? Because he offered up to God, not only what God required and what God had provided and what God would approve, but he offered up to God that sacrifice that pictured the crucified Christ.

And he continues here. He says:

If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.¹⁶

That means that the first murder that took place on this earth and so amazingly the first murder that took place between two brothers in the flesh on this earth was because of works and grace. Do you know that? It wasn't over this thing and that thing and land or inheritance. It was over this matter of how a sinner can approach unto God, worship God and be accepted by God. And the way of Cain is simply that way whereby he offered that which was the works of his own hands. And it was plain disregard for the principle of sacrifice that Adam had taught him.

You say, “Well, where did Adam find out about it?”

God taught him. When he first sinned, Adam and Eve there in that garden where they sinned against God, God showed to them immediately the only way of forgiveness, the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Genesis 4:7.

¹⁶ Genesis 4:7-8.

only way of righteousness, the only way of acceptance before God when he took those skins of innocent animals which pictured imputed righteousness and put on them.

How could they be covered in their nakedness before God? How could their sins be put away and hidden and then be clothed or covered? It was through the death of these animals that God slew and provided for them these coats or covering which pictured the very righteousness of Christ.

And so Adam passes this down on to his sons, these two first sons especially. And what does Cain do? He turns and rather than do what God had pictured and prescribed he offered up something else. He offers up something that he came up with and here is this one way of approaching God and yet Cain turns over here and he goes in a way of self righteousness and a way of self love and way of will worship. As a sinner said, "I will worship God however I want to."

No, you won't. Neither you nor me nor anyone else. What Cain offered to God was a denial of God's holy character. What he offered to God was a denial and a mockery of God's justice and it was a denial of God's righteousness. It made little of sin. And today what natural man, especially the natural religious man and woman offers to God as the basis of their acceptance before him, it is the very same thing. Why? Because he says all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. They are not coats of covering. They are not like those cloaks of righteousness that we have pictured for us all throughout the Scriptures which represent the righteousness of Christ. They are not any of these things. They are nothing in God's sight except filthy rags, because he says, "By the deeds of the law, by any principle of our doing there shall no flesh be justified in his sight."

You say, "Well, what we do has got to account for something."

It does. Sin. Everything we do, everything we say, everything we think, every motive that rises up in us naturally of ourselves apart from the Spirit of God is nothing but sin, so that if we trust in any way in any of these things, we will by no means be accepted by God. And, you know, John the apostle all the way over in 1 John he makes reference to these two men. And he says:

"For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him?"¹⁷

Why did he murder him? He says:

"...Because his own works were evil."¹⁸

God didn't look at Cain and say, "Well, he doesn't know any better. He is just a dummy or he is just this or he is just misguided."

¹⁷ 1 John 3:11-12.

¹⁸ 1 John 3:12.

No. God said, "His deeds were evil."

And that means that every work, I don't care how it appears outwardly. I don't care what kind of a spirit or zeal or whatever it is. Everything that is done, even what would be considered in the eyes of most as good, if it be any part of our standing before God he says it is evil.

He rose up and killed his brother because his own works were evil and his brothers, righteous.

Now I just guarantee you if you walked along and you watched Cain and you watched Abel and you say, "Well, I don't really see any difference."

But God looked on Cain's doings when he sought to worship God and he called that evil. But he called what Abel did, he called that sacrifice that Abel offered, which was the slain lamb with its blood shed on that altar, he called that righteous.

But there is another thing I want you to notice in this and that is that this way that always ends in death, this way is manifested in many ways. Look back there at our text verse there in Proverbs chapter 14.

Proverbs chapter 14 and listen to the way he expresses this here. He says:

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."¹⁹

I saw an advertisement for a TV program. I am not sure exactly what the title was, but it... they called it something like death by a thousand ways or something like that. That is kind of what this is about. Death by a million different ways, all of which are the same. They are this one way, the way that always ends in death. Sometimes it is the way of the irreligious person who has himself for his God and is most often, though, shown by the many ways of the false religionists in which men choose a God of their own making and their own liking.

You have got at Catholic way and a Baptist way and a Methodist way and a Jewish way and a Muslim way and this way and that way and all. But in themselves they are all the same way. In this way that leads in death, there are many ways.

Some people are going to go to hell drunk in a drunken stupor. Some people are going to go to hell from a church pew. Some people are going to go to hell as raving outward thieves and immoral and everything. Some folks are going to go to hell as just nice moral clean people. But all these ways they are still the same way and all of these men are choosing their way instead of God's way and their ways, often times, that they choose are

¹⁹ Proverbs 14:12.

the ways that are set forth by those who do not preach the gospel and they will not preach it because of their own gain.

Listen to what Peter says.

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.²⁰

They all got these ways and somebody will follow the ways this fellow sets forth and some of them will follow the ways of a man on the radio who says that the Christ is coming on a certain day and all these things, but all these pernicious ways, some for monetary gain, some for fame and glory, he said, many will follow. But the one thing they will all do together is they will speak evil of the way of truth, the way of grace, the way of blood, the way of Christ alone.

And these are the ways of false professors and apostates. Peter again saying:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.²¹

In other words, you can just sum up all the works of religion and all the ways of religion which amount to one work or another work or this way or that way, all the variety like a Heinz 57 variety, all the gospels of works monger, all who bring their person and their doings and their abstinences and their works to God as any part of their salvation.

Do you ever wonder why so many people can be deceived by so much? About every time we have service, I pass a religious organization and I see all the cars. I see signs like this morning a sign that said tonight there will be the hanging of the greens. Now what that has got to do with God and the gospel, I don't know. Hanging of greens.

I asked my wife. I said, "Do you think they will be collard greens, or turnip greens or mustard greens?"

We will have the hanging of the greens. I won't say that.

Why do people fall for such ridiculous, stupid absurdity rather than the truth? Why does a man offer such things, lead in such things? Because he knows that what people want by

²⁰ 2 Peter 2:1-2.

²¹ 2 Peter 2:20-21.

nature. He knows that the way seems right to them. His goal is to give them what they want and then, therefore, they will turn and give him what he wants.

You know, it is not always money. Most of the time it is that favor and that pat on the back.

“You are about the best pastor and preacher we ever had.”

But it all ends in death.

I called this message the way to hell and I get that from what the Spirit of God directs Solomon to write in Solomon seven where he talks there about and warns his son about this harlot, how seductive she is. And it is nothing but a picture of that one we hear of in Revelation which is the harlot of religion. She looks beautiful from the outside. She entices him. She calls him off the street into her house. She tells him about how it is this way and she spreads perfumes and things like that and lures him into her house and into her web of deceit. And then the Spirit of God says this.

“Her house is the way to hell.”²²

There will be many ways, but her house is the way to hell. And, likewise, all man’s imagines, doings and goodness and deeds and religion and activities are all to be rewarded with death. The end thereof, because all these things are sin and the wages of sin is death, eternal death.

Turn over to Matthew seven. If there ever was a sobering passage this is it. Matthew chapter seven and listen to what Christ says. Verse 13.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.”²³

Broad is the way. Oh, you could almost reduce it to this.

Men say, “Preacher, you ought to be more broad minded. Oh, you are so narrow.”

I am only as narrow as Christ, only as narrow as this book.

He says:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.²⁴

²² Proverbs 7:27.

²³ Mathew 7:13.

²⁴ Matthew 7:14-15.

And then look what he says in verse 21.

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”²⁵

Christ said:

“And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”²⁶

And this is the will that everyone that seeth Christ, believes on Christ, I will raise him upon the last day.

They said, “Tell us what to do. Tell us how to work the works of God.”

He said:

“This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”²⁷

Well, listen.

“Many will say to me in that day...”²⁸

That day of great awful judgment. They will say in that day:

“Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?”²⁹

We preached. We had that big church down on Main Street. We had a thousand in Sunday school. We gave out gifts at Christmas time to the old people and we just did all these things. I must have preached 10,000 sermons.

“...have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”³⁰

And then Christ says:

“...will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”³¹

²⁵ Mathew 7:21.

²⁶ John 6:39.

²⁷ John 6:29.

²⁸ Matthew 7:22.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Matthew 7:23.

He is calling everything they did that they were so proud of, gloried in and even so blind as in that hour to offer up to God as the basis of him accepting them, he says it is iniquity which simply means it is not equal to what I require.

“Ye that work iniquity.”³²

But now here is the third thing and that is set against this way is another way. And it is the way that leads to life. That is what it is called, the way that leads to life. And this way is not natural to us since we are spiritually blind by nature and our minds are, Paul says, enmity against God. We are religious. We want to go to church. We want to have a Bible. We want to do all these things, but the truth itself, the gospel itself, he says, we are... our hearts are enmity against it. The carnal mind is enmity against God, against his truth, against his life.

So that if we are to be saved we have to be shown this way by God and put in this way by his blessed Spirit.

And the Spirit of God must show to us the eternal danger of the way that we are in and direct us into God’s way, because we can’t see it. We can’t know the truth of Christ and we cannot believe of ourselves.

He leaves us to ourselves. We will be found in one of those ways which are simply nothing but that way that ends in death.

Turn over to John chapter 14 and listen to the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, he said, concerning the Spirit of God. He said:

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.”³³

I am going to tell you the truth as long as the Lord will give me grace and health. I am going to tell you the truth. But I can’t guide you into that truth. I can’t reveal that truth and that glory of God’s grace in Christ to you. Only he can.

But look here in John chapter 14 and verse four. He says to these disciples:

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.³⁴

Now he is not just talking about himself in some kind of a mystical sense. Oh, I believe in Jesus. No. You see, the name Jesus is attached to and inseparably joined to sacrifice, sacrifice by which we have salvation.

³² Ibid.

³³ John 16:13.

³⁴ John 14:4-6.

“...thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”³⁵

Now here is man on this other way, though he might not even admit it. He is trying to save himself. And here are those in this way. They are being saved. There is a big difference in it.

Try to save yourself is not only impossible, it is the most awful thing, just beating your brains out all the time, just self inflicted pain and torment and sacrifice all of which avails for nothing and never brings peace to your conscience.

But when you are being saved...

I always remember something I read many years ago where it talked about how a lifeguard has to deal with a drowning man. And it said that a lifeguard swims out to a drowning man who is trashing his arms and doing all these things, grabbing and groping and such things as this and the lifeguard is taught in his training to not go but so close to him and to wait until he gives up his fight. And when he gives up his fight he then is grabbed by the lifeguard and he is saved. The lifeguard saves him. And that is what we have to be. We have to be saved.

Christ and him crucified is the one way to God, the way of acceptance with God, the way described in this book as the way to the Father's house, the way of peace, the way of righteousness, the way of salvation.

But I will tell you what I believe it means chiefly. He is the one way that God wholly and inflexibly just, the only way he can be just and at the same time save a sinner.

If we had any idea of the vast difference between God and us and what he requires and what his justice demands as the punishment of sin, we would say there is no way but one way. That is what the gospel is like. It is like a big sign with that arrow on it. It says one way. It is pointing to Christ, pointing to his cross, one way. That is what Abel's sacrifice represented. Abel brought a lamb. Christ is the Lamb of God that takes away sin. Sin has to be removed. That sin debt has to be paid. Justice has to be satisfied. God has to be honored. A sinner has to be declared righteous by God and that only by him imputing to that sinner the very righteousness of Christ.

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”³⁶

It is only Christ, only his blood, only his righteousness.

It all comes down to this as far as we are concerned. Is Christ our way? You see, when Christ saves his people he brings them to that conclusion. It is the conclusion of faith.

³⁵ Matthew 1:21.

³⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

This is the only way. And this is the way for me, the way a sinner can be made righteous before God.

They charged the apostle Paul, those Jews did, of preaching some strange doctrine, some new way and stuff like this.

He said, "Wait a minute." He said:

"But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy..."³⁷

All these Pharisees and such, they call the way I preach heresy.

"... after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets."³⁸

You know, I am so thankful that what men call heresy is not heresy. Naturally what men call heresy is really the truth and what they think is the truth is really heresy.

"As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him."³⁹

In the first Psalm in that sixth verse he says:

"For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous."⁴⁰

That means the Lord loves, approves of the way of the righteous.

"...but the way of the ungodly shall perish."⁴¹

God loves that way in his Son, honors that way, blesses based on that way. And he hates every other way.

Again, the psalmist said the Word of the Lord is tried, tested, proved and he says the righteous also shall hold on his way.

If I am righteous, I am holding on to his way and every other way, no matter how different it might appear, no matter how pleasant it might appear, no matter how appealing it might appear, every other way is the way to hell.

Father, we give you thanks and praise for the Lord Jesus Christ, for that gift of righteousness that is in him, for that blessedness of all spiritual blessings being in him,

³⁷ Acts 24:14.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ 2 Samuel 22:31; Psalm 18:30.

⁴⁰ Psalm 1:6.

⁴¹ Ibid.

for forgiveness, for an eternal inheritance, for everything you give out of the bounty of your grace and for the glory of your name to poor sinners in Christ. We thank you for it. We pray you would help us. Have mercy upon us. Bless us in the coming week. Watch over us. Those of our number that are away, sick, all our cares we cast upon you in the sure knowledge that you care for us. We thank you and praise you in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.