

Lesson Eight THE NARROW WAY

In our study in the book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, we have progressed to the point where Pilgrim has finally been converted, and last week we concentrated upon the character at the gate who was known as "Good-will." This was the individual that represented the person and work of Jesus Christ in the free offer of the gospel. We found Pilgrim coming up to the gate which stands for true conversion and he knocks and asks to be admitted by the individual who is there at the gate. He doesn't know if the gate will be opened or not, so he petitions as a sinner asking for mercy. Good-will, who represents Christ, comes to the gate, and he opens the gate permitting the seeking sinner to enter into salvation. So from the beginning of this book, we have dealt with the individual who has been seeking salvation due to the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit. Pilgrim has now been converted by placing his faith in Jesus Christ. He is now a son of God who has been begotten through faith in the gospel.

We have concentrated upon Good-will as representing Christ and the free offer of the gospel. By that we found that Christ offers Himself freely to all sinners who will apply for mercy. All those who will come to Christ shall in no wise be cast out. So there is a free offer of Jesus Christ in the gospel.

Tonight we want to concentrate upon something that Good-will or Christ points out to the seeking Pilgrim now that he has become converted. We begin at the account in the book where Good-will and Christian are talking, and Good-will is saying these words:

We make no objections against any, notwithstanding all that they have done before they come hither; they in no wise are cast out. And therefore, good Christian, come a little way with me, and I will teach thee about the way thou must go.

We are now going to concentrate on the Narrow Way. We have seen the Wicket or the Straight Gate, and we have seen that Good-will invites all who will come to enter into this gate. But now he is going to point the seeking Pilgrim to the straight and narrow way which leads to the Celestial City, which is heaven or the state of glory in the presence of God. So he continues with these words:

This is the way that thou must go. It was cast up by the patriarchs, prophets, Christ, and his apostles, and it is as straight as a rule can make it; this is the way thou must go.

But, said Christian, are there no turnings nor windings, by which a stranger may lose his Way?

Goodwill: Yes, there are many ways butt down upon this, and they are crooked and wide; but thus thou mayest distinguish the right from the wrong, the right only being straight and narrow.

Then I saw in my dream, that Christian asked him further, if he could not help him off with his burden that was upon his back, for as yet he had not got rid thereof, nor could he by any means get it off without help.

He told him, As to thy burden, be content to bear it until thou comest to the place of deliverance; for there it will fall from thy back of itself.

Then Christian began to gird up his loins, and to address himself to his journey.

The straight and the narrow way - this is what we are going to be concentrating on tonight in our study, and we want to see what this stands for. The Pilgrim now has experienced true conversion, but it is important at the very outset in the presentation of the gospel to sinners that we emphasize that conversion is only the beginning of the way. It is not the end of the journey. Up until he has entered into the straight gate, Pilgrim has been outside of Christ, and he has only been a seeker. Now he has truly experienced conversion which is the beginning of life, not the end of life. So Good-will or Christ shows him that now he needs to concentrate upon the way which lies ahead of him, the onward way. I think that we need to understand this also as to what conversion really is. What are we talking about when we say that except a man be converted, he cannot enter into eternal life? What is conversion? It is more than just a nod of the head to Christ. Conversion is a change and doing an about face from the way that one was formerly going. Now what is the way of a sinner? The way of a sinner is "his own way." ***"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."*** (Romans 3:23). That is, prior to a person's conversion, the chief end in his life is himself, and he makes everything in life subservient to his own interest and happiness. When the Bible speaks about being converted, it speaks about an "about face" from making our own self as the chief end of our existence, and making God's glory the chief end of our existence.

Conversion is set forth by many today in the preaching of the gospel, as if it takes place merely like this scenario.

Imagine that I am walking down a road minding my own business. While I'm going a certain way, seeking my own

interests and happiness, someone tells me that I need to be saved. I ask him, "What do you mean by that?" He replies, "You need to go to heaven." So I nod my head in response to that and go my own way. I have never turned about and gone a different way. In essence, that is all that conversion is today. In the modern presentation of the gospel, it allows the sinner to merely stop and pause in his self-centered life, acknowledge that Christ died for him, and go right on in his own self-centered life, to do whatever he wants, because it doesn't make any difference now, since he has been saved. But this is strictly foreign to the Biblical definition of conversion. Conversion means an "about face." A ceasing in going in one direction and a turning to go in another direction. The Christian should now be asking this question. What is my duty or responsibility, what have I been converted unto? Have I now been converted to do whatever I want to do, and can a person obtain pardon or forgiveness of sin apart from repentance and faith in true conversion? Can this actually occur? I invite your attention in the Bible to Matthew 7:13. Our Lord is giving these texts that Bunyan is using to set forth this principle. Jesus said, ***"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: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."*** Notice three things in this text. There is a gate, there is a way, and there is life, and they are lined up in that order. There is a beginning point of life, there is a continuing of life, and there is a completion of life. These three are lined up just like this, the narrow gate, the narrow way, and the life.

Conversion means an "about face." A ceasing in going in one direction and a turning to go in another direction.

Now lets look at the preaching of the Apostles in the book of Acts. Here is the way they urged duty upon their hearers. Acts 3:19 says, ***"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."*** Now notice that repentance and conversion are connected with forgiveness of sins. There can be no forgiveness and pardon of sin in one's experience apart from repentance and true conversion, or faith in Jesus Christ. These two are united together. Christ has died upon the cross for sinners, but no

one has a right to claim that until first of all they have embraced Christ in the gospel, and that comes through repentance. What is repentance, Pastor? Repentance is an acknowledgment that I have made myself the chief end for my own existence, and that I have not lived for God's glory. When I repent, I say, "God I have not lived for your honor and for your glory." I acknowledge that and repent. Faith is trust in Jesus Christ, in what He has done on my behalf in the gospel. When those acts are performed, they are connected with the pardoning or the forgiveness of one's sin. No one has a right to believe that Jesus Christ has done anything for him, until first of all he is assured that he has

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embraced Christ in the gospel. So repentance and conversion are involved in forgiveness of sins. Conversion involves leaving a broad way and entering a narrow way. Prior to my conversion I lived primarily for one person and that was Jim Gables, and whatever was the easiest way to go, whatever the circumstances were, I

would seek out after that way. It was in my interest to do so. But since conversion has taken place, have I been converted unto another broad way? No, but I have been converted unto a narrow way. What is that narrow way, or what would Bunyan have this stand for? The narrow way is obedience to the revealed will of God as set forth in the Scriptures. That is, instead of walking according to MY way, we now walk according to GOD'S way as revealed in the pages of the Bible. So this is conversion from a broad way unto a very narrow way. However, conversion is only the beginning of the way. Notice, that there was a gate, but there is also a way, and there is life. These three are associated. Now doctrinally in the Bible this is set forth by three terms which the apostles talked about. You may remember some of them. You young people should start trying to learn these terms, because they are Biblical terms. The Bible says we are justified by faith when we first come to Christ in the gospel. The wicket or narrow gate stands for the beginning of life in Jesus Christ. That is justification. The narrow way stands for sanctification of life, and the end of the way, stands for glorification of life. Now lets illustrate it like this. The gate stands for the beginning of life, the narrow way stands for the continuance of life, and at the end of the way, the perfection of life. Three things, our justification--our beginning, our sanctification--the continuation, and our glorification--when in heaven we shall be glorified with all the

redeemed saints in Christ. That is what we look forward to. We long for that day when we shall be in the presence of God and we shall be enabled to commune with Him there in glory. You say, "What kind of a place is that, Pastor?" It will be similar to the first paradise that God placed Adam and Eve in where they were enabled to enjoy communion with God. In the state of glory in heaven we shall be enabled to enjoy the communion and the presence of God in perfection. Now all of us are aware that we do not now commune with God in a state of perfection. In fact, we do not teach that we shall ever in this life, attain a state of perfection. That is, we shall never reach a state where we shall be without sin here while we are in this body. But there will come a time that this life which has now begun in us shall be perfected, and that is in glory. So there is the gate, the way and the life.

There are two errors which have caused much misunderstanding down through the years as to the nature of Christian faith. One of these errors is the teaching which makes the entrance into the Christian life apart from the gate. A few weeks ago we found this error in the City of Morality which emphasized that individuals could become a Christians without experiencing conversion. It claims that they can enter into life apart from going through the gate. They are the ones described by our Lord in John chapter 10 when He said they would be like those who would climb up some other way into sheep-fold. They would try to enter into the state of glory apart from an entrance with a personal encounter with Christ in conversion. That is an error, and that has caused confusion in the minds of many regarding the Christian faith.

Also, there is another error on the other extreme. I think that we have been exposed to, and are more prone to be affected, by this error. It is rare that modern Baptists would ever be charged with believing that a person can become a Christian apart from true conversion. But many modern Baptists can be charged with the error that the wicket gate is the end of the journey. That is, you just be converted, and that is all there is to it. Just settle down right there, there is nothing more. That is, you can be plowing down the road of your life, stop and be converted, and you have already obtained all there is to attain in salvation. You can just go on with the way you were living before. This has caused much confusion in those who are outside of the realms of the Christian faith. Because this emphasis maintains that conversion is everything. But conversion is not the end of everything, it is the beginning of everything. What are we converted unto? We are

converted unto a life of victorious living in Christ Jesus. It is only the beginning. We don't settle down because we have initially embraced Christ and that is it. By reading books and hearing today's preaching, I sense that many people are so dead and bored in their experience thinking that now that they have been saved, that is all there is to it. They believe they have attained all there is to attain. But beloved, we are converted not just to idleness, but unto activity. There is a long road to go, and there are many experiences that you and I have to be taught prior to our entering into glory. This is what God is doing right now in our experiences. Notice something about this narrow road, Good-will says:

"Good Christian, come a little way with me, and I will teach thee about the way thou must go. Look before thee; dost thou see this narrow way? That is the way thou must go. It was cast up by the patriarchs, prophets, Christ, and his apostles, and it is as straight as a rule can make it."

He is talking about Moses and Abraham, the prophets, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Christ and the apostles have walked this way. Now what is this WAY again? It is obedience unto the revealed will of God. Do you remember what Jesus delighted in doing while He was here on earth? What did He say? ***"My meat is to do the will of my Father, who sent me."*** (John 4:34). And the writer of Hebrews says that Christ would claim ***"I come to do thy will, O God."*** (Hebrews 10:9). This is the path that Christ walked, that straight and narrow way, a desire to do the will of God. The prophets, the patriarchs, the apostles and all the saints of God who have already arrived at the Celestial City have trodden this path of obedience prior to you and I. I personally think that the Book of Hebrews gives evidence to this in the 12th chapter as seeing we are so ***"compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses."*** This is Gables' theology here, "I believe that we are in the arena and the cloud of witnesses are looking on today and cheering us on to that Celestial City. That is, the inhabitants of heaven are aware of what is transpiring here on earth. They have already arrived at the end of their race, and we are compassed about with this great a cloud of witnesses. Therefore, Paul would say, ***"let us lay aside the weight which so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."*** (Hebrews 12:1). We are converted unto a progressiveness of life, to go on, on, and on until we enter into the Celestial City.

Good-will says, "Now this road, or this narrow way, ***"is as straight as a rule can***

make it." But Christian asked a question, and you ought to be asking this question about right now. **"Are there no turnings nor windings, by which a stranger may lose his way?"** That is a very good question. That is, hear me carefully, because it is important that this be included. "Is it possible for a person who has truly been converted to lose his way and never enter into the Celestial City?" This has caused much debate down through the centuries of the history of the church. Is it possible for a person who has been truly converted to lose his way off the straight and narrow, and therefore never enter into heaven or into the state of perfection? Of course, the answers are many. Those who teach salvation by the free will of man, would say that a man can be saved one day, and he can be lost the next day. Therefore they would answer Christian's question, **"Are there no turnings or windings by which a stranger may lose way?"** They would say, "Oh, yes, there are many things that can keep a person from entering into heaven." Then others would say, "No, the Bible says, "once saved always saved--a person can never lose his or her salvation." Now, it is true that ALL the saints shall be saved. But it is equally true that ONLY the saints shall be saved. Listen carefully now, any person who has truly entered into a state of grace, shall enter into that state of perfection.

I want to bear this out by the oldest Baptist Confession of Faith which we have access to. This confession was founded in 1689, and this was no doubt the one that Bunyan used. Lets see what he and those people in that era taught on the sanctification of life. That is, after a person has been justified, is it possible for a person to fall from a state of salvation and thereby be lost? Alright, now listen carefully:

Article 13, Section 1: They who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also farther sanctified, really and personally, through the same virtue, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts of it are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

Section 2: This sanctification is throughout the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abides still some remnants of corruption in every part, wherefrom arises a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

I hope we understand that. The sanctification of our life to the narrow way is not one of perfection.

Section 3: In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome; and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, pressing after an heavenly life, in evangelical obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in his Word has prescribed to them.

In other words, the old Baptists not only believed that God's grace put a person through the gate, but it exercised sanctifying influences internally in that person which enabled him to walk the straight and the narrow way; but not perfectly. That is, there would be many stumbling stones that believers would fall over in that way, but that this grace of God would hedge them in so to speak, and prevent them from apostatizing and going back into the world as many would-be professors do. We have seen some of them already, haven't we? We have seen Pliable go back. We have seen others go back. But yet there will be the grace of God which will take the Christian all the way to the Celestial City.

Those of you who may be here tonight, and you don't believe in the perseverance of the saints, what are you talking about when you sing "*Amazing Grace?*" What are you talking about when you say, "*through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come, tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*" How can you really sing that and mean it if you believe that a person who has truly come through the gate of conversion, and grace is drawing him on, somehow he is going to fail? Do you see that? Yet at the same time we have no right to believe, or to hope that we have truly been brought through the gate if there are no sanctifying workings of the Spirit within our life to draw us onto love and obedience to the revealed will of God in Christ Jesus.

I want to read again another quotation from the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith regarding the perseverance of the saints. It answers the question, shall the saints persevere or shall they apostatize?

Section 17: Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, whence he still begets and nourisheth in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality; and though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon; notwithstanding, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them, yet he is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraven upon the palm of his hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity.

That is the Confession of Faith of the Baptists as far back as we can trace them. There is only one other group of Baptists that do not adhere to this as a confession, and that is the Free-Will Baptists. They believe that man's free will is what determines his destiny rather than God's grace. Thereby they believe it is man's free will which put him through the gate, and therefore, it is man's free will which can let him go away from conversion. If that be true, then we have to acknowledge that if a person can put himself in Christ, he can take himself out of Christ. But if it is God's marvelous grace which puts us in Jesus Christ, then God's gifts are without repentance. God doesn't repent and change His mind and take us out of Christ. So on this basis, here are the two schools of Baptist thought, that of man's free will and that of those who believe in God's free will. You may want to be saved by your own free will, but I would rather choose God's free will. That is, I know that I have more security, when God's will has put me in Christ Jesus, rather than my own free will. I know that if it was left up to my own free will, I would never have chosen Christ. If it was left up to my own free will to keep myself in Christ, I can't overcome one temptation without God's marvelous grace. He has brought me safe thus far, and the Bible promises that **"He who hath begun a good work in me will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."** (Philippians 1:6). And if He has brought me safe thus far to this point, then I can say with John Newton, the song writer, *grace will lead me safely home.*

Now the question arises, then why do I need to be concerned about anything now that I am converted? The first Bible answer is this, because our conversion converts us from

self unto God. My friend, if I claim that I am a Christian and still go on to glorify myself, it raises great questions as to my conversion. That is, if I am going to live like the world, the flesh and the devil, then I had better go back and check my salvation experience at the wicket gate very carefully, because all those whom God justifies through faith, He converts unto a straight and narrow way.

I want to now point out one other thing before we bring our lesson to a close. Christian has one more question for Good-Will:

Then I saw in my dream that Christian asked him further if he could not help him off with the burden that was on his back for as yet he had not gotten rid thereof nor could he by any means get it off without help.

Does that startle you? Here is a man who is truly converted, and yet he still is not assured that he is in an accepted state with God. It startles many people today that a man who has truly repented and believed in Christ is not assured that he has truly been accepted by Christ. Now notice how Good-will, or Christ, answers the Pilgrim. Here is where modern ministers err greatly. Nearly every modern minister I am acquainted with believes that it is his primary duty to immediately give a person, who makes a profession of faith in Christ, assurance that he has been saved. Now notice, Good-will doesn't do that. Beloved, a

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minister cannot assure you that you are a Christian. Only the personal work of the Holy Spirit applying the gospel to you can give you that assurance. So what does Good-will tell him? He says, ***"As to thy burden be content to bear it until you***

comest to the place of deliverance and there it will fall from the back all of itself."

We are going to see in a few weeks that place is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit where additional light is given to Christian so that he finally has an assurance he has been accepted with God. Is it possible to be saved and yet not be assured of it. Bunyan thought so. Bunyan believed that, but that is so contrary to modern teaching. Now listen carefully to this, assurance of salvation is not essential to the "BEING" of a Christian, but it is essential to the "WELL-BEING" of a Christian. But you say, Pastor, what do you mean by that? It simply means this, you can go to heaven without knowing that you are saved, but

it sure helps to know it on the way. That is, to really enjoy your Christian life, assurance of being accepted with God, gains so many advantages. But you can go to heaven without being assured that you have been accepted of God. Many do this. If that wouldn't be true, we would have to write off nearly every Methodist, Church of Christ, and every Pentecostal group that there is today, because all of these groups teach that you cannot be assured that you are in a right standing with God because something might happen that could sever this union. Once again, it is possible to go to heaven without being assured that your sins are forgiven but it is impossible to really enjoy your Christian experience without having that assurance. Here is the man who is truly converted but he still has the burden of sin on his back. A little further down the road that burden will fall off all by itself, and he is going to be given an assurance which cannot be taken away from him. So I think it is important that if the apostles taught the Scriptures the same way Bunyan did, then we must be careful to not give someone a false assurance before the Holy Spirit of God gives them the assurance that they are accepted by God. Only God can do that. I can't tell you that God has accepted you, but God can through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the gospel. My friend, when He gives you that assurance a thousand ministers can't argue you out of it. So bear that in mind. Pretty soon on down the road the burden will fall off.

Finally, we read, ***"Then Christian began to gird up his loins and to address himself to his journey."*** He has now been converted and has a straight road to follow. Now I invite your attention to the drawing here before us. You notice several crooked roads leading off here and here. These are the paths, which those who enter this road without going through the gate, shall get off into. We are going to meet Hypocrisy and Formalist, who climb over the wall and end up on one of these roads. But the Christian is going to walk the straight and the narrow way. He is going to have many temptations and trials, but how will he know not to go off on one of these side roads? Jesus said this (or Good-will) "you will know this, that the broad way is a crooked way and the right way is a narrow way." God's commands are narrow, and when you are walking the straight way in obedience to God's commands, you can't cut corners so to speak. If you should come to a fork in the path that looks like one way would be an easier way to go, and you try to justify doing what is forbidden of God, then Christ said, you have taken one of the false ways. Stay on the straight and the narrow way. What keeps a child from straying off of the straight and the narrow? It is the grace of God that began His work in them. Charles

Spurgeon said that a man may slip on the deck of a ship or a Christian can fall on the deck of a ship, but he cannot fall overboard off of the ship. You and I may stumble and fall in the path of obedience. This Christian is going to do this many, many times, but the sanctifying grace of Christ reaches down and lifts him up. He will strengthen, correct, chastise and comfort him as the shepherd does the sheep and place him right back on that path. He will go on and on until finally he enters into that state of perfection. May God help us to do that.

Shall we pray? Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the precious gospel which through your grace on our behalf you have drawn us out of the love of the world into the love of your Son in the gospel. We thank you for the ministry of the Holy Spirit on our behalf which has converted us into Your ways, and God, our hearts even tell us now that this is not perfection. We know that we have sinned and come short even today, so we are also grateful for the realization of this, because we come once again asking for cleansing of our daily sin through the blood of your Son. We pray that you might grant unto us afresh daily strength from the manna of your word to enable us to walk the path of obedience unto your will. We thank you for your will, we delight in your will, and we ask that as a King you might rule over us and subdue us and cause us to be enabled to conquer the lust of the flesh whereby we shall be enabled to do your will more and more perfectly until finally we enter into that state of heaven where we shall enjoy perfection in your presence. We ask these favors in Christ's name and for His sake, Amen