

The Way is Hard

by Tricia Berg

Question: If it's so EASY to get into heaven that all we have to do is claim to believe in Jesus, then why did He say that the way is EASY that leads to destruction and HARD that leads to eternal life? It almost seems like there's more to this, doesn't it? What is hard about saying some words, whether you mean them in your heart or not?

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Matthew 7:13-14

Jesus goes on to tell us to beware of false prophets. What do they do? Usually one of two things (IF they teach about Jesus as Savior): They either tell us that we need to work for salvation because what Jesus did wasn't enough, or they say that all we need to do is say we believe and then we can go on reveling in our sin as we did before we were "saved." (James 3:10-18)

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits." Matthew 7:15-20

Imagine that. God anticipated what false prophets would say, and so He went on to explain that no, just SAYING you believe is NOT enough. He expects you to SHOW that you REALLY believe by respecting Him enough to obey Him. (The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. Psalm 111:10) He clarifies that "workers of lawlessness" are NOT going to be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven. Some may say they have done wonderful things for God, but they have really been doing those things for themselves in order to get rich and famous. They don't actually KNOW and OBEY God themselves. They are NOT wise at all.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will

I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" Matthew 7:21-23

Did Jesus just say that? Really? He DOESN'T just want lip service, but for people to actually DO what He says if they claim He is their LORD? Yes, He did. He said it again just in case anyone missed it the first time around:

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." Matthew 7:24-27

So it's clear by Jesus' own words that He IS the narrow door through which ALL must enter into heaven (or they can't enter AT ALL), but that AFTER He has purchased us with His blood, then He is our Lord and we are to behave as such, doing as He said in the Bible. He asks (in the book of Luke) why anyone would call Him "Lord" if they do not obey Him. Good question! We have some examples of "bad fruit" above and also in the book of Mark below. People who have been born again spiritually into God's kingdom, as His children, do not bear these bad fruits. They are not instantly perfect and they will slip from time to time, but they will be grieved by how their sins displease God, causing them to repent and receive forgiveness and cleansing from Him.

So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep." John 10:7

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6

"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them

is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great." Luke 6:43-49

And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Mark 7:20-23

He summarized His commandments into two, because by keeping them, all of the others will be kept. (Romans 13:8-10) This does not mean that the others are not important, but again, that we are not able to keep these two without fulfilling the rest (just as our laws are (used to be?) based on the Ten Commandments, yet there are WAY more than ten, because more practical details are specified as to how to live by them). And so we come full circle to the question of how to enter the kingdom--Jesus tells the scribe who agreed with Him when He made the following statement that he was "not far from the kingdom."

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. Mark 12:28-34

Let's not try to fool God with lip service as though He doesn't see the things we actually DO, SAY and even knows what we THINK. That is not what someone who has a healthy respect for God would do, unless they have NO IDEA what He is even like. Let's study the Bible to find out what pleases God and then do it with the help of His Holy Spirit within us, out of love and gratitude for what He's already done for us. Amen!

Our guide to bad fruits (not saved) and good fruits (born by those walking in the Holy Spirit):

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:19-26

Let's recap. Jesus provides us with a sparkling white robe of His righteousness when we are born again. He is the ONLY one who could ever do this for us. However, it IS possible for us to use our free will to soil it or even throw it off. We need to ABIDE in Him and the word of God. (John 15) It is His desire that we should bear fruit (behave as though we are His and do good works He prepared for us to)--this brings Him (not us) honor and glory, and that's what we're here for.

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. "'I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' Revelation 3:1-6

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. James 1:27

("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!") Revelation 16:15

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. Titus 3:8

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:16

"As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." Matthew 13:23

The following is absolutely TRUE:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

But wait, there's more a little farther down if we keep reading:

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. Romans 8:9

In today's culture, people have become more and more comfortable with less and less clothing on. Let's remember what God said about the matter and keep our robe of righteousness ON and CLEAN (by abiding in Jesus and His love, by coming to Him for forgiveness and cleansing whenever we have given in to our old sinful nature.)

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that

you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. 1 John 1:5-2:6

He wrote this to BELIEVERS who were deceiving themselves about their spiritual condition:

"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. "'I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" Revelation 3:14-22

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