

JESUS, THE WAY AND THE TRUTH

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SCRIPTURE: John 14:1-6.

Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And when I go, I will prepare a place for you, and come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, ye may be also. 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.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness, (we) enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us. (Hebr. 10:19-20)

The world "way" is one which has so changed in meaning since the days when the best scholars of England gave us the King James version of the Bible, that we are apt to read wrong meanings into some of the passages which employ this word. Smith's Bible dictionary says that the translators have employed the English word "way" to be the equivalent of no less than eighteen Hebrew words, each with some slight variation in meaning. Today, the word "way" is very often employed to mean custom, or manner. We speak of certain "ways" of doing things; or we say that a certain person is set in his ways, or has winning ways. The use of "way" to mean road or highway or track has become almost secondary, though in the days of King James it was the primary meaning of the word. Smith points out again that where the Bible speaks of the way of life, or the way of truth, or of peace, justice, righteousness, salvation, etc., the meaning would be much clearer and much more in harmony now with the original if "road to" were substituted for "way of," making the phrase read, "the road to truth, or life, or peace, etc.

In the book of Acts, "Way" is used as a sort of technical term to describe the new religion of Christianity which Paul first persecuted and then defended and supported. There are at least six verses in the book of Acts which use the word "way" thus. There is undoubtedly some significance in the choice of that word by the Bible writers and translators. They might have called the gospel of Jesus a gospel, or a faith, or a religion, or a system of thought, or a philosophy; but instead, they chose to call it "the way." Notice, too, that the word is usually used with a definite article rather than the indefinite; it is THE way, and not A way.

A "way," in the Biblical sense, then, is a road or track, rather than a manner of doing something. The Christians of the early church did not simply have a more polite or more pleasant manner of going about their daily life; they had a road or track to follow which they felt was getting them somewhere. Much of the frustration and disillusionment and dissatisfaction of life stem from the fact that so many people are following A WAY which never seems to get them anywhere, and which seems to be constantly changing its goal and its direction. And so the man or woman who sets out to follow THE WAY of life, if he regards that way as a road or track to take him from where he is to where he wants to be, will eventually arrive at his goal or destination.

Man in his fallen state was alienated from God -- a stranger to him -- unable to abide in his presence. He was lost and wandering in a trackless waste of sin, in which there was no "way" to lead him back to God -- not until Jesus came. But Jesus was that way -- the road, the path, the track which if followed would lead men back to God. Paul symbolizes this idea for us by pointing out that in the ancient Hebrew

Temple and tabernacle, there was a holy of holies -- a place where no one save the high priest was ever allowed to go -- and he only once a year with special sacrifice and preparation. As Paul puts it, "the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest" (Hebrews 9:8) But when Jesus came to offer a final sacrifice for our sins, he went into the holy of holies. Thereby he became the "way" by which men may also return to the presence of God. He is also the "way" by which men may find a new fellowship with each other, since he broke down the middle wall of partition, not only between us and God, but between Jew and Gentile, and made all one in Christ.

Jesus does not point us to the way of life; he is the way. Notice again the use of the definite article. He is not a way, but the way. There is no other name given under heaven whereby men may be saved. There is no other way which men may take to God. There is a certain absoluteness about Christianity, which teaches that there is only one Mediator between God and man; that "strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it," that "he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber;" that "there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ." Jesus is the only man who ever lived who had power over death -- who could lay down his life and take it up again because although he was tempted in all points as we are, yet he was without sin and owed no debt to sin. He is unique in that by his death and resurrection as well as by his perfect life, he has shown the way for man to be reconciled again to his heavenly Father. His name, his life, his power, his love, form the way which men must take to be restored to the presence of God.

We have pointed out that a "way" is something to be walked or travelled upon. Roads, tracks, or ways are designed for travel. A path is to be walked in, not sat upon. We cannot simply accept Jesus passively as "the way" and then sit down expecting him to take us somehow to our life's goal. Sitting down beside him will not take us to our Heavenly Father. Even accepting him will not make us fit or worthy to dwell with God. We must walk the "way" once we have found it. For example, I live within two blocks of one of the highways that leads to St. Louis. I have lived in that house for fourteen years, but I am not an inch nearer to St. Louis today than I was fourteen years ago. If I want to get to St. Louis, I must travel the highway, not simply live beside it. So Jesus is "the way" of life, "the way" back to God. He is not something to be lived beside and ignored, but to be walked, to be travelled, to be followed to the end.

Jesus is not only the way, the one way by which man may come back into the presence of God, but he is "the truth." He is the one teacher authorized to reveal and to teach the things of God. In many ages, men have conjectured and guessed at the nature and the purposes of God, but Jesus is unique. He is God revealed in human flesh. He and his Father are one. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," he said. In him are revealed the Father's love and mercy and grace -- the Father's wisdom and majesty and power. If we would find God, we must walk the "way." If we would know God, we must know the "truth." If we would live, we must know "the life," which is from God, which is revealed through Christ, the one author of both spiritual and natural life.

Few men are willing to accept the restrictions imposed upon those who would walk in "the way" or follow "the truth" or receive "the life." Most men hope to find salvation on their own terms, in some of the many broad ways that lead to destruction. The thing that makes a road a road, or a way a way, is the fact that it is narrow, restricted, confined within definite limits. If one could set out on a road two thousand miles wide to seek a certain city, he might travel on that broad highway all his life without ever finding his destination. Jesus is the strait (i.e., the narrow) gate, the narrow way. But following that way to the end will bring men the freedom of eternal life in the Father's kingdom.