

The Two Paths

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.

July 7, 2024

Text: Proverbs 4:18-19

Purpose: In this life we have two paths to choose from. We can choose the path of the just or we can choose the path of the wicked. Do we desire the things of God or do we desire the things of evil? The path of the just grows brighter every day. The path of the wicked leads to darkness and destruction. Choose you this day which way your life will go!

Our text today from Proverbs identifies one of the great mysteries of life. That is the problem of choices. Why do some individuals choose a life of just, righteous, holy living while others seek out a lifestyle of rebellion and evil?



Some individuals in this life believe that children are simply blank slates and their environment dictates the way they will go as they grow older. If a child lives in a good wholesome environment, then they will grow up to be responsible, just, and good in all of their actions. That if we only control the environment, then the product of that kind of home life will result in perfectly obedient children. If this theory was correct, then there would never be divorce, adultery, drug abuse, or alcoholism in the finest homes and neighborhoods.



Other individuals believe that children are born with an inward nature that has a tendency to sin and choose to do wrong. It is this nature that is born within us that the scripture describes as “*desperately wicked.*” We do not want to admit there is a tendency to do evil. If we are honest about our heart, we will come to the conclusion it is true. Even the best of us have had evil thoughts or a temptation to seek out harm against others. That sin nature is always at work in us trying to rear its ugly head. Some individuals are able to keep it restrained while others allow their impulses and fleshly desires to direct and lead their thoughts and actions.

The first chapter in the Book of Psalms starts out with a description of two people – one choosing to walk righteously and the other is described as ungodly.



READ PSALM 1

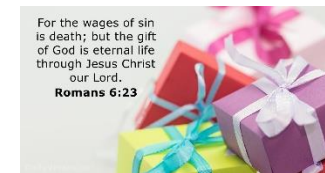


The Roman Road of Salvation

The Bible describes us as sinners. I don't want to admit that. I want to believe the best about myself and promote myself as righteous all the time. But we are born into a world filled with individuals that are selfish and self-seeking. The Bible even describes us as being conceived in sin. We have inherited the sin nature of Adam. And we pass it on to generation after generation.

In our study of Romans several years ago, I was personally convicted of what **Romans 3:23 (Step 1)** says: It says that “*we are all sinners and we fall short of the glory of God.*”

Because God is Holy and righteous no sin can enter into His presence. Only righteous, holy individuals may enter into the Kingdom of God. Sometimes I have heard people say they sure hope God is grading on a curve. Maybe their goodness will be good enough to be able to slip into a small corner of heaven. We laugh and smile, but people are truly hoping they can enter heaven on the basis of their own goodness.



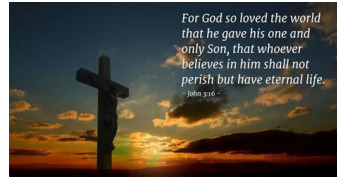
Paul reminded us in Romans what God's solution is for our sin. God has said repeatedly in the Bible that sin must be atoned for. **Romans 6:23**

(Step 2) sums up the consequences of our sin. It says, “*The wages of sin is death. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission for our sins.*” Throughout the Old Testament we learned that the sin of an individual was atoned for through the shedding of blood – maybe the blood of a goat, or sheep, or a calf – they were made in right standing once again with God.

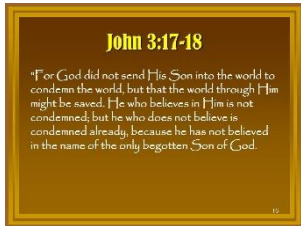
But when Jesus Christ came, He came as God's perfect, sinless sacrifice on Calvary. When we claim Jesus as our own, then we are accepting God's sacrifice on the cross as atonement for our sin. That was a free gift of God given to you and me. By accepting Jesus as your Savior, you receive eternal life with God in heaven, instead of eternal

separation from God in Hell. All of us are destined to Hell if we do not accept the sacrifice offered by God.

We all have heard John 3:16. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*



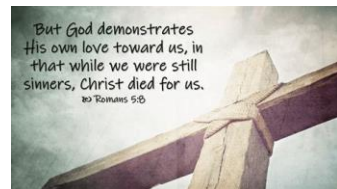
But we need to go a little further to see what else Jesus Christ was trying to tell us when we refuse to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior.



“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in His is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because

he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:17-18)

You see, while you and I were still dead in our sinful ways, Christ died for us. It says, *“But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* **(Romans 5:8 – Step 3)** We

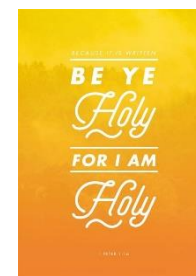
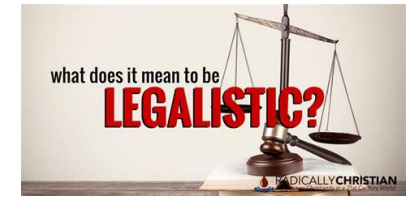


have done nothing to earn this free gift of grace. We only need to come to God and ask Him to forgive us of our sin, and accept what He offers – forgiveness and eternal life.

Once we have done that, our sins are eternally forgiven. Once we choose to walk with God, we enter into a

relationship of love, forgiveness, and communion that is inconceivable prior to our decision to accept Christ. Once we decide and receive Christ, we are forgiven.

Some denominations teach that now that you have decided to follow Jesus, it is up to you to keep the relationship pure. They attempt to prove they are saved through the strict adherence to what they wear (no pants, no jewelry, no makeup etc.) where they go (no movies, no dance halls, no bars) who they associate with (no sinners) and how frequently they go to church. But once we have joined God’s family, we are fully adopted and accepted by God.



Now that we are accepted and adopted by God, we need to live a life that is pleasing to God. We need to choose out of our love for God to dress modestly so that we do not become temptation for others. We need to be careful what we watch or where we go so that it doesn’t harm our relationship with God or hurt our witness to the world. We may be able to do these things, but they harm us and they harm others. Our desire should be to please God in ALL our actions and ALL our thoughts instead of attempting to live out of a code of conduct to “earn” God’s approval.

Once God has said He accepts you, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God which in Christ Jesus. Our past sins are forgiven and they will not be brought up again by God. If God has forgiven them, then so should we. They should not dictate and dominate our lives.



Nothing will separate us from God once we take Him as our Savior. Not even Satan.

Romans 8:38-39 (Step Four)

says, *“For I am persuaded*

(know) that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which in Christ Jesus our Lord.” As we live our new life in Christ, that old nature attempts to rear its head and direct you away from God. You must decide to crucify your fleshly desires daily. As you do that, those old temptations have less and less control over your life. I don’t ever think you reach a place of perfection, but it will have less control over your life.

Our Text – The Just

Our text this morning from Proverbs one talks about the path chosen by the righteous and the path taken by the wicked. Proverbs 4:18 talks about the just or righteous. It says, *“The path of the righteous is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”*

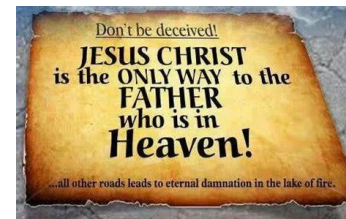
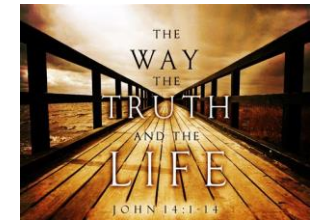


We may ask again, **“Who are the righteous?”**¹ It is those that have accepted and acknowledged Jesus Christ as their Savior. They become righteous through the shed blood of Jesus there at Calvary. It is imputed or counted towards them as if they were righteous themselves. Those that believe are justified.



Another question about the righteous is **“Where do they walk?”** As I have said earlier, our conduct in life is directed out of love and obedience. Those that love God want to live a life that is pleasing and honorable. It is a narrow path that they choose to walk on. Narrow is the way to eternal life ... and few therein find it. The scripture describes the way of the wicked as one that is broad and easy to travel upon. The path to hell is a well-worn highway. But the path chosen by the just is a very narrow.

That opening to the just, righteous path is only obtained through Jesus Christ. Jesus said that He is *“the way the truth and the life, and no one comes unto the Father except through Him.”* There is only one doorway into eternal life and that is through Jesus. It is not through the church; it is through the person of Jesus Christ. The church is a collection of people that have identified with Jesus as their Savior. The Catholic Church teaches that the church provides salvation. But the scripture teaches the only way to the Father is through Jesus Christ – who is the foundation stone of our faith.



In one of the other great “I Am” statements, Jesus described Himself as the door. Only through the door of Christ can you enter into this narrow way. The world around us does not want to hear this. They say this is too narrow-minded. They may say, **“Do you mean to tell me that**

Jesus is the only way to heaven?" To them I would have to say unequivocally – **“Yes.”**

In life I have found that truth is narrow by definition. When you calculate an answer for math you only get one true answer. All the other possible answers are wrong. When you level a board, or cut out a dress pattern, or try on a shoe, only one cut or size will be the right one. God has said in His word that we are saved through Christ.

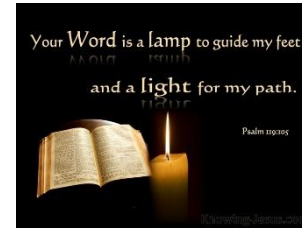
“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with your heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” **(Romans 10:9-10 – Step Five)**



If you are sitting here and believe in Jesus Christ then you need to confess it to others. If you believe that Jesus is who He says He is, and desire to have eternal life, then you need to accept what God has offered and be willing to tell others of your decision. Keeping your faith inward may comfort you, but others want and need to know.

If you are not willing to confess your faith to others, then maybe you don't have faith at all. You only have faith in your ability to do good. Your goodness will not save you. Only through confession of your sin will you be saved. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

This path of righteousness is described as like a light. We are not pushed into a dark alleyway and asked to follow



blindly. We are guided by God's word and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

This path of righteousness is one where the light grows as we follow down that path. Proverbs says it grows and shineth more and more. It is going from strength to strength and as you follow God, you will grow in grace and in knowledge of God.

This path leads to a perfect day. We do not live in days that are perfect. But this path of grace and light leads to that perfect day. One day we will be face to face with Jesus and we will see wondrous things. Our eye has not seen nor ear heard what God has prepared for those that love Him.

Through the years I have met many people, when they are at the end of their life, say to me, they are ready to go and see their Lord. They want to see the face of Jesus – the one who comforts them in daily prayer. They are ready to go and see their loved ones that have gone on ahead of them. For those individuals, that day when they see all things clearly, that will be a perfect day.



Our Text - The Wicked

But The Way Of The Wicked Is Like Deep Darkness; They Do Not Know What Makes Them Stumble.
Proverbs 4:19
BibleWording.com

But our text also has a somber warning for those that reject God's plan of salvation. Proverbs 4:19 says, *“The way of the wicked is darkness, they know not as to what they stumble.”*

The path of the wicked relies on their own understanding. They are rebellious in accepting God's Son. They think their own thoughts, choose their own way, and are rejecting the will and way of God.²



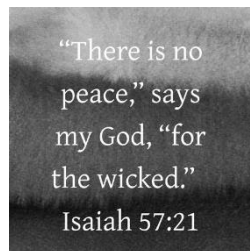
The path of the wicked is the way of darkness. In Isaiah 59, the way of the wicked is described as stumbling around in the darkness. They seek the light but only walk in darkness, groping for the walls, yet they only stumble. They have no light on the path they are traveling. They devise schemes to destroy others only to find that the net entangles them. The way of darkness often results in failure after failure.

The path of the wicked is the way of ignorance. The scripture says "*they know not.*" It is like the blind leading the blind. They do not know where they are going and their future is uncertain.

The path of the wicked is the way of disappointment. As they walk in darkness, they stumble and fall. They trip and fall. They have no one to guide them in their decisions. They love the darkness rather than the light. They will continue to stumble and fall like a drunk person on Saturday night until they fall into death and enter into Hell.

It is because of their hardness of heart that they are consumed and destroyed.

As Isaiah 57:21 says, "*There is no peace,*" says my God, "*for the wicked.*"



BUT we can change our destination. Today is the day of salvation. Turn to the Lord while there is still time. Enter into the path that leads to life eternal. Turn from the path of evil and destruction. Choose the grace of God.

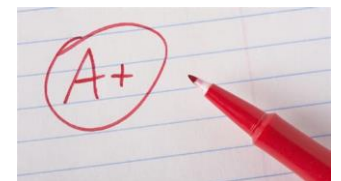
THE CONCEPT OF GRACE³

There is a great article that illustrates the concept of grace written by Charles Stanley. He said in his book *The Gift of Forgiveness*, Dr. Stanley said, "One of my more memorable seminary professors had a practical way of illustrating to his students the concept of grace. At the end of his evangelism course, he would distribute the exam with the verbal instructions and cautioned them to read all the way through the exam before beginning to answer the questions. This caution was written on the exam as well. As we read the test, it became unquestionably clear to each of us that we had not studied nearly enough.



The further we read, the worse it became. About halfway through, audible groans could be heard throughout the lecture hall. On the last page, however, was a note that read, "You have a choice. You can either complete the exam as given or sign your name at the bottom and in so doing receive an A for this assignment."

Wow? We sat there stunned. "Was he serious? Just sign it and get an A?" Slowly, the point dawned on us, and one by one we turned in our tests and silently filed out of the room.



When I talked with the professor about it afterward, he shared some of the reactions he had received through the years. Some students began to take the exam without reading it all the way through, and they would sweat it out for the entire two hours of class time before reaching the last page.

Others read the first two pages, became angry, turned the test in blank, and stormed out of the room without signing it. They never realized what was available, and as a result, they lost out totally.



One fellow, however, read the entire test, including the note at the end, but decided to take the exam anyway. He did not want any gifts; he wanted to earn his grade. And he did. He made a C+, but he could easily have

had an A.

This story vividly illustrates the way many people react to God's solution to the problem of sin.

Many are like the first group.

They wonder if the Lord hears their pleas for forgiveness or if they have pushed Him too far. They do all they know to receive His pardon. Many people spend their lives trying to earn what they later realize was freely available the entire time.

Many people respond like the second group of students.

They look at God's standard—moral and ethical perfection—and throw their hands up in surrender.

Why even try? I could never live up to all that stuff, they tell themselves, while completely abandoning God's commandments.

Such people live the way they please, not expecting anything from the Lord when they die. Often, they come to deny God's existence. What a shock it will be for them when they stand before the Lord and realize what was available to them, had they only asked!

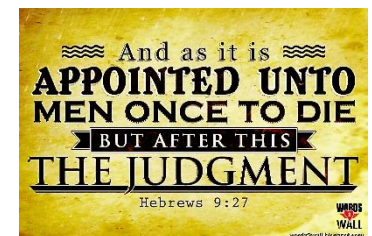
Then there is the guy who took the test anyway.

Some people are unwilling to simply receive God's gift of forgiveness. Striking out to do it on their own, they strive to earn enough points through righteous living to win the Father's pardon. They constantly work to "even the score" with the Lord through their good works.

"Sure, I have my faults," they say. "But God does not expect anyone to be perfect." However, when it comes to forgiveness, there is no room for boasting in one's own ability. The Bible does not teach that we can contribute to the process through self-effort.

Scripture says, "*It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). Thankfully, the Father provides a solution for the problem of sin through Jesus' death and

resurrection. For His grace to cover all our wrongdoing, we simply have to receive the gift of Christ's forgiveness.



If you have not already accepted God's mercy, admit that you have rebelled against Him. Surrender your life to His control. He will wipe away the guilt of your sin and give you a fresh start in life.

The Bible reminds us that our righteousness – no matter how good – is nothing compared to the Holiness of God.



The two paths are set before us – enter in through the narrow gate called Jesus Christ. Or continue on the wide path that leads to destruction.

The choice is yours.

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Handfuls on Purpose, Vol. II, page 263.

² Ibid.

³ Illustration from Sermon Central – accessed 5/4/2013 – from book by Charles Stanely – The Gift of Forgiveness, 1987