

The Narrow Way Called Grace

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

The average sermon preached from Matthew 7:13-14 about “the narrow way” is focused on what people must avoid to stay on that road. In the mind of the listener, walking the narrow way might as well be like a walk on a tightrope, where works and legalism are needed to make it. This view does not reflect the heart of God, and those who approach the narrow way from this mind-set will only experience frustration.

The narrow way is the way of grace. God calls it the “narrow” way because it cannot be walked except by the power of the Holy Spirit. Nothing can be added to this way. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy [Spirit]; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 3:5-6).

The way of God is grace and all grace. Anything we might attempt in our own strength is

unacceptable. Our prayer is that as we grow in understanding God's character of grace, we will be drawn nearer to Him who draws us with cords of love. We do not mean for grace to be a license to sin but a provision to grow out of weakness into the strength of God's manifestation of His presence.

Chapter One

THE ONLY WAY TO FIND LIFE

“If ye fulfil *the royal law* according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well; But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are [convicted] of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

“For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath [shown] no mercy; and *mercy rejoiceth against judgment*.

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? *can faith save him?*

“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute

of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

“Even so *faith, if it hath not works, is dead*, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: [show] me thy faith without thy works, and *I will [show] thee my faith by my works*.

“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*” (James 2:8-20).

Consider that passage in light of Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:13-14: “Enter ye in at the strait [(narrow)] 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.”

What is the narrow way? What did Jesus mean when He said we are to enter in to the gate that is strait and the way that is narrow? He was talking about grace, the only way a man can ever come to God and be saved. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of your-

selves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The Only Way We Could Make It

Billions of years ago in heaven, God longed to reveal His character and His nature—what He is like. So the Trinity in the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit held a meeting (“the determinate counsel,” Acts 2:23). There, God the Father presented a plan for the ages that the Son would execute in time on earth. In this plan, Jesus voluntarily died on the Cross. He shed His blood and bore all of our sins in His body so that we might believe on Him and have eternal life. With this revelation and inspiration by the Holy Spirit to the hearts of men, the whole plan of eternity was designed to show us the very narrow way called grace.

Many people fear Matthew 7:13-14 because they don’t understand it. The legalistic preacher will say that to walk the narrow way means to keep the Law. Those who always preach the letter of the law teach that it means we must follow a set of rules, living in “dos and don’ts.” Many people spend their lives trying their best to live *under* the law, completely missing the meaning of the narrow way.

This “narrow way” is strictly the grace of Almighty God. You may ask, “Why is grace a narrow way?” It’s simple. There is no possible way we can make it apart from grace! We must understand the economy of God’s grace—He did it all. That is the narrow way.

Jesus Christ came to bring grace and truth to sinners. “Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:16-17). Even though they are inseparable, grace must come before truth. We cannot experience truth about God’s holiness and righteousness unless we first understand grace. The focus is upon what God does *for* us: He is constantly pouring into our lives grace upon grace upon grace.

That is the narrow way. It is a way so narrow that if we try to add one thing to grace, it will profit us nothing, and God will not accept it.

The Way to Have God’s Heart

Grace gives faith to the weakest person. It gives hope to the backslider. It gives encouragement to the person who has failed over and over again. And when a fallen man turns to the Lord, the first thing he must learn is *not* to change

himself but to release the grace that he has received. Only then can he reveal the same character that brought him redemption and forgiveness through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7).

The most difficult thing to understand is that grace is *pure* grace. “And if by grace, then *is it no more of works*: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Romans 11:6). When we receive unconditionally the grace of God that motivates His love and reveals the characteristics of mercy, then we place God in His rightful position of headship in relationship to our walk on earth. Our submission to a throne of mercy does away with hypocrisy and legalism.

There is no way we can ever teach too much grace, and this is why: Grace always takes us into the heart of God as it puts the heart of God inside of us. Grace keeps leading us to know Him, to know the power of His resurrection, and to know the fellowship of His sufferings. Grace always brings us into an eternal perspective so that we will begin to comprehend the compassion and the scope of God’s love toward every single person on earth.

Chapter Two

A LAW AND A CROSS: DEMONSTRATING GOD'S CHARACTER OF GRACE

“Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

“But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a [practicer] of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:21-25).

If we receive the love of God by the Holy

Spirit who sheds it abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5), then we will be motivated by love (2 Corinthians 5:14), and we will walk in love (Ephesians 5:2). As we receive the gift of God's grace, we will minister the same to others as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10).

"Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Grace is the truth about the nature of Jesus Christ. Therefore, if we taste the grace of God, if we receive the grace of God, and if we appropriate the grace of God, then the nature of God controls us.

Grace can never be separated from truth, nor can truth ever be separated from grace. Why? Because we are all incurably bad (Jeremiah 30:12). We are desperately wicked. We fail and fail again. Yet, a holy God sent His Son to die on the Cross. He came to take our penalty, to take everything that we deserved, so He could demonstrate the reality of His grace to us.

The Royal Law of Love

God ordained civil law, and we should obey it (1 Peter 2:13). Also God has given us moral law, written in the hearts of every man, which teaches us right from wrong and protects the

property and freedom of every individual. But after the moral law comes a higher law: *the royal law of love*. “If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well” (James 2:8). Also, Jesus said in John 15:9, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.” Then in verse 12, “Love one another, as I have loved you.” This is the royal law of love. Jesus manifested this love by taking *all* of our sins, *all* of our perversions, and *all* of our guilt upon Himself on the cross at Calvary. That was the royal law of love in action.

It is one thing for me to receive this love, but what a magnificent thing it is when I become the *revelation* of perfect love to others as a living epistle (2 Corinthians 3:3). Pharisaism, legalism, criticism, slander, gossip, and guilt can be completely erased when I begin to reveal the Son of God in His *true* nature of grace, of love, and of mercy. Now, though a person has failed seven times a day in one area of sin, he is able to get up and receive the righteousness of God which comes by faith (Romans 10:6).

If I fulfill the royal law of love—“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”—then anything that I want for myself, I will do for my wife, because she is my first neighbor. I will love her as I

love myself, and she will love me as she loves herself. The royal law of love also applies to children as they are reared up under the stewardship of grace. To live outside the royal law is to be a respecter of persons—giving to those who can give in return but withholding from the needy. “But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are [convicted] of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:9-10).

Consider James 2:11: “For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.” Do you realize what this means? If I offend any one of the Ten Commandments, I have broken the entire law. The truth is, we do that all the time. It is vital for us to understand this passage if we are going to truly understand the narrow way and the strait gate.

The Law of Liberty

“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty” (James 2:12).

The law of liberty means that the royal law of love has eternally paid for every sin and doesn't

keep a record of them. “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? *But there is forgiveness with thee*, that thou mayest be feared [(trusted)]” (Psalm 130:3-4).

We are to speak and do as those who are judged by the law of liberty. The key in understanding the law of liberty is in James 2:13: “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and *mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*” After we have been cleansed by the blood of Christ and received forgiveness for every sin we have ever committed, why would we want to turn around and judge people without mercy? Yet the Church today is filled with people who have no understanding of the royal law of love and the perfect law of liberty.

If a Christian judges without mercy, he will be judged without mercy. Can you imagine standing in the Throne Room of God as a believer saved “so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15), and having God say to you, “I saved you through unconditional grace and mercy, but you did not show mercy to others. The people who were around you never got to know My heart. They never knew My life. They never knew what I was like, because you didn’t show them mercy.”

“But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:15-18).

This is saying that when I turn to the Lord, I have the liberty to live in grace and to be pure, liberty to love and to think properly. I have liberty not to lust and not to consider fornication at all. I have liberty to be kind and forgiving, even to turn the other cheek. I have liberty to trust God in every situation. The royal law of love combined with the perfect law of liberty—where mercy rejoices against judgment—is the most magnificent wonder of God ever revealed to man.

Chapter Three

LIBERTY TO REVEAL GOD'S NATURE BY OUR WORKS

“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:15-17).

The book of James has been referred to as the “epistle of straw,” having an emphasis on works rather than grace as the basis for our justification. Some scholars assert that this epistle is not in harmony with Paul’s teaching on grace. But if we have received the grace of God and the love of God, James 2:15-17 would not be interpreted as a system of works. This is what we need to ask: Are we being good stewards of the manifold grace of God and the royal law of love? Do we live in the perfect law of liberty? Is

grace, through the Person of Jesus Christ, doing an effectual work in me? Am I manifesting God's nature as I interact with those around me?

James 2:20 says, however, that "faith without works is dead." What "works" does this verse refer to?

The Work of God is to Believe

When the disciples asked Jesus, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (John 6:28), Jesus said to them, "*This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent*" (verse 29). The work of God is believing in a non-meritorious system. It is believing in grace "plus nothing" and receiving unconditional love. It is simply sharing God's love through the filling of the Holy Spirit.

There is no contradiction when we compare line upon line and precept upon precept (Isaiah 28:10): Faith without works—without revealing God's life—is dead.

James wrote, "Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith *by* my works" (James 2:18). To James, his "faith by works" meant a faith that reveals mercy. The entire theme of James 2 is the royal law of love and mercy that rejoices against judgment (verses 12

and 13).

If we were to ask God today, “Lord, what do you desire?” He would say, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6). Jesus quoted this verse in Matthew 9:13 when He said to the self-righteous Pharisees, “Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” The original Greek is translated, “Go and study what I am saying. I did not come to call the righteous but to call sinners to repent—to change their mind about mercy!”

Grace Produces Joy on the Way

The substance of these verses goes way beyond any commentaries that mix in works of the flesh with their interpretation. Everything God offers us is based on the unbelievable, unsearchable riches of His grace. When we begin to receive grace upon grace, love upon love, and forgiveness upon forgiveness, then the nature of God, through His promises, begins to penetrate the very soul of our being and the very depth of our hearts. We begin to relax as we are filled with joy, living in Faith Rest.

No failure can remove His grace from us. No mistakes can disannul it. Because Jesus Christ is

in us, the process of growth goes on. Our way is enjoyable because we are being conformed to Jesus Christ's image on the journey. We are becoming the epistles of the nature of God. From eternity past to eternity future, God Almighty has included us in His perfect plan to reveal His perfect will through His nature of grace and love.

Faith that does not reveal the character of Calvary is vain. But it is a joy just to obey God and be upheld in our own integrity (see Psalm 41:12). The Psalmist said in verse 11 of Psalm 41, "I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me."

"Trust in [the Lord] at all times," says Psalm 62:8. The Lord will always come through because He cannot do anything but love us with His love. His love casts out fear. It takes care of guilt. It will take care of our weaknesses. It will take care of everything, once we begin to be occupied with Who God is in His essence and nature. When we look to Christ, we will embrace the One who is all and in all (Colossians 3:11).

The Nature of Christ's Love

Song of Solomon 2:6 says, "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me." This is a picture of the Lord Jesus

Christ embracing a believer, showing how much He cares for us individually. Tears ran down His face as Jesus gazed down at Jerusalem, longing for Israel to be saved (Luke 19:41).

God desires so much to get through to each one of us on a personal basis. Consider Jesus' words as He wept over Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, *and ye would not!*"

Jesus was weeping for a city filled with people who did not know Him or understand that he was full of grace. They did not know that He represented the Father's love when He spoke these words:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matthew 11:28-29). God's one desire is to give His people mercy and rest.

As we begin to understand the narrow way of grace, our fellowship becomes sweeter. We no longer need to sublimate through worldly diversions, because His grace satisfies completely. His

ways are past finding out. There is no way we can measure grace because we haven't begun to understand what God is like. The richness of our relationship can only be measured by the unsearchable riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:8*b*).

God will allow us to go down to the bottom of a pit so we can really get to know Him. Those who have been forgiven much, love much (Luke 7:47). God never plans our failures, but He allows them so that we can see that His love is genuine at all times.

Let us enter into the royal law of love and reveal mercy that rejoices against judgment to everyone we see. This is the narrow way of grace.

CONCLUSION

Grace promotes and magnifies the life of Christ while we are on the earth. Those who walk in grace will not accept an accusation against themselves or others, nor will they receive an evil report.

On the narrow way, everything is manifested in the light of what God has done for His creation. We can see that in God's economy, one soul is worth more than all the world. Therefore, we desire to narrowly define our thinking and our speaking to that which edifies and supplies grace to the hearer. Every vain imagination, any thought that exalts itself against the grace God has given to us is cast down. Every negative impression against ourselves is to be cast away.

May our fellowship become so close to Him that immediately, in every situation, we will hear the voice of the Spirit of Grace saying: "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isaiah 30:21).