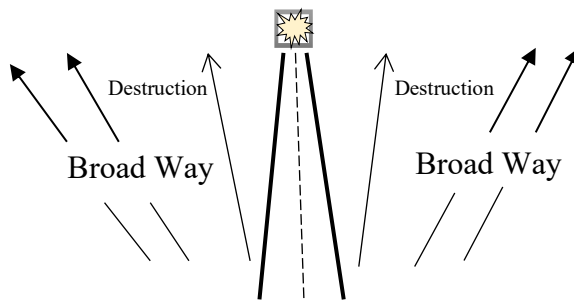


~ Part Four ~

Side Roads that Miss the Mark

Jesus is the Narrow Gate



Jesus poignantly described the way to the Father, stating in John 14:6, “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*” Later, Jesus illustrated His statement using a word picture in Matthew 7:13-14. Jesus is the narrow gate. “*You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell¹ is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.*”

According to these scriptures and others, Jesus is the narrow gate. Entering by the narrow gate represents the way to know God and to experience His infinite love. The invitation to enter by the narrow gate is extended to every person. *Every person is invited* to enter God’s kingdom through the narrow gate; no one needs to miss heaven. God wants us to experience His love, so that is why He has given us a clear and precise way to know Him.

**Side Road #4 The most deceptive of all,
“I am a good enough person to get into heaven without Jesus.”**

One of the largest, widest side roads is trying to please God through merit—“*I can do this myself—I can gain God’s favor without Jesus.*” The primary reason for this side road is that most people feel confident that being a good person is enough to “appease” God and therefore get into heaven. Throughout the ages, and across all cultures, “being good enough” is engrained in us from a very early age. Whether at home, work, or school, our good performance provides us with a way to receive approval, acceptance, and even promotion, so it makes sense that we believe the idea so strongly.

The confusion comes because the Bible teaches a lot about doing good deeds. It’s just that some people mistakenly believe that the good works they do provide the way to be saved. Good works and salvation must be rightly related, or we default to self-righteousness, which denies God and His plan to save us. The book of James 2:14-26 tells us that good works demonstrate that we are saved, but good works are not how we are saved.

I’ve had this word picture described many times. An ancient counterbalance scale depicts a person’s good deeds on one side of the scale and the person’s sins and other bad deeds on the counterbalance. An assertion is made, “I figure that if my good deeds outweigh the bad, then God is going to let me into heaven.” Of course, the deadly deception is in having a false hope—*having a false hope is no hope at all.*



I mentioned earlier that when we wrongly approach God, avoiding His way to Him, we are, in fact, rejecting Him. Scripture mentions this assertion many times and in many ways. The most poignant is in Matthew 7:21-23, where Jesus taught on true discipleship. Here, Jesus emphatically

¹ The NKJ translation says, “...the way that leads to destruction.”

states that He will disregard those He does not know, even though they have done good works in His name. Jesus' moving assertion cuts through our self-righteous motives. He addresses the inherent inward determination to try to please Him through good works without *knowing* Him—an attempt to gain His acceptance on our terms.

A paraphrase of several Scripture references on the topic of self-righteousness would read like this, “If you think you can be made right in God’s sight, by the things you do to please Him, then you do not need God at all, nor do you understand who He is.” Romans 2:9 says it this way, “*Salvation is not a reward for the good things we do, so none of us can boast about it.*” Jesus is the only solution to the human sin problem; Jesus is the one constant in God’s plan to save you. Any genuine Christian will gladly acknowledge that Jesus is the sole answer for inner peace, joy, as well as the assurance of eternal reward.

The truth is we need God because He is the only One who can make us right with Him. Our relationship with God is not about doing good, but about knowing Him. A pastor once said, “We are human beings and not human doings.”

Most of the people that I know are good people. In fact, some of the finest people I know aren’t professing Christians. What am I trying to say? Using a math analogy, we must take “merit” and “being good enough” out of the salvation equation because these efforts are not part of how the solution is calculated. This means that if you are one of the amazing people who leads a good respectable life, please know that you are applauded for your personal acts of goodness; however, self-righteous deeds are simply not part of the salvation equation.

Solving the salvation equation is not within a human’s ability to accomplish. It would be like taking your three-year-old child with you to visit your stockbroker. Your child is simply unable to contribute to your business transaction no matter how cute and bubbly he or she is.

This also means that we should not consider a person’s worthiness for heaven based on how good he or she appears. Doing so can be deceiving. I once had a neighbor who was one of those amazingly good people. He fit the description of a Christian... until I mentioned Jesus. I sincerely thought he would appreciate what I had to say because we had talked about God on many occasions. The change in his demeanor was dramatic and hostile. He became furious that I would include Jesus in *his* salvation equation.

Please consider the other side of the “I’m good enough” coin. This side of the coin says, “I have no need for God; I’m doing just fine without Him.” There is no expressed desire to please God. As compelling as God’s promises are, some might say, “I am a good person; that should be enough,” followed by, “I don’t need Jesus.” If a person feels that he or she doesn’t “need” God, then a natural human response would be to turn a deaf ear to Him. In other words, each of us must come to the place where we recognize our need for a savior before we can truly start a personal journey with Him. Interestingly, the “I don’t need God” mindset may sometimes lead to extra efforts to prove it, often going to extremes to be seen as a good person. I have done it; we all have done it. —Ω

 Information and Revelation
 Application and Transformation

Heavenly Father, thank You for providing a clear and precise way to know You. My prayer is that You would keep me in the way. LORD, help me seek You and You only so that my good works will spring from our close relationship and not through any attempt to appease You. Help me when I lean to my own understanding and attempt to gain Your favor, acceptance and Your love on my terms, veering off the path You have for me—I do not want have a false hope of heaven! LORD, I ask You to transform my heart, so that I want to serve You through our love relationship and not through a sense of obligation. Help me know how to surrender to Your call to come up ever higher to You. I proclaim Your love and make these proclamations in Jesus’ name. Amen.