

The Path of the Just

By Jonathan Taylor

The most significant reference to paths in the Bible is undoubtedly found in Matthew 7:13-14: “Enter ye in at the strait 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.”

The words of Jesus clarify that there are only two paths; the path of the wicked is rather easy to define. The following verses give us some insight:

“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”—Proverbs 14:12.

“Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.”—Proverbs 4:14-17.

Let us first note that a sign of the wrong path is confidence; for the way seems right. *Second*, walking the path of wickedness is also marked with sleepless nights. *Lastly*, those who walk this path feed on wickedness and live by the doctrine of violence. How do they feed on wickedness? The senses are the mouth of the mind—watching, hearing, doing; these are how one feeds on wickedness.

For this reason, Isaiah 33:14-15 records the following:

“The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from

hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil.”

Here we see two classes of people: sinners who suffer from sleepless nights because of fear and the righteous. These sinners are classified as hypocrites because they do not walk righteously, speak uprightly, despise profit from oppression, shake bribes from their hands in disgust, stop their ears from hearing of violence, or shut their eyes from seeing evil. They eat the bread of wickedness. By beholding, they become changed until they are experienced in the doctrine of violence. Like Cain, when called to self-mastery, they redefine it as the mastery of their brother through violence. The path of violence hides itself under the guise of the Path of the Just; for both are known as “self-mastery.”

What is the Path of the Just? Many would say “The Bible” because of the following verse: “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105). You will notice that the Word of God here is not a path, but a light to show what path we are walking on. Though we have confidence that we are walking uprightly, the Bible says: “Ponder [seriously think about and consider] the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.”—Proverbs 4:26.

We see that, in our pondering, the evil way will often seem right; so we need a second opinion, a pondering partner if you will. The Word of God will give us insight because it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. For this reason, the Path of the Just is described as a shining light:

“But the Path of the Just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”—Proverbs 4:18.

The more light we receive from the Bible, the more established we are in the Path of the

Just. This shows a clear line of progression, brighter and brighter. It is a path to enlightenment. If the Bible, as a whole, is not the Path of the Just, what would the path be?

“Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments; for therein do I delight.”—Psalms 119:35.

The Path of the Just is everything except disobeying the Ten Commandments. That doesn't seem like a very small path, does it? And yet Jesus says, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24). Why is it so hard to enter? “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). The way of wickedness seems right because our minds are deceitful above all things, which would include Satan himself.

Where does this other path lead? to righteousness. What is righteousness? Righteousness is holiness, likeness to God, and “God is love” (1 John 4:16). It is conformity to the law of God: “For all Thy commandments are righteousness” (Psalm 119:172), and “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). “Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him.” —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing 8*

Note what Paul says about the commandments:

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”—1 Timothy 1:5.

The understanding of this verse is that the purpose of the commandment is to lead people to possess love and faith that are not hypocritical.

There are some who say the commandment referred to here is the gospel. Note the following verse comparison:

“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Corinthians 7:19) is the important thing.

“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”—Galatians 5:6.

We see the path begin with faith and works through love, our love of Jesus, and is fulfilled in love for our enemies, supreme love for God, and unselfish love for man. Is there anything else? Paul, describing the things that we will take with us to heaven, gives us three things in order:

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”—1 Corinthians 13:13.

We know that faith works by love; and this is fulfilled in obedience to the commandments of God. We know the commandments are the path. Where do we, then, get hope from?

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”—Romans 5:1-5.

We come to God by faith. We are justified by faith and led to obedience (Romans 16:26). Then we are tempted with fiery trials; and, through “patient continuance in well doing” (Romans 2:7), we gain an experience of victory. That experience is the source of our hope; for “if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us” (2 Timothy 2:12).

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”—James 1:2-4.

In victory we portray the glory of God, His character of love. This love is placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit “whom God hath given to them that obey Him” (Acts 5:32).

We will see, from the Bible, where the path begins, ends, and even the midway marker!

Here is the big question: What are the steps? “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.”—2 Peter 1:5-7.

Is this really the Path of the Just? It begins with faith, and ends with love; and the midway marker is patience, from which we obtain experience and hope. This entire discourse is a parallel of what is known as Aristotelean ethics (Aristotle’s set of principles of moral values and right conduct] Aristotle was a revered Greek philosopher that lived about 400 years before second Peter was written. His teachings were seen as very important among the Greeks. Oddly enough a number of times Paul either directly or indirectly refers to Greek philosopher’s quotes also.

His ethics begins with the function, known in Greek as “ergon”; this is the active way something does what it does. How are the commandments accomplished in us? Christ in you through the Holy Spirit. This is how the commandments are fulfilled in us; it is the *ergon*. *Next is the Greek word, telos: the inherent purpose for the existence of something.* This Greek word is used in Romans 10:4: “For Christ is the end [*telos*] of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Also see: 1 Timothy 1:5-7:

“Now the end [*telos*] of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling [discordant, harsh, or unpleasant]; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” [1 Timothy 1:5-7).—7 *Manuscript Releases, 176.*

The inherent purpose for the existence of the law is to grow in us love and real faith.

Next is the Greek word, phronesis, a kind of practical wisdom on how to accomplish a telos (purpose). 2 Peter 1:5-7 is the *phronesis*, the practical wisdom, to accomplish the Ten Commandments. Basically *phronesis*, in this sense, is our part in the plan of salvation. Why am I talking about Aristotelean ethics as a Christian? This is an intentional parallel to reach the Greek audience; and one step in the practical wisdom found in 2 Peter, cannot be properly understood without noting the parallel. Now let us take each step in detail and discover the purpose of the path.

Faith: We will have a quick definition of faith without going into much deep detail. Note the following verses:

“But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.”—Romans 16:26.

A fruit of faith is obedience.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”—Hebrews 11:6.

Another fruit of faith is the favor of God in the form of grace: “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.”—Romans 5:2.

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”—Hebrews 11:3.

Paul places the first sign of faith as the belief that God formed the world and that He is the Creator. This understanding establishes God as one who has the power to create with words and, by extension, as someone who cannot lie. It also establishes God as our Creator and gives Him authority over us, making Him the one who defines our purpose (*telos*; see Matthew 5:48). In short, faith is the moral conviction that God has the right to tell us what to do, and will give us the power to accomplish what He says. All examples of unbelief fall into three categories: 1. disbelief in His power (example: John the Baptists’ father in Luke 1), 2. disbelief in His authority (exam-

ple: Naaman in 2 Kings 5), and 3. disbelief in both (example: Pharaoh in Romans 9:17-18). For this reason, the centurion (see Matthew 8:8-13) is praised for his faith, He recognizes Jesus as the one who represented the infinite Creator God (for further study read *Desire of Ages*, chapter 32, pp. 315-320). Let's parallel this understanding with the first verse of Hebrews 11: Faith is standing in the power of God unto salvation (by grace) and it gives evidence of His authority (by obedience).

Let's take another look at Romans 5:1-2: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Therefore, we are declared innocent because of our moral conviction in the power and authority of God; thus, we have peace with God through Jesus. That's right; we have access to this undeserved peace through our belief in the forgiving and empowering blood of Jesus as our Saviour and Creator, whose authority as High Priest and Lord we have recognized. And we rejoice in the hope of the completion of the mystery of godliness, which is Christ in us—the hope of glory.

Virtue: We are to add virtue to our moral conviction of the power and authority of God. At first, virtue meant manliness or valor; but, over time, it settled into the sense of moral excellence.

Here is how Ellen White defines the word, virtue: "Having received the faith of the gospel, the next work of the believer is to add to his character virtue, and thus cleanse the heart and prepare the mind for the reception of the knowledge of God."—*Acts of the Apostles*, 530.

The Greek word used is *arete*. It coincidentally is the next step in Aristotelian ethics. *Arete* is about decision-making; it involves breaking the chain of habit by forcing all actions into conscious thought. Jesus wants us to be responsible for our own decisions by looking at the context of the situation and selecting the most virtuous actions for building excellence in character. This is the virtue

we are to receive; for it cleanses our hearts of all excuses and prepares our minds for the knowledge of God. When we ask, "What is the most virtuous action to build good character?" The character of Jesus forth shines brightly from the Bible.

Knowledge: As we ask for the wisdom to make good choices, God reveals His knowledge to us. This knowledge is twofold: it is the glory of God's character seen in the face of Jesus Christ; it is also the knowledge of His exceedingly precious promises that contains the power we need to escape the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. These promises are the only means by which we can attain the nature of God: love. Once anyone reaches this point on the path of the Just, a decision must be made:

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."—Isaiah 55:7-9.

God calls us to be His children. When the Pharisees claimed to be children of Abraham, Jesus told them: "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham."—John 8:39.

The children of God can only be so if they forsake their wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts and replace them with God's righteous thoughts and just ways. Only then can they be classified as lovers of *philosophia*, the Greek term for wisdom.

Temperance: This is a fruit of the Spirit, which is responsible for the power we need to forsake our unrighteous ways.

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."—2 Timothy 1:7.

Lovers of wisdom are lovers of Jesus Christ; for He is "made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The Path of the Just

Those who refuse this gift of power henceforth have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof. Many Christians stumble at this step; they find themselves lovers of the pleasures of sin more than lovers of God.

“The great mystery to me is not that man must be born again to see [the] kingdom of God, but that he should be unwilling to accept the help that Jesus left the courts of heaven and came to the world to give him; that he should feel so perfectly content and satisfied without His help. Jesus knows that if the world with its pride, its ambition, and its violence possesses the soul, man can have no rest, no peace, no happiness. There is no true elevation of character outside of Christ. There is no peace, happiness, or joy attainable for man which can bear comparison for a moment with that which the possessor may find in Christ.”—4 *Manuscript Releases*, 231.

If you have found yourself a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God, I urge you to look to the cross. There you will see something that pleasure has never done for you, something pleasure cannot give you. This is the only way to escape the trap of Hedonism (pursuit of, or devotion to, pleasure—especially to the pleasures of the senses).

“We love Him, because He first loved us.”—1 John 4:19.

If we don’t understand His love for us, all the rebukes in the Bible cannot awaken love in us. This step is the point of commitment, where one decides whether or not to present himself as a sacrifice, to enter the new covenant, and to test the will of God. Before this point, there has not been a conversion “because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God” (Psalm 55:19).

Patience: “In your patience possess ye your souls.”—Luke 21:19.

The key to a godly life is not temperance but patience; we “bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15).

Overcoming our flaws does not make us wise; for a dog throws up that which makes it sick. It is patient continuance in well-doing, not returning to the vomit, that makes one godly. Faith leads to action; this action is temperance, and “the trying of your faith works patience” (James 1:3). Notice the defining characteristic of the 144,000:

“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”—Revelation 14:12.

The patience of the saints is demonstrated in keeping the commandments of God; therefore, patience is the defining characteristic of the 144,000. With Christ, all are called who have chosen to commit themselves to Him and patiently remain faithful. Patience is another fruit of the Spirit, a gift from God that is given to those who strive to walk the path of the Just. Paul wrote to some who had failed at this point saying:

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.... But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”—Hebrews 10:35-36, 39.

Godliness: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”—1 Timothy 3:16.

“Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”—

Colossians 1:26-27.

Godliness is a mystery; it is Christ in us, the reception of the mind of Christ. It is acquired, at this point in the path of the Just, by restoring man into the likeness of His maker. How God can take a fallen sinful man, who is at enmity with Him, and recreate within that man the divine nature is a mystery, “which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12).

This mystery is prophesied to be fulfilled very soon: “But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets.”—Revelation 10:7.

We have an unparalleled opportunity to be among the patient and faithful, among those who fulfill the purpose, the *telos* that Christ has called us to. In these, the mystery of God is finished.

Brotherly kindness, brotherly love: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”—1 John 3:16-17.

It was in answer to the question of God that Cain, that great rebel of the human race, answered, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Thus, God, by question, places the responsibility of keeping our brother at our own feet. We are not our brother’s conscience, but our brother’s keeper. Jesus, in answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” pointed to the questioners’ enemies and said, “Them.” We are all descendants of Adam. We are all brothers; “for He [Christ] is not ashamed to call us brethren” (Hebrews 2:11).

“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another [Matthew 25:31-32]. Thus Christ on the Mount of Olives pictured to His disciples the scene of the great judgment day. And He represented its

decision as turning upon one point. When the nations are gathered before Him, there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering.”—*Desire of Ages* 637.

Charity (love): “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”—Matthew 7:12.

Love is action, love is doing for others what you would want done for you. Love is the spirit of the law. The Ten Commandments teach us to love God with all our hearts and love our neighbor as ourselves.

“Jesus, who died for us, loves us with a love that is infinite; and we must love one another. We must put away all selfishness, and work together in love and unity. We have loved and petted ourselves, and excused ourselves in waywardness; but we have been unmerciful toward our brethren, who may not be as faulty as ourselves. The Lord loves us, and bears with us, even when we are ungrateful to Him, forgetful of His mercies, wickedly unbelieving; but consider, brethren, how relentless [persistent in our own way of thinking and doing, even when it is not necessary to antagonize our brother who reacts differently than we do] we are to one another, how pitiless [shows no pity or kindness, heartless]; how we hurt and wound one another, when we should love as Christ has loved us. Let us make a complete change. Let us cultivate the precious plant of love and delight to help one another. We must be kind, forbearing, patient with one another’s errors; we must keep our sharp criticisms for ourselves, but hope all things, believe all things, of our brethren.”—*Gospel Workers* (1892), 429-430.

“The precious plant of love is to be treated tenderly, and it will become strong and vigorous and rich in fruit-bearing, giving expression to the whole character.”—*1 Mind, Character, and Personality*, 212.

“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—2 Peter 1:8.

Peter, under the inspiration of the Spirit, gives us the key to bearing fruit. This is a tremendous blessing; there is no need for us to be unfruitful as the Jewish nation was when Christ came. We have taken a deeper look at the role each step takes in helping us rise to the glory of our high calling in Christ Jesus.

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”—Matthew 5:48.

Christ has made a way to obtain the glory of the Father’s perfection:

“But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Peter 1:9). To get all the characteristics here, read all the first 10 verses of this chapter.

Blindness is one of the characteristics of the Laodicean church. Those who fail to maintain their salvation in this acceptable manner cannot perceive the glory of the purpose which they have been called to accomplish. They have forgotten that they were cleansed of their sins. Here we see the importance of forgiveness in the plan of salvation. One cannot run the race with patience unless they know they have been forgiven of their sins. For this reason, God arranged the plan of salvation in such a way that His justice forgives the guilty (1 John 1:9); for His justice is what the guilty fear. Christ paid the price; therefore, it would be unjust to charge more than the price. Praise God for His mercy and loving kindness!

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”—2 Peter 1:10.

The Path of the Just is a difficult one: “because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14). Of those few that find it, a large number do not succeed in entering: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter

in, and shall not be able.”—Luke 13:24.

None need to fail in attaining eternal life; for we have been given clear instructions on what to do:

“God has called His people to glory and virtue, and these will be manifest in the lives of all who are truly connected with Him. Having become partakers of the heavenly gift, they are to go on unto perfection, being “kept by the power of God through faith.” 1 Peter 1:5. It is the glory of God to give His virtue to His children. He desires to see men and women reaching the highest standard; and when by faith they lay hold of the power of Christ, when they plead His unfailing promises, and claim them as their own, when with an importunity [persistence in requesting] that will not be denied they seek for the power of the Holy Spirit, they will be made complete in Him.”—*Acts of the Apostles*, 530.

“None need fail of attaining, in his sphere, to perfection of Christian character. By the sacrifice of Christ, provision has been made for the believer to receive all things that pertain to life and godliness. God calls upon us to reach the standard of perfection and places before us the example of Christ’s character. In His humanity, perfected by a life of constant resistance of evil, the Saviour showed that through co-operation with Divinity, human beings may in this life attain to perfection of character. This is God’s assurance to us that we, too, may obtain complete victory.”—*Acts of Apostles*, 531.

“The work of transformation from unholiness to holiness is a continuous one. Day by day God labors for man’s sanctification, and man is to co-operate with Him, putting forth persevering efforts in the cultivation of right habits. He is to add grace to grace; and as he thus works on the plan of addition, God works for him on the plan of multiplication. Our Saviour is always ready to hear and answer the prayer of the contrite heart, and grace and peace are multiplied to His faithful ones.

Gladly He grants them the blessings they need in their struggle against the evils that beset them.”—*Acts of the Apostles*, 532.

The path of the wicked is one of folly, recklessness, and immorality. Proverbs describes the path of the Just as one of wisdom, discretion, and righteousness. We have all the help that God can give us and the promises He has given us in His Word. All people can be free from guilt and sin (righteousness) and become victorious if we comply with the conditions set before us in the Scriptures.

“Shall we not regard the mercy of God? What more could He [God] do? Let us place ourselves in right relation to Him who has loved us with amazing love. Let us avail ourselves of the means provided for us that we may be transformed into His likeness, and be restored to fellowship with the ministering angels, to harmony and communion with the Father and the Son.”—*Steps to Christ*, 22.

Let us consider all that the Godhead has done for us and Their plans for us. Let us not disappoint Them. —*Jonathan Taylor*

Fight the Good Fight By Connie Campbell Bratcher

Let us fight the good fight of faith
As God’s Spirit leads the way.
Put on the whole armor of God
For protection every day.
Fight for righteousness in the land,
That all people would be free.
Trust God’s powerful, sovereign hand;
For He holds our destiny.

Evil is conquered, not by might,
But by God’s Spirit and prayer.
As we follow the shepherd’s lead,
He will keep us in His care.
The King of Glory is with us;
In His presence we abide.
When we fight His holy battle,
We’re on the winning side.

Be strong in the Lord and stand firm,
Obeying the Father’s will.
The foe may destroy the body;
But the soul, he cannot kill.
Faith is the victory, my friend;
It will set the captive free.
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