

Christian Character Building Messages

The Path of Life – The Conflicting Paths

Ken Birks, Pastor/Teacher

I. Introductory Remarks.

Psalms 16:11 *You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

In this message I would like to draw a picture for you in your minds that will enable you to see more clearly where you are at on the path of life. Is this scripture a testimony of your life, or do you find yourself falling short of this promise? It may be that you have made a few wrong turns or took some detours that have caused you to veer off course, or it may be that you will find your feet still holding securely to the path of life wherein righteous, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit dwells.

Most of us are here today because of a significant choice that we made. There was a time when we came to a fork in the road and saw that one way was narrow and the other way was wide and more traveled on.

Matthew 7:13-14 *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

By making the right choice we found the way that leads to eternal salvation, the abundant life. It was the condition of our heart that caused us to turn in the right direction. It was not something that you toss a coin, and if it's heads you go this way and tails the other way. Many people are deceived about which way to turn, because the other path has more traffic on it, but somehow your heart was prepared to find the narrow path.

The problem we as Christians have, though, is that we are all like sheep that have a tendency to go astray from time to time and we lose sight of the path that continually leads in the direction of the Lord's mercy and fruitfulness. It is only as we stay on the straight and the narrow that we continually receive encouragement, refreshing and strength to go on.

In this message I want to talk about two different paths that we as Christians must continually choose between.

II. The Two Paths We Must Continually Choose Between.

As I look out among you that are here today, you could probably be divided up into two categories. There are those of you who are running the race with fervency and zeal and bearing fruit, some 100 fold, some 60 fold and some 30 fold. And there are those who are worn out, tired and disillusioned. Major sin still persists in your life, you get prayed for, but there is little or no victory. Those of you who are running with zeal and fervency are walking in victory with a confidence that nothing can hold you back. What's the difference? The difference is the path. The Bible tells us to ponder the path of our feet.

Proverbs 4:26 *Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established.*

As Christians there are two paths that we continually come in contact with each and every day of our lives. One is the path of self-gratification and the other is the path of self-denial.

Which path do you find yourself on most often or which path is your life being shaped by? It depends which one you spend most of your time on.

The choices we make each day of our lives determine which path we will spend our time on. In you endeavor to walk in the Spirit on the path of life there is a continuous struggle between the Spirit and the flesh. Therefore it is very important to ponder the path of your feet.

Galatians 5:17 *For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.*

1. The Path of Self-Gratification.

This is the path of self – will, self-indulgence, self-gratification, self-sufficiency and self-seeking. From the carnal perspective this path looks real good. It is also the path that makes the most sense to your carnal understanding. But as you begin to travel it, it begins to turn bitter and sour and often becomes a tangled web of misery. Our first inclination is to take this path because it offers the least resistance, it's wider, it's easier and it's even clearer.

This path is like a mirage or a dream in which you see all these wonderful enticing foods, but never seem to satisfy because there is no substance. It's all vanity and worthlessness.

The example of Lot typifies this path. Lot chose that which looked good to the natural eye, but it became a snare unto him.

Genesis 13:10 *And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar.*

Lot was looking through the eyes of his fleshly and carnal understanding and missed God's true purpose for his life and as a result experienced a disastrous outcome of his life.

This path led him in the way of sinners and flirting with the world and caused him to have his house broken into by the strong man, whereas Abraham had to rescue him. As a result of this path he had no testimony.

All that he had was destroyed and burned and eventually lost all of his family. There was absolutely no blessing and deliverance for him on this path.

Those who travel this path wonder where God's blessings and riches are. They never seem to really experience the goodness of God. There is no deliverance from bondage.

There is a continuous cycle of falling and repenting and trying to get back up. After awhile they grow weary of the struggle and settle into being a very lukewarm Christian. This is a path that will eventually lead to destruction for you just as it did for Lot.

Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*

2. The Path of Self-Denial.

The cross of Christ is found on this path, which begins with death to self and doesn't look all that appetizing or fun. After the initial death the path opens up to the beauty and the glory of all that God has for us. All that pertains unto life and godliness is found on this path. All of the blessings of God and spiritual fruit we could ever want lie on this path.

Psalms 68:19 *Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loads us with benefits, The God of our salvation! Selah.*

Hebrews 11:24-26 *By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.*

Moses experienced just about everything there was to experience from God, because of his desire to continually walk in this path that esteemed the reproach of Christ. It is the same for us.

Matthew 16:24-25 *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*

This is the path where we experience the abundance of life that Jesus talked about. It's the path where we experience true deliverance from our sin nature and begin to take on the very character of Christ.

John 8:31-32 *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

Galatians 5:16 *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*

On this path we continually identify with the purpose of God. There is a genuine desire to go forth unto maturity, and to be thoroughly equipped for the ministry and the calling Christ has for us. We have a desire to grow up in all aspects unto Him.

The ministry and working of the Holy Spirit within us is on an inexorable course to produce Christ's likeness within us. When we stray onto the other path we are frustrating the grace of God to the degree that Christ can't be released to purify and cleanse us.

III. How To Stay On The Right Path.

As I mentioned earlier, we are all like sheep and have a tendency to stray from time to time. If we want to stay on the path of life, we must continually guard our steps. Here two very important things we can do to stay on the right path.

1. Keep Your Eyes On Christ & His Purpose.

Colossians 3:1-2 *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*

Illustration of the Hunting Dog.

A man bought a new hunting dog. Eager to see how he would perform, he took him out to track a bear. No sooner had they gotten into the woods than the dog picked up the trail. Suddenly he stopped, sniffed the ground, and headed in a new direction. He had caught the scent of a deer that had crossed the bear's path. A few moments later he halted again, this time smelling a rabbit that had crossed the path of the deer. And so, on and on it went until finally the breathless hunter caught up with his dog, only to find him barking triumphantly down the hole of a field mouse.

Sometimes we as Christians are like that. We start out with high resolve, keeping Christ first in our lives. But soon our attention is diverted to things of lesser importance. One pursuit leads to another until we've strayed far from our original purpose.

Psalms 119:37 *Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, And revive me in Your way.*

2. We Must Realize That Death To Self Is A Daily Thing.

1 Corinthians 15:31 *I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.*

What we have to realize is that staying on the right path involves a daily commitment. If we are not daily pondering our path and dying to self it is very easy to wander off the path and find ourselves on the path of self-gratification once again. The important thing is that when we find ourselves on the path of self-gratification that we quickly examine ourselves and get back on the path of self-denial.

In closing we should ask ourselves, are the choices we make each day based on self-gratification or self-denial? Our character and who we are in God will be shaped by the path that these choices take us on.