

THE TWO WAYS



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A teacher surprised her class with an unusual lesson one day. As the children filed into the classroom, they saw a large tray of cupcakes on the table. All but one of them were cherry with pink icing and sprinkles on top. In the midst sat just one little plain-looking green-coloured cupcake. When the teacher passed the tray around, all the children chose the attractive pink cupcakes until the last person grudgingly accepted the small green cake nobody else wanted. Everyone started eating—and suddenly the room filled with howls of disgust.

Everyone was reacting to a horrible flavour, except for the guy with the ugly cake. He was looking rather befuddled as he licked his lips and gobbled down the last delicious crumbs. The smiling teacher admitted she had baked the pretty cakes with salt instead of sugar to make a point: life is about choices, so choose well. There will be consequences. She then produced another tray of cupcakes and this time everyone was happy!

The Bible makes the same point about life. There are two ways of life, and life consists of a choice between two things. Most people choose the first one, which looks appealing but turns out bitter. Few people opt for the other way, which seems unattractive but turns out sweet.

The two choices are God's way of asking us "How will you live? Which way will you walk?" He asks that question of all of us, after presenting us with a choice between two ways of life. It began rather graphically in the Garden of Eden with two trees available for Adam and Eve to choose from, the tree of Life and the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The two trees were close together, but worlds apart—if they ate of one they would die, and if they ate of the other they would have eternal life.

We have all had the same choice since. It's pretty simple really, isn't it? We have a choice of two ways of life—one leads to death, one leads to life. The Bible shows us this choice over and over again. It even starts, in Genesis 1, with *tohu and bohu*—formlessness and darkness, being contrasted with God's way of light and order.

In Genesis 3, Satan the serpent appears, and says to Eve to follow his way, his advice, rather than God's way.

In Chapter 4, we have Cain and Abel, who again clearly distinguish the two ways we can go—we can follow God's way of love, service and giving, or Cain's way, Man's way, of getting and greed. In that way, Abel and Cain in effect had the choice between the two trees too.

The Gospel can be simply summed up as a comparison of the two ways of life—the way of get and the way of give. This is so simple, but it is a brilliant philosophy of life, something to remember always, because every day of our lives we are confronted by those two choices! We are faced over and over again with the choice of doing things God's Way, the Way of Give, the Way of the Tree of Life, or doing it Man's Way, our human way, the Way of Get, the Way of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

By the time of Genesis 6, the whole world was following the Way of Man, the Way of sin, to such an extent they had to be flooded. But Noah and his family were following God's Way—so few people!

When God started working with the nation of Israel, He gave them the same choice between two ways. He gave them His laws, and said they could follow them, or reject them. One of the clearest descriptions of this choice they had, the same choice you and I have, is—Deuteronomy 30:15-19:

¹⁵“See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.”

Another clear description of the two ways of life, is found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, two chapters that give a list of Blessings that will be given to Israel if they obey God's laws, and Curses that will strike them if they disobey.

The books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles tell of the leaders of Israel and Judah who went God's way and prospered, and those who went the way of sin, and brought destruction on the land.

Then we come to Psalms 1 which describes the difference between the godly and the ungodly man, summarised in Verse 6 “For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.”

The book of Proverbs talks in chapter 9 about two women, wisdom and foolishness. Both have their own food, their own lifestyle, and both invite us to follow them. We need to choose between two ways.

Proverb after proverb compares and contrasts the two ways of life.

Proverbs 11:19 is an example. “Truly the righteous attain life, but whoever pursues evil finds death.”

The prophets also catalogue a list of examples of nations following God's Way and having peace, and promises of the future millennium, or nations following Man's Way that leads to destruction.

Isaiah has something interesting to say about it in, one of the ways is infinitely superior to the other!

Isaiah 55:6-9 ⁶“Seek the LORD while He may be found; call on him while He is near. ⁷Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and He will have mercy on them, and to our God, for He will freely pardon. ⁸“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Jeremiah 21:8 “Furthermore, tell the people, ‘This is what the LORD says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death.’”

So all the way through the Old Testament, the patriarchs, the law, the writings, the prophets, the poets, all ask us over and over again “Which way will you walk?” and give us the choice of two ways of life.

What about the New Testament? It continues the same theme. Notice what Jesus said, in Matthew 7:13-14 ¹³“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Just like the two trees in the Garden of Eden!

Eve took of the wrong tree, and that is what mankind has been doing ever since—because the serpent is still around to tempt us, and we all fall for his tricks just as Adam and Eve did! So the wrong way is the wide way, and many people enter it.

But a few people make the right choice, not through any inherent goodness of their own, but because the goodness of God calls them to repentance—God calls them and they respond. Even after we respond to God and begin eating of the tree of Life, the other tree is still there. We still have to make that choice every day of our lives. We can go the way of get, man's way, or the way of give, God's Way. Satan is still around, encouraging us to take the forbidden fruit.

But we have begun eating the tree of Life when we receive God's Holy Spirit. Hopefully we taste it and see it is good, and continue eating of it—but the other tree is always there, and it looks attractive and appealing. Interestingly, the next verses in Matthew 7 talk about two types of trees!

Matthew 7:17-20 ¹⁷ “Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.” Here we have the two ways of life contrasted again.

You can tell what tree people are eating of by the fruits of their lives. This gives new meaning to the phrase “We are what we eat.” When you think about it, that principle is just as true spiritually as it is physically.

If we take in good wholesome spiritual food—if we “think on these things”—whatsoever is good, lovely, honest, righteous, just, pure—concentrate on wholesome books and TV programs, spend time with godly people, study God's Word—then we will be making the right choices, taking of the tree of Life, and our lives will bear good fruits—the fruits of the Spirit.

But there are also evil fruits of the flesh, and those are the ones found where people have been eating of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Matthew 7 goes on to talk about the wise man who built his house on rock, and the foolish person who built their house on sand—again referring to just two ways of life.

Matthew 7:24-27 ²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Throughout the rest of the New Testament, we continue to read about the two ways of life.

Romans 12:9 “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.”

Romans 13:12 “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.” (Another way of describing the choice we have.)

We are told to put on the new man, put off the old man, over and over again we see the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ—there are just two ways of life; we can choose God's Way that leads to life, or Man's Way that leads to destruction!

Romans 7 is a classic passage where Paul described the difficulty of making the right choice. It sounds simple—to take one fruit and not the other, but in practice it can be a struggle, a war, because the evil way beckons us with great force.

Romans 7:21-26 ²¹“So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; ²³but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”

How can we be sure we choose the right way? Paul gives the big key in Verse 25. Jesus Christ is the key.

John 14:6 “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

The Way is actually a person—Jesus Christ! And He promises to live in us, if we ask Him to. If He is living in us, we will go the right way, because He is that Way! We will go the way of the Tree of Life, because He is the Tree of Life!

He doesn’t force us to go the right way against our will, but if we yield ourselves to Him and let Him live His life in us, we will always make the right choice!

Imagine Him telling a lie, belittling someone, being selfish, lazy, or impatient? No, it isn’t possible! So if He is having His Way in us, it will not be possible for us to go the wrong way!

As we progress through various scriptures on this theme, let’s move on to 1 John, and then finally take a look at the book of Revelation.

1 John 3:4 “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.”

Here are two ways again! The root meaning of the biblical words for sin is “to miss the mark, or miss the road, or the way.”

There are two ways of life. Living according to God’s laws leads us along the pathway of Godliness—the narrow way to eternal life. Rebelling against God’s law leads us along the pathway of sin, heading towards destruction. When we sin, we miss the mark, we go astray from God’s Way, we step off the path on to the wrong way.

The book of Revelation talks about the great end-time battle between God’s Way and the World’s Way. That spiritual battle going on inside us will become a physical battle where Babylon the Great—the world’s economic, political and religious system will be destroyed as Jesus Christ returns to set up His Kingdom.

Revelation 22:1-3A ¹“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be any curse.”

The Bible begins with a picture of an idyllic garden where grows a Tree of Life and a Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It ends with a picture of another idyllic garden.

Again, the Tree of Life will be there, but the other tree will be gone! There will only be one Way to live then, and only people who are happy to live God’s Way will be there.

If the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil led to death in the first garden, and it won’t even exist in the eternal garden, why would we want to live in that tree now?

But we do have the choice. Every day of our lives, and many times every day, we have the choice. It's a choice between two ways of life, two trees, God's Way and Man's Way, the way of death and the way of life.

The choice is yours! Let's choose Life!

