

## HOW CAN WE KNOW?

By Archie L. Duty via "Seek the Old Paths"

If God gives us directions to follow in the accomplishment of His will on any matter, we are to execute that action exactly as He directs without adding to or subtracting from the action.

As individuals and as the church (body of Christ), we are daily made aware of the many choices that must be made in choosing the way we will travel. What will be our guide? How can we know if the way we are traveling will lead us ultimately to that eternal home with our loving Father and the redeemed of all the ages?

Jesus himself identified the two ways every one must choose between and where each of them leads. *"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"* (Matt. 7:13-14). It would seem to naturally follow that a person would desire to enter in at the strait and narrow way leading to life everlasting. If so, the question still remains, what will be our guide... our own ingenuity? Are we clever enough to guide our own footsteps? Before we answer, "Yes, I can do that," let us note that familiar Scripture spoken by the writer of Proverbs, *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Prov. 14:12).

The narrow way must be walked with much care and watchfulness because it is constricted by many difficulties and troubles of life. If we therefore have the tendency to go our own way, the narrow way may well be missed. Remember Moses, the man chosen by God to lead His people out of bondage? As long as Moses followed God's instructions, all went well, at least until the day came when Moses substituted his own way in place of the way commanded by God. They were in Kadesh and there was no water for the congregation. The children of Israel, even the whole congregation gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. Moses and Aaron went unto the door of the tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them. The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, *"Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink"* (Numbers 20:7, 8). What was the reaction of Moses? And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, *"Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?"* And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also (Numbers 20:10, 11). Moses took credit for bringing forth water instead of giving honor to God and smote the rock rather than speaking to it as God had instructed. As a result God rendered this verdict: *"And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them"* (Numbers 20:12).

It is plain to see. There is only one way. It is a narrow way, to be sure, but it is God's way. We cannot substitute our own way. No matter how good and practical our way may seem to be. When God gives us the way to go, any other way is excluded.

Another simple example is the command given to Noah. *"Make thee an ark of gopher wood, rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch"* (Gen. 6:14). What was the reaction of Noah? Noah went the way commanded by God. *"Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he"* (Gen. 6:22). As a faithful follower of God, Noah would not use any other wood in the place of gopher wood. He may have wanted to, but he loved God so much he would not question His command in any way. It makes you wonder why anyone would question God's way in any regard. Surely God who created the heavens and the earth knows what is best. When He tells us the way to go, will we be like Moses and assert our own will or Noah and humbly and lovingly follow God?

Can anyone assume that the wall of Jericho would have fallen down flat had not Joshua and his men of war followed the instructions of the Lord exactly (Joshua 6)? Would they be justified in going around the city once? And instead of doing this for six days as commanded by the Lord, decide to do it only for five days? After all, they might have reasoned, "We need a day of rest before we go around seven times on the seventh day." We can easily resolve the error in such reasoning. The wall fell down because they followed the way the Lord had ordained without exception.

Many are the accounts given in the word of God concerning the actions ordained by God. The final requirement was this: *"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book"* (Rev. 22:18-19).

From these accounts, we can draw this conclusion. If God gives us directions to follow in the accomplishment of His will on any matter, we are to execute that action exactly as He directs without adding to or subtracting from the action. In other words, when God gives us a specific way to accomplish His will, any other specific way (ordained by man) would be excluded and would cause a person to leave the narrow pathway described above. This is sometimes referred to as the "Law of Exclusion."

James made it clear that a person cannot walk both pathways at the same time. He said, *"A double minded man is unstable in all his ways"* (James 1:8). Later in the same chapter, he identified the only path to follow: *"But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed"* (James 1:25).

Our hearts are saddened when we see the many departures from New Testament doctrine taken by some who would try to draw people away from the narrow way. Just after Jesus spoke concerning the narrow and broad ways, He made the following pronouncement: *"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves"* (Matt. 7:15).

Let me point out some of the more prevailing departures currently popular among churches referring to themselves as "Churches of Christ." First, there is the matter of the addition of instrumental music to the worship service. Nowhere are instruments of

music authorized in New Testament Scripture. All Scriptures referring to making music always refers to singing: *“What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also”* (I Cor. 14:15). *“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* (Eph. 5:19). *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”* (Col. 3:16). *“Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee”* (Heb. 2:12). Since God has given the way we are to “make music,” any other way (devised by man) would necessarily be excluded and would be an addition to the word of God and therefore prohibited.

Another prevailing example of a departure from God’s way is the matter of the role of women during worship services. Some congregations, referring to themselves as Churches of Christ, are allowing women to lead in prayers, wait on the Lord’s Table, and assume other leading roles. Again, we turn to the word of God for guidance: *“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law”* (I Cor. 14:34). *“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence”* (I Tim. 2:11-12). Since God has denied leading roles to women and has given them to men, women are excluded from participating in these roles. We could go on with other examples but we should all be encouraged to examine all our actions in the light of the inspired word of God. The answers are there for all to read and apply to our lives so we can “enter in at the strait gate and travel the narrow way, which leadeth unto life.

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