

## Entering the Narrow Way

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*“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.” (Matthew 7:13-14)*

Many times, we encounter difficulties in complying with the Lord’s Word. We recognize that living according to the Lord’s teachings is the best form of life that we can live. We know the Lord loves us and desires us all to enjoy life in heaven. The Lord made the way to heaven as easy as possible for us. If the way to heaven is made easy, and the Lord created each one of us to be there, why then are we required to endure hardships when we make the effort to perform acts of charity? Why must we experience inner pain as we make efforts to apply the Lord’s Word to our individual lives? Why must there be constant battles as we work to obey the Lord’s commandments in His Word?

The Word does address these questions. The Lord did not will or intend that we experience troubles in a life that is guided by His Word. He desires that we experience nothing but joy and happiness as we cooperate with His guidance of us. It is against His Divine nature for us to suffer just for the sake of suffering. What makes living a life of charity difficult is not from the Lord, but in ourselves and in the world around us. We all have inborn tendencies toward what is evil or selfish. As we make efforts to apply the Lord’s Word to our lives, we must do battle against these tendencies. All along the way, we are battling ourselves as we conform to the Lord’s teachings. We are also doing battle with the world around us. Trends and mores that are commonly accepted by the vast majority constantly influence us. They may even have an appeal toward us. It is not easy to stand alone or be the exception when seemingly everyone else can enjoy activities that we can not indulge in. Often the accepted standards in the world at large will be a barrier for us. So our natural tendencies to do evil, and the incitements from the world, are what make living a life from heavenly principles difficult and challenging.

Now this does not mean that we are to take the extreme approach and remove ourselves from functioning in this world and being involved in it. In fact, we are supposed to enjoy the pleasures that exist in the world. However, we are to take care that our enjoyment of the things of the world does not act as a barrier to our being open to the Lord’s leading on how we should love, think, and act.

Throughout the New Testament, the Lord did give many warnings that following His teachings would require enduring times of hardships. This can especially be seen in the Sermon on the Mount, which the Lord gave very early in His ministry. This sermon laid out the principles of a new dispensation of truth that the Lord was establishing while He was on the earth. The Sermon on the Mount sets out the basics of a genuine worship of the Lord and how we should treat other people. And He spoke about how those who followed Him would be going through a narrow gate or path. He was implying that there would be a period of troubles and discomforts before one can fully experience the joys and peace of heaven.

The Greek words for “narrow gate” has the idea of a gorge going through a mountain. It is like a very narrow tunnel that one can just barely squeeze through. Conversely, the broad gate that leads to destruction has the idea that there is plenty of room to go through, thereby that it is a more comfortable path to take. As we read in our third lesson, this was once actually portrayed before Swedenborg in the spiritual world when he witnessed a broad way and a narrow way. Furthermore, this illustration implies that to become a true follower of the Lord, we must be willing not to blindly follow the crowd but to resist what is popularly accepted whenever necessary. Every generation has had to resist “the world” in order to follow the Lord. The Heavenly Doctrines make it clear that those who are associated with heaven will have affliction while on earth (*Apocalypse Explained* 365). They will be exposed to evil incitements that seek to lead them off the path they are taking. Popular trends that advocate giving priority to a life of pleasure and ease have always been advocated by the world in one form or another. This way of life will always look attractive to the natural level of our minds, so long as we are living in the natural world. And it is not easy to endure the pain of saying no while others are enjoying the sensual pleasures of saying yes.

Also, when we are on the narrow way, there is often an appearance that the Word is restricting the type of life we can live. For a period of time, the Word appears to tell us more about what we cannot do than about what we can do. At this time, we feel as if we are on a narrow and restrictive path that does not offer us much mobility or variety. However, it is while we are taking the narrow way, that evils and falsities that are attached to us are being removed and slowly put away (*Arcana Coelestia* 28514).

Conversely, those that are taking the broad path appear to have a wide range of natural pleasures to indulge in. They seem to have a greater expanse of choices than those who are complying with what the Word teaches. It is during these times that we find complying with the Word challenging and difficult.

Things change dramatically, however, when the destinations are reached. Those who take the broad way are said to go to destruction. They are, in a sense, destroyed because their spiritual lives are no longer able to be receptive of the Lord’s guidance or teachings. This is the result of living a life that is only concerned with self and gives no consideration to the interests and welfare of others. As a result, such people are neither capable nor willing to allow the Lord to instill heavenly loves into them. The refusal to love the Lord above all things and the neighbor as oneself is the spiritual death that awaits them. And when people are in spiritual death, destruction to their spiritual lives becomes inevitable.

Much different is the case for those who do take the narrow path. They are said to be led to life. Their willingness to compel themselves to adhere to the Lord’s teachings in His Word allows them to enter into a life that is full of delights and endless varieties. As we read in our second lesson, this is the victory that the Lord promised, made possible by His subjugation of the hells while He was upon the earth (*Arcana Coelestia* 10828). The Lord referred to this when He said, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 6:33). We recognize the victory that the Lord established when we sense the freedom that comes from genuine charity.

This is what the Lord desires for us throughout our lives, even while we are in the natural world. The Lord never intends for us to suffer just for the sake of suffering. But we must endure times of pain, discomfort, and restrictions as our evil affections and desires are put away so that we can enjoy the life of genuine freedom and delight that the Lord wants to lead us into. The Lord promises us that we will eventually enjoy a sense of peace. This peace is vastly different than what the world offers (John 14:27). Peace is defined as *being in charity, having spiritual security, and being in internal rest* (*Apocalypse Revealed* 306). When we are in charity, we have a sense of purpose, protection from the hells, and a satisfaction that the Lord is enabling us to perform uses in His kingdom. This is the state of life that awaits all those who are willing to take the narrow gate or path.

While we are living in the natural world, we are constantly choosing between the broad path and the narrow (*Arcana Coelestia* 28513). And we are not set on the broad or narrow path with just one choice, but with a series of choices. This means that we always have the opportunity to change paths and follow the way that leads to heaven. And when we are able to function in the world within the boundaries that the Lord's Word prescribes for us, we will have heavenly happiness, and joy after our periods of sorrow. This the Lord promised, saying, "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy" (John 16:20).

Amen.

Lessons: Matthew 7:1-20; John 16:20-33; *Heaven and Hell* 534