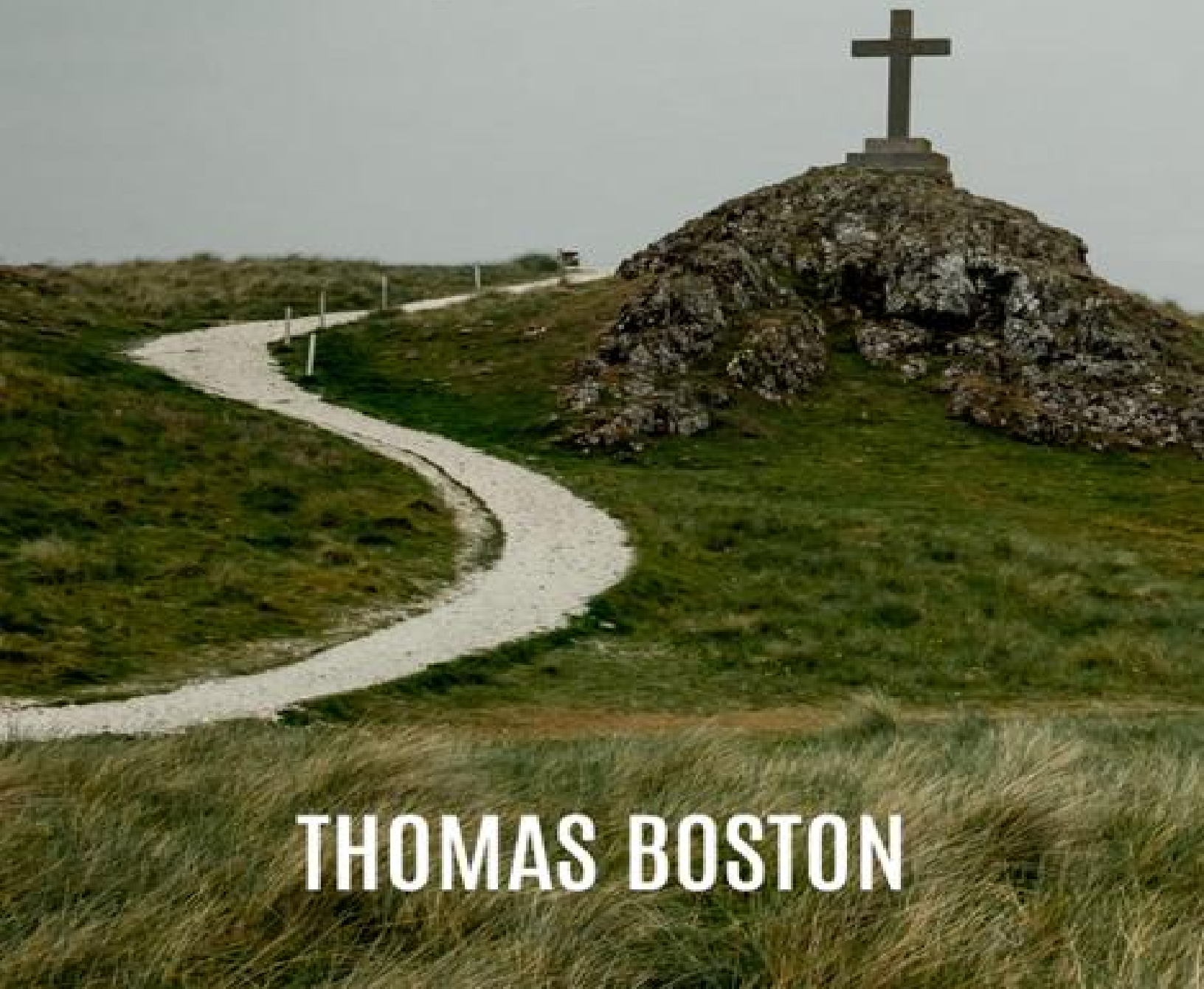


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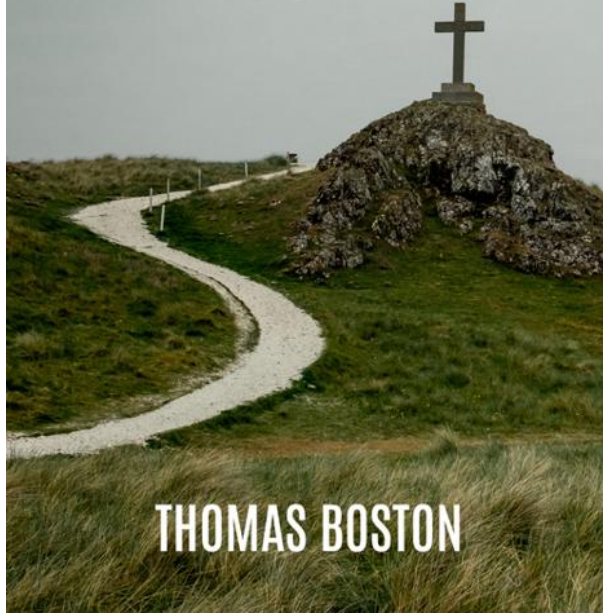
**THE WAY TO LIFE AND
THE WAY TO DESTRUCTION
UNFOLDED**



THOMAS BOSTON

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The Way to Life, and the Way to Destruction Unfolded

by Thomas Boston

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Introduction

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the path that leads to destruction, and many choose that way.
(Matthew 7:13-14)

For the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to life, and only a few find it.

People in this life are merely on a journey, not in their final destination, where they are meant to stay. Given that life and destruction lie before everyone, each with its distinct paths and gates leading to them, it's crucial for everyone to be careful about which gate and path they choose. "Enter through the narrow gate..."

The purpose of these words is to address a significant barrier to genuine faith, which is the world's perspective: the immense challenge in following such a path and the limited number of those who actually pursue it. This barrier often hinders many, causing them to stumble time and again. After delivering his sermon on the mount, where Jesus provided insights into genuine faith, it would undoubtedly seem unappealing to worldly men. They might argue that these teachings are too demanding, and very few will embrace them; the majority's preference opposes this path and indicates a

much easier route. And wouldn't most people believe that the well-trodden path is safe? And should they abandon it for one less travelled? To address this, Jesus firmly asserts that the well-trodden, broad path, where most of the world treads, leads to destruction. Conversely, the path to eternal life is narrow, challenging to find, and difficult to navigate. Therefore, understanding the dire need to attain eternal life and avoid eternal destruction, regardless of the cost, he urges us to enter through the narrow gate.

In the words presented, there are two main aspects:

I. An encouragement and caution on how to approach the world beyond, to which this world and life serve as a mere pathway. "Enter through the narrow gate..." In this, we find:

1. The recommended route for our safety: "the narrow gate". A gate is typically an entrance to a city, as mentioned in Acts 12:10, or to a courtyard, as in Acts 3:10. However, it's rarely referred to as the door of a residence. Thus, it's clear there's a metaphorical usage here. Some believe there's a dual metaphor: (1) Heaven is likened to a house, accessible through a narrow gate, and (2) To a city, reached via a narrow path. However, if heaven is likened to a city, so is hell, as there exists a wide gate and broad path leading to destruction, just as there's a narrow gate and path leading to life. But typically, scriptures don't describe hell as a city. My belief is that there's a singular metaphor here: heaven is likened to a house, as in Luke 13:25. Similarly, hell is portrayed as a prison or pit. Such a house has a forecourt, and the gate leading to this forecourt is the one one must pass through to reach the house itself. Clearly, this "gate", "path", and "entrance through the gate" are set in this world and life, as depicted in Gen. 28:17. The same applies to hell. Consequently, the devout,

the true believers, are in a sense in heaven's outer court, while the wicked and unredeemed are in hell's outer court, both advancing towards their destinations.

2. An implied dangerous route: By mentioning the narrow gate, it's insinuated that there exists a broader gate, which he later explicitly refers to. Thus, two distinct gates stand before us, each leading to divergent outcomes.
3. Our responsibility and benefit regarding these gates: We should opt for the narrow gate. The Lord guides our decision when confronted with these gates. As we start discerning between right and wrong, we begin, figuratively speaking, to enter one of these gates. We'll naturally gravitate towards the wider one, given its ease, until we heed Christ's call and reconsider our path. While Satan lures us towards the wider gate and the masses flock to it as it caters to worldly desires, Jesus instructs us to choose the narrow gate and be wary of the broad one. This call can be jarring to many, challenging to accept. Who would pick the tight, restrictive entrance when there's a spacious alternative available? Hence, we have...

II. A rationale for this encouragement and warning, consisting of two elements.

Firstly, even if the other gate seems more accessible and is frequently used, it's perilous. It's foolish to favour a path leading to destruction over one leading to life just because the former seems more straightforward. Where's the wisdom in choosing momentary comfort that concludes in everlasting pain? Here, Jesus highlights the alternative gate – the one contrasting with the narrow one – so we can sidestep it. He identifies it in tandem with the path that corresponds to it. I believe the gate and the way aren't to be

perceived as separate entities, like a path leading to a city and a gate leading into a house. Instead, they seem to encompass a unified expanse. However, the gate and the way can be distinguished; they should be seen as forming one uninterrupted stretch. Jesus refers to them as a single entity: "those who enter by it", not "by them".

Some interpret the "way" in this metaphor as the gap between the two sides of the gate, implying the gate encompasses the way. But this suggests the gate is the immediate entrance into the house, which isn't a typical interpretation. Certainly, the way leads into the house based on the text. Moreover, if the way shares the same nature as the gate, mentioning it becomes redundant. Where there's a wide gate, a broad space is implied, and where there's a narrow gate, a constrained space is evident. It's the breadth or narrowness between the gate's sides that determines its size. Consequently, I believe the gate and the way should be visualised as a continuous stretch, with one ending where the other begins.

Some think the way leads to the gate, suggesting the gate is primary. But this implies the gate is the house's entrance, which, as we've seen, doesn't fit. Even Jesus differentiates between these two in Luke 13:24-25.

Therefore, I deduce, based on the text's sequence, that the gate precedes the way. By entering it, we commence on the path, similar to how one might pass through a courtyard's gate and then journey towards the house. This sets the context for the metaphor, crucial for grasping the spiritual insight conveyed by the text. In this, we find...

1st, The characteristics of the gate contrasting the one we're urged to pass through, and the path connected to it.

1. The gate is expansive. The entrance to the path leading to damnation is quite straightforward. It's an open and vast portal, where crowds can effortlessly enter without jostling each other. No need to jostle or push here; it welcomes all with ease, being wholly in tune with one's physical desires and innate tendencies. It's so expansive that individuals can shut their eyes, move carelessly, and still not miss it; even the young can effortlessly access it.
2. The adjoining path is expansive. Once they've passed the gate, they find themselves on a spacious path, offering them ample room to manoeuvre. They won't feel confined, as they might on a narrower route. Here, they aren't constrained by their conscience, the Bible, etc. but have ample freedom for their fickle minds, their resistance to good, their inclination to evil, and all their chaotic desires.

2ndly, Its popularity. It's a well-trodden path; "many there be which go in thereat." The vastness of the gate and the breadth of the path, given the comfort they offer to travellers, draw people to them. It's so appealing that the majority choose this route. Despite the contrasting tendencies of worldly individuals — be it the greedy and the wasteful, the irreverent and the ceremonious, etc. — however differing their paths, they converge here. The gate and the path are so expansive that they provide separate lanes for each type.

3dly, Its conclusion and direction. The end is destruction, and that's its ultimate trajectory. No matter how comfortable the entrance and journey may seem, every step on this path leads to eternal devastation. So, enticing as its onset and progress may be, its culmination is harrowing. At the end of this broad route lies a chasm, a cautionary sight for those considering embarking upon it.

The second part of the rationale is: Though the gate we're beckoned to enter may be challenging, it's ultimately safe and promises a joyous destination.

1st, The characteristics of the gate and the path connected to it.

1. The gate is narrow. Entry onto the religious path is challenging; one needs immense determination to make it through. Luke 13:24 states, "Strive to enter through the narrow door." One has to push through, shedding their burdens; they won't pass with these weights on their shoulders. They must streamline their focus, casting aside any unwarranted negative influences at the threshold. Jewish scholars reference gates like the gate of repentance, the gate of prayer, and the gate of tears. These, and similar gates, are the ones we're guided to, and they are indeed narrow.
2. The connected path is constrained (Gr.), pressured or squeezed. It's akin to a tight shoe that compresses the foot. It's not a comfortable journey, no more than walking in such footwear or on a path with limited space for one's steps. It's flanked by trials and temptations, and often goes against natural desires, making the journey challenging.

2ndly, Its rarity; only a few discover it. The expansive gate is easily found; it's evident to everyone passing by, and there's no challenge in entering it. However, only a handful even come across the narrow gate; many don't seek it. Clouded by overpowering desires, they either don't recognise it or are deterred by its demanding nature.

3dly, and finally, its rewarding trajectory and conclusion; (Gr.) it leads to life. The journey isn't a brief stint but a continuous voyage. It steers one away from the temptations of the devil, worldly desires,

and personal weaknesses, ultimately guiding them, after many strenuous steps, to eternal life in heaven. So, regardless of the hardships faced at the gate and along the way, the final destination more than compensates for them.

The text suggests several doctrines.

DOCTRINE I: Anyone aiming for the next world must invariably pass through the narrow gate.

In discussing this doctrine, I will:

I. Outline its underlying assumptions. II. Examine the nature of the narrow gate. III. Explore the act of passing through it. IV. Conclude with its implications.

I. This doctrine makes several assumptions:

1. Everyone is on a journey towards the next world. As Ecclesiastes 9:10 states, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no task, plan, knowledge, or wisdom in the grave to which you're heading." Life here is simply a prelude to the life beyond, and our current world is merely a transit point to the next. It's akin to a town on the route to a major city, which travellers pass through; Ecclesiastes 1:4. Regardless of what people might say, no one has a permanent claim on life. Both the young and old are on this journey. Everyone is aware of the distance covered, but the road ahead remains uncertain.
2. Ultimately, we will all reach this destination, one way or another. There's no question that we'll find a route leading there; the real challenge is identifying and navigating the right path, as suggested in Psalm 49:10. Many embark on journeys

they never complete, often because they've chosen the wrong direction. Nevertheless, whether via the right or wrong path, we'll all arrive at the next world.

3. There's a misguided path towards the afterlife that we're at risk of choosing. This path, while certainly leading to the next world, takes us to its more sinister realm, a place of endless death and devastation. As the scriptures say, "for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and many enter through it." We're vulnerable to this treacherous route because our inherent tendencies lean that way. Satan actively tries to lure us down this path, and the world's overwhelming influence doesn't help.
4. Nonetheless, there's also a correct path to that world, a route that, if we discern and follow, leads us to the region of the afterlife filled with perpetual light and life. While this path was once obstructed, through Christ's sacrifice and obedience, it has been unveiled; Heb. 10:19-20. We ought to embrace this revelation wholeheartedly given its profound significance to us.
5. It's plausible for us to find and tread this righteous path. Certainly, it won't happen without deliberate thought and effort; we won't inadvertently stumble upon it or blindly arrive at it as we might with the destructive path. However, if we heed Christ's guidance and navigate accordingly, we're unlikely to go astray; Prov. 9:4-6; Psalm 119:9.
6. By nature, we're not on this righteous path and need to find our entry point. Adam, representing all of humanity, was originally on the right path towards eternal life. However, due to the deception of the serpent, he was led astray; and so, by extension, were we. As Romans 5:12 elaborates, "Therefore, just as sin

entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people because all sinned." Presently, our starting point is akin to wandering aimlessly on desolate hills. Yet, Christ seeks us out in our lost state, offering guidance on the right direction, where to begin, and the pitfalls to avoid.

7. The gate we must pass through is narrow, elusive and challenging to enter. The path to damnation starts wide but becomes increasingly constricted towards its end; Rom. 2:9, "There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil." Conversely, the journey to heaven begins narrowly but widens towards its conclusion; Rev. 21:7, "Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children." Those who embrace this initial narrowness are on the path to everlasting freedom; Rom. 8:21.
8. In conclusion, the only entrance to this path is through the narrow gate. While some might wish for or imagine broader entrances to heaven, scripture recognises only the narrow gate as the way. Therefore, anyone unwilling to compromise or squeeze through this challenging entry must reconsider their aspirations of heavenly life.

I. Let's consider the concept of this narrow gate.

Here, we'll discuss:

1. What this narrow gate represents.

2. What attributes to its narrowness.

Firstly, what does this narrow gate symbolise? Based on previous explanations, it signifies the initiation into genuine religious belief and practice; John 10:9 states, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved." And as in Heb. 4:3, "Now we who have believed enter that rest." This refers to turning to God through faith in Jesus Christ; comparing Hos. 14:1 with John 14:6. This idea of the "door of faith" in Acts 14:27 can be understood as conversion, as elucidated in chap. 15:3. This is the gate we must go through because:

1. It serves as the entrance to the outer sanctuary of heaven. Once someone passes through, they find themselves directly in heaven's sanctuary, as depicted in Heb. 4:3. Being in this sanctuary ensures they will ultimately reach their heavenly destination; as mentioned in Phil. 1:6. True converts or believers are as unshakeable as something firmly held in Christ's hand, as expressed in John 10:28. Thus, they are considered "members of God's household" according to Eph. 2:19, uniting with the heavenly residents as one family, as referred to in chap. 3:15. Some are within the house, while others are in its courtyard.
2. This gate sets individuals on their journey towards heaven. Those who have crossed this threshold are on a pilgrimage to the land of Immanuel, with an aura reminiscent of heaven, as described in Cant. 8:5 and chap. 3:6. These individuals have left behind their old life, symbolised by Egypt, crossed the challenges represented by the Red Sea, and are now navigating their path through life's trials, akin to a wilderness, en route to their promised destination.

3. This gate directly aligns with the entrance to heaven and guides those who choose it straight to their heavenly destination. In the same manner that the wide gate inevitably leads its travellers to destruction, genuine religious commitment and transformation through faith ensure a journey towards salvation and eternal life.
4. This gate signifies a departure from the allure of the broad path and its associated temptations, as they stand in stark contrast; Heb. 4:10. While individuals can fluctuate between different lifestyles and pursuits, it's only through this gate that they can truly exit the expansive road leading to ruin; Matth. 18:3. On this expansive road, there's ample space to waver between contrasting choices. However, upon entering the narrow gate, they are definitively set apart from the world mired in malevolence. Instead, they align themselves with God's chosen family; 2 Cor. 6:17, 18. And once this distinction is made, there's no reverting; as Psalm 12:7 states, "You, Lord, will keep the needy safe and will protect us forever from the wicked."

This gate, notably, is narrow. Initiating a life devoid of righteousness isn't challenging. Even adopting a superficial religious façade isn't particularly demanding. Some may embrace it simply due to a positive upbringing, akin to Joash; others might feel a fleeting emotional stir from the gospel, as mentioned in Matth. 13:20, 21; or, like Simon in Acts 8:12, 13, they might be swayed by the prevailing societal norms of their time. The most restrictive approach is perhaps through a premature and incomplete adherence to religious law, reminiscent of the Israelites in Exod. 20:18, 19. However, even this method remains sufficiently accommodating, failing to genuinely challenge and transform one's core, as illustrated in Deut. 5:27, 29.

The genuine entry into authentic faith through sincere conversion is undoubtedly challenging for various reasons.

- 1. Visibility and Recognition:** This path is so subtle that it often escapes the naked eye; Matth. 7:14 states, "Because narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it." The majority of people live their lives oblivious to it, as if it doesn't exist at all. Many go on happily without pondering the very essence of conversion, questioning whether they've truly experienced it. For those who do experience the tug of the Spirit, it's often dismissed as mere melancholy or gloom. At times, even the individuals in question can't comprehend the forces at play in their lives; it's a profound enigma, as described in John 3:8. Modern religious leaders often neglect to recognise this, focusing instead on superficial reformations and moral conduct. This approach often achieves limited societal transformation and pales in comparison to ancient pagan moral teachings.
- 2. Initiation and Commitment:** It's no easy feat to embark on this spiritual journey. The sheer intensity and demands of the path deter many; as seen in John 6:60, 66 where some disciples found Jesus' teachings too hard to accept. Some, having taken a few steps, retract and avoid the path, overwhelmed by its challenges. An example is Felix in Acts 24:25, who, shaken by Paul's words, said, "Go away for now; when it is convenient for me, I'll call for you." A profound realisation of one's past sins and the inherent flawed nature can be truly humbling and daunting. Such enlightenment can be likened to the people in Acts 2:37, who were deeply moved and asked, "Brothers, what should we do?" Many, at the cusp of this journey, fear they might not persevere and may falter.

3. Navigating the Path: The journey, albeit difficult, varies in duration for different individuals. Often, one's lack of understanding might prolong the experience more than necessary, as mentioned in Hos. 13:13. Regardless of its length, the path remains challenging throughout.

(1.) Here, individuals can't enjoy the freedoms they were once accustomed to. They're restricted from their past indulgences in sin. This often leads them to nostalgically yearn for their old vices, much like longing for the comforts of Egypt. If not for a guiding force propelling them forward, they might easily revert to their former ways, as referred to in 2 Thess. 1:11.

(2.) In this journey, one can't walk with pride or arrogance; it's more of a humble crawl, recognizing one's vulnerabilities and limitations. Divine intervention humbles the individual, pulling them from their pedestal. The call to Zaccheus was one of humility: "Come down," as mentioned in Luke 19:5. This command, while literally referring to descending from the tree, had a deeper spiritual resonance, leading to his profound transformation. Genuine conversion is intrinsically linked to humility, as seen in Acts 9:6 and 2 Cor. 10:4, 5. This humbling experience persists until they wholeheartedly embrace God through faith, as highlighted in Acts 15:11.

(3.) This path demands that individuals shed their excess baggage – the unnecessary burdens they once clung to, as emphasised in James 1:21. The narrow gate doesn't have room for both one's old habits and a new-found faith. Christ's message is clear: embrace Him fully and let go of the past. This resonates with the tale of the wise merchant who sells all his possessions to acquire a precious pearl. The journey requires purging not just a select few sins, but all of them, including those dearest to one's heart. This cleansing extends

beyond mere actions, reaching the very core of one's being, as echoed in Psalm 24:3, 4.

Secondly, what makes the entrance into faith so challenging?

1. It's largely due to the inherent resistance within our nature. As stated in Rom. 8:7, "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." Consider how a fish out of water feels uneasy and out of place; similarly, our nature leans more towards wrongdoing and feels distanced from divine virtues. A significant aspect of the transformative grace of conversion is about making the soul receptive, as referenced in Psalm 110:3. Once that acceptance is achieved, the soul easily connects with God through Christ.

2. Another challenge is the many desires clinging to our being. While the gate is adequately spacious for an individual, it feels restrictive when one approaches with an array of unchecked desires.

(1.) Every man not yet spiritually renewed has a multitude of unchecked desires, as mentioned in Tit. 3:3. These desires constantly clamour for satisfaction, reminiscent of a demanding family. Upon approaching the gate, it feels constricted because one is burdened by the 'old self', which must be shed, according to Eph. 4:22. Letting go isn't easy.

(2.) These lusts, by nature, always tend to expand. They are like persistent weeds in the garden of a tainted heart that flourish uncontrollably. Individuals harbour broad aspirations that demand ample space, as described in Hab. 2:5. Consequently, since these desires need to be reined in and unified, the entrance appears narrow, as captured in Psalm 27:4.

(3.) These lusts intensify especially during the moments of spiritual awakening. Rom. 7:9 states, "Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died." When the tenets of faith are introduced to someone not yet spiritually transformed, it can exacerbate their inherent tendencies. Lusts that might have been dormant during complacent phases become active in their defence against attempts to expel them. They react defensively, much like an anthill being disrupted or a wild horse rebelling against control.

3. The fierce resistance posed by Satan against one's journey to faith. When someone begins contemplating a life with God, the forces of darkness take notice and actively counteract these intentions, as highlighted in Rev. 12:12. Those who previously went unbothered, living in worldly contentment, suddenly face intense trials, as if all forces conspire to push them against the guiding current of the Spirit. In these times, Satan employs various tactics:

(1.) He emphasises the pressure to conform to societal norms, as noted in Acts 28:22. The fear of standing out or being labelled as 'different' becomes daunting. Satan suggests that if the mainstream path were truly perilous, it wouldn't be so popular. He insinuates that there's safety in numbers and, even if things go awry, at least they'll be in good company. If this tactic doesn't deter them, he shifts to the temptation of:

(2.) Procrastination. Why adopt such a disciplined lifestyle so early in life? Young people, often influenced by these deceptions, imagine a vast expanse of time ahead, wherein they can gradually adopt faith. Consequently, many spend their youth indulging worldly desires, postponing genuine commitment to faith until they're more

established in life. By the time they're "settled", new responsibilities and distractions emerge, as referenced in Luke 14:20. Then, the commitment is deferred to old age, which many might not even experience. For the few who do, a lifetime's habit makes change challenging. Some even delay until their final moments, hoping for a deathbed conversion, only to realise that either illness hampers them or divine grace remains elusive. If this isn't enough, he then suggests:

(3.) The notion that they've delayed too long, implying that the window of grace has closed. This is a tactic to drive individuals towards hopelessness and despair, mirroring the fate of Judas. Satan's tactics shift from lulling the complacent to aggressively accusing the conscious. He emphasises God's judgment, arguing that forgiveness is now out of reach. He confronts them with their past mistakes, aiming to instil a sense of irredeemable guilt, and reminds them of all the opportunities they've squandered to establish a relationship with Christ, suggesting they've now missed their chance.

(4.) Lastly, he intensifies temptations, making sin seem even more appealing than before. This is to ensure that individuals, noticing their vulnerabilities and flaws more acutely, might lose hope of ever overcoming their weaknesses.

4. The world's hostility towards faith is palpable, as pointed out in 1 Cor. 16:9, where it states, "There are many adversaries." This hostility seeks to stifle spiritual growth right from the outset, attempting to undermine any positive progress as soon as it manifests, as referenced in Cant. 2:15. The secular world often acts as Satan's primary advocate, furthering his objectives by misguiding the faithful—whether through coercion, deceit, ridicule, or by minimising the struggles of those grappling with their beliefs.

5. Lastly, the very essence of faith itself presents challenges. The process of understanding and acknowledging one's misdeeds is inevitably confronting. Recognising our sins, whether in thought, speech, action, or innate nature, is bound to be intense and distressing. The weight of guilt, combined with the fear of retribution due to the laws we've broken, narrows our spiritual journey, as depicted in Rom. 8:15. For someone who's become acutely aware of their sins, deeply affected by the law's judgements, and self-admitted guilt, it's incredibly challenging to grasp — and maintain a hold on — the assurance of grace offered through Christ.

II. Let's explore the act of entering through this strait gate.

We'll address three main aspects:

1st, The destination it leads to.

2nd, The manner of entry.

3rd, The implications of this act.

Firstly, where does this strait gate lead?

1. It directly ushers one into the disciplined path of religious practice, which manifests in a life rooted in holiness and actions aligned with the Gospel, as highlighted in Acts 2:41, 42. Once through the gate, they persistently move forward, despite not knowing the length of their journey.

(1.) They find themselves on a novel path. As expressed in 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away, behold all things have become new." They tread a route unfamiliar to them, governed by a fresh set of rules, surrounded by new companions, led by a distinct guide, and driven by renewed objectives. They're essentially immersed in a different realm, still existing in this world but not entirely belonging to it.

(2.) This path, though unfamiliar, is secure. As Prov. 1:33 assures, "Whoso hearkens unto me, shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." Before crossing the threshold of the strait gate, their journey, regardless of its perceived ease, was riddled with dangers as indicated in Prov. 9:17, 18. However, upon entry, they embark on a secure path, even if it might seem fraught with challenges. It's shielded from above, ensuring no tempests of wrath can strike, and any hurdles arising will be safely navigated, as referenced in Cant. 3:11.

2. Indirectly, this gate also leads to heaven. This celestial abode is the ultimate destination that the strait gate points towards, an entrance no one can access without passing through this particular gateway. Yet, all who do enter through it will undoubtedly reach this divine realm in due course, as highlighted in Matth. 18:3 and Acts 3:19. By choosing the strait gate, they ultimately arrive at:

(1.) A spacious dwelling; John 14:2 states, "In my Father's house are many mansions." Regardless of how narrow the entry point may seem, there's no shortage of space within this heavenly home. While those who opt for the broader gate may eventually find themselves constricted, like prisoners packed too closely together, those who

select the narrower gate will experience freedom and serenity in their celestial surroundings.

(2.) A haven of complete comfort and abundance, as depicted in Rev. 21:7. Nothing will be amiss in this divine setting, ensuring utter contentment for its inhabitants. Though the journey through the strait gate may have been fraught with concern, dread, and grief, no trace of these emotions will persist in this ethereal realm. As Rev. 21:4 assures, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things have passed away." Thus, those who've chosen the path of the strait gate will immerse themselves in pure joy, in stark contrast to others who, by selecting the broader entrance, will find themselves engulfed in perpetual sorrow.

Secondly, how do individuals enter through this gate? Their entry is marked by:

1. Stepping away from self-reliance, as noted in Matth. 16:24. God's guiding hand encourages them to question their established beliefs. Through enlightening conviction, they experience deep emotional turmoil, humility, and introspection, leading them to question the very foundations of their prior beliefs. This causes them to lose hope in attaining salvation solely through their own means. As Phil. 3:7-8 describes, what was once seen as an advantage is now viewed as a detriment. Consequently, they seek validation, sanctification, and the promise of eternal life elsewhere, not relying solely on themselves.
2. Turning to Christ, grounded in the unconditional promise of the Gospel, expressed through faith, as mentioned in John 10:9. While some might assume this transition is easy, it's far from it.

Only with divine guidance can one genuinely embrace this aspect of the narrow gate, as depicted in Isa. 53:1. Throughout this spiritual journey, God's influence ensures a logical and rational transition. Realising that there's no other refuge, individuals move forward, clinging to Christ's promise as highlighted in Jer. 2:22-23, much like a drowning person would desperately grasp a lifeline.

3. Moving closer to God through the teachings of Christ, as illustrated by the comparison between Hos. 14:1 and John 14:6. This process is known as conversion, the ultimate outcome of genuine faith in Christ; referenced in Heb. 7:25. Sin causes people to distance themselves from God's teachings and expectations. However, through Christ's mediation, we are provided a path to return to God's embrace, as depicted in 1 Pet. 3:18. By placing faith in Christ, individuals find their way back to God, leading a life in his service, as shown in Acts 20:21. This underscores the idea that many who claim to have faith in Christ might only be paying lip service, as their actions don't reflect a genuine return to God's teachings; a notion reinforced in Matth. 13:20-21.

Thirdly, what implications does this entry have that we must prepare for?

1. Recognising the gate, the narrow gate; Matth. 7:14. Many have travelled the path of Bethel as mentioned in Gen. 28, yet never identified the gateway to heaven present there; but Jacob did, as per verse 17. Similarly, many navigate the world, attend religious ceremonies where the gate is shown, but still never truly perceive it. It's akin to the well in Hagar's story in Gen. 21: we

don't see it until the Lord illuminates it for us. It's essential to pray for God to reveal this gate.

2. Realising the paramount need to enter through it; Luke 15:17. We won't embark on this journey if we remain indifferent to our fate in the afterlife, or mistakenly believe that a broader gate exists leading to heaven. This misguided belief misleads many. Why restrict oneself by the narrow gate if a wider, seemingly easier one is available? However, it's crucial to understand that only through the narrow gate can one truly find salvation.
3. Determination to reach a better world, regardless of challenges; Matth. 11:12. Until this resolve is firm, individuals won't attempt the narrow gate, and even if they do, they may not persist. Those who do commit understand the significance of pushing forward, realising the dire consequences of not doing so, as echoed in Luke 15:17, 18.
4. Willingness to sacrifice current comforts to ensure safety in the afterlife; Matth. 16:24. Life is a journey of trials, with true rest awaiting us beyond. Yet, persuading individuals to relinquish current comforts proves challenging. Many cling to their comforts until adversities disrupt their ease. But it's only when one is prepared to sacrifice these comforts that they can truly embark on this journey, as indicated in Prov. 6:9, 10 and Acts 2:37.
5. Bravely stepping through the gate; Luke 15:18. No matter how intimidating or unfamiliar it might seem, they won't be deterred. They wouldn't even consider the wider gate, knowing its outcome. The soul, in this context, resembles a fugitive rushing to a sanctuary city, overcoming any obstacles until they're safely within its confines.

6. Lastly, pushing onward without hesitation or turning back, unlike Felix in Acts 24:25, or stalling like Ephraim in Hos. 13:13. Regardless of the gate's narrowness, genuine seekers will persevere, facing all challenges and never resting until they draw closer to God through Christ; as seen in Luke 13:24. They recognise that true safety lies ahead, in stark contrast to the oblivious world around them.

USE 1. For Understanding. This tells us that,

1. Those who wander aimlessly, without reflection, will never safely reach the next world. They might drift into the abyss, for, conscious or not, they are swept away by the current. The journey to heaven is like rowing upstream; it cannot be achieved by merely drifting. This requires thought and commitment to our salvation, as expressed in Phil. 2:12.
2. To have a good ending, one must have a good beginning. If we aim to reside eternally in the vast mansion above, we must first pass through the narrow gate. The tight pathway leads to life, and the narrow gate is the entrance to this path. To hope for life without passing through this gate is wishful thinking. It's as if by following a path to destruction in this life, we still expect to end up in heaven after death. However, as Gal. 6:7 warns, "God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, he will also reap." An unholy life will inevitably lead to a regrettable end.
3. We need to be proactive, prioritise our salvation, and decide on our path for the hereafter. Complacent souls need to wake up before it's too late. As 1 Cor. 15:34 says, "Awake to righteousness, and sin not." Those indifferent about eternity must start taking care of their spiritual wellbeing. The scripture in Prov. 6:9 reminds, "How long will you sleep, O sluggard?"

When will you arise from your slumber?" A challenging gateway lies ahead, and we won't pass through it by remaining idle. If we don't, we're doomed.

4. Conversion is crucial for all of us. It represents the narrow gate we must pass through to reach heaven, as stated in Matth. 19:3. Without the transformative power of grace, we won't experience eternal glory. Our inherent flaws mean that unless we undergo a significant change, tantamount to rebirth, we won't be fit for heaven, as mentioned in John 3:5, 6.
5. Those who believe they are on the path to salvation without experiencing genuine conversion are deluding themselves. Such a belief equates to seeking spirituality without truly embracing its essence. John 10:8 warns, "He that does not enter by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, is a thief and a robber." It's distressing to observe the limited number who commit to a spiritual path, and among them, many overlook or skip the essential first step. Many approach religion too casually, and such superficiality often leads to disappointing outcomes.
6. Lastly, those who claim to be religious but detest its disciplined demands are deceiving themselves. Such an attitude reflects an aversion to the stringent requirements of faith. What does their current religious stance signify, and what hopes can they have for the afterlife? Will worldly ways ever lead them to salvation? Can one claim to follow Christ while resenting strict religious discipline? Or expect to partake in heaven's glory without truly following Him?

USE 2. For Correction. This text serves to highlight:

1. Those who are indifferent about choosing the right path for the afterlife. They are people who never seek the narrow gate and remain oblivious to it. Their attitude suggests they're not seeking the path to Zion, as referenced in Jer 50:4, 5. It would have been preferable for them never to have encountered the gospel; they ignore Christ's guidance and dismiss the importance of choosing the right path for the afterlife.
2. Those who cling to the broader path, ignoring the narrow one, yet still hope for a favourable outcome. Such hope implies a wish that the Bible might be a myth and warnings of the perils of sin are exaggerated. These individuals can find a forewarning in Deut. 29:19, 20. Ultimately, they will discover that these are not just words but realities that will weigh heavily upon them.
3. Individuals who neither pursue the right path for themselves nor allow others to do so; Matth. 23:13. Some actively discourage others from seeking the narrow gate, displaying a clear aversion to religion. They place obstacles, seize every chance to dissuade others, tempt them towards wrongdoing, and lead them astray. It's worth questioning whose mission they serve – certainly not God or Christ's. It's the work of Satan, and they will be recompensed accordingly.
4. Those who ridicule religious practices and devout individuals. We're cautioned that such mockers would exist in latter days; 2 Pet. 3:3, 4. Notably, these individuals are irreverent, making light of sacred matters. They lean towards atheism because only those who doubt the existence of a divine judgment or the legitimacy of the Bible would scoff at others for valuing it. It's crucial for such individuals to recognise their peril; as cautioned in Isa. 28:22, serious consequences await those who mock.

5. Lastly, those tasked with guiding others towards the afterlife but neglect the importance of directing them to the narrow gate. They constantly stress various duties and virtues without prioritising leading them to Christ. They behave as if mere diligence could suffice in making one a Christian. However, they overlook the significance of conversion and the essential connection with Christ, the source of all devout obedience; as highlighted in John 15:5 and Eph. 2:10.

USE 3. A Call to Action. If you truly wish to find the right path to the afterlife, choose the narrow gate. I'll outline this in two specific points.

Firstly, if you're sincere about navigating the path to the afterlife, cast aside any bias against genuine devotion. Prepare yourself and firmly decide to take the challenging path through the narrow gate, aiming for heaven, and leave behind the world's broader, more popular route. This call to action is:

1. Aimed at the young, who are just beginning their journey in life. I urge you to concurrently set your sights on the afterlife. Regardless of whether you intend to or not, that's where you're headed, and how swiftly you may get there is unpredictable. Be cautious about the direction you choose during these formative years, as early habits often persist; as stated in Prov. 22:6, "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it." Guard against letting biases against devout dedication take root; instead, embrace and pursue it with commitment.
2. For the elderly who have already travelled far in life: I implore you to finally set your sights on the afterlife, guiding your journey there, especially since many of you are already well on

the path, albeit often in the wrong direction. The urgency to change direction grows, for if you continue down the current path, you risk becoming irreversibly entrenched in it.

Both young and old harbour reservations about genuine devotion due to perceived difficulties, its distinctiveness, or its perceived lack of modern appeal, among other reasons. However, consider what our Saviour counters with: its absolute necessity. It's futile to debate the condition of a path to a destination, criticising it as tough or unconventional when it's the only route there. In such circumstances, the choice is clear: either take the path as it stands or abandon aspirations of reaching that destination.

Our Lord has emphasised, "The gate is narrow." Therefore, I encourage you to commit to it, challenging as it may be. Resolutely endure the hardships now, hoping it will ultimately lead you to a place in the afterlife where you can experience true freedom. Bid goodbye forever to the broad gate and path, and be determined to enter and progress through the narrow one.

MOTIVE 1. All reservations you may have against religious commitment stem from the flaws in your human nature. Do these imperfections need further encouragement? 2 Thess. 2:12. Reflect impartially on any reluctance you might feel towards religious dedication. You'll realise it protects some personal desire or vice, acting as a shield; see Rom. 1:18 in conjunction with Jer. 2:25. It's these deep-seated tendencies that skew our perspective, making us justify unspiritual behaviours while viewing religious commitment with scepticism. Consider the consequences of nurturing these imperfections which ought to be subdued.

2. Any challenges associated with religious commitment arise solely from the flaws within us and others around us; Rom. 7:14

highlights, "The law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold under sin." In heaven, religious commitment is elevated to its pinnacle; as Rev. 21:27 states, nothing impure will ever enter it, only those whose names are in the Lamb's book of life. And there, they experience complete freedom; Rom 8:21. This illustrates that any discomfort we might associate with religious commitment shouldn't be blamed on religion itself, but rather on our own limitations. Such commitment only seems burdensome to:

(1.) Our corrupt hearts. Just as a shoe might hurt a wounded foot but fit perfectly when the foot is healthy; see Rom. 7:23, 24. While a fish thrives in water, we might find it intolerable to be submerged for long. Likewise, a righteous path would seem natural to a righteous heart. It's crucial to understand that a life which challenges our flaws is as necessary for our salvation as Christ's own sacrifices were; as Gal. 5:24 points out, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

(2.) A world steeped in sin. As described in Rev. 6:10, they can't stand such commitment, often baffled by someone's dedication, even resorting to mockery; 1 Pet. 4:4 observes, "They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you." It's hardly surprising that a judge's pronouncement is unsettling to a criminal; in a similar vein, the devout, through their commitment, indirectly condemn the wicked; this is echoed in Heb. 11:7. Why should we aim to appease a world lost in wickedness, especially in matters that will lead to their downfall? Why aspire to journey with those we wouldn't wish to accompany at the destination?

3. The toughest challenge in religious commitment comes at the beginning. Much like with any skill or profession, the initial

phase is the hardest; however, with time and practice, it becomes more manageable; see Matth. 11:29, 30. Some might feel that despite the passage of time, the challenge remains as daunting as ever. Why might that be? It's likely because you're always restarting, never truly committing. It's akin to students who sporadically attend school; they find learning perpetually difficult, unlike their consistently attending peers; as Prov. 2:1–6 suggests. So, be firm, determined, and consistent; things will change.

4. When considering your eternal fate, would you align with the strictly religious or with those more carefree, who lead a worldly life without much restraint? Deep down, most might echo Numb. 23:10, wishing for an end like the righteous. If so, align your life with them. If you admire their destination, discard any reservations about their journey. If you dread the outcome of a loose lifestyle but are drawn to the journey, you're essentially contradicting yourself. If your aim is eastward, you wouldn't join a westward-bound group.
5. In conclusion, only through a strict religious path can one attain heaven; a lax approach will only lead to downfall. The text clearly states this, without exception for any status, age, or wealth. Everyone faces challenges at some point; it's an inevitable part of life. So, decide whether you'd prefer to face these challenges now or in the afterlife, whether temporarily or eternally.

If you believe that some people, despite not being strictly religious, eventually found their way to heaven, remember that they repented for their earlier neglect. Would you want to emulate a path that its very travellers deeply regretted? If you do, ensure you too express the

same remorse; otherwise, you're heading for a fall. It's not wise to accumulate reasons for remorse or avoid a path, the neglect of which will eventually require repentance. Remember, repenting now is simpler and more effective than doing so at life's end; the latter is rarely genuine or successful.

Here are a couple of guiding principles to consider:

1. First and foremost, reflect on the death of Christ. Recognise its significance for our justification, our reconciliation with God, and our salvation from eternal damnation. Through faith, take refuge under the shelter of His sacrifice. While some might achieve a semblance of moral decency or merely an outward display of piety, true religious devotion is beyond reach without this understanding, as illustrated by the barren fig tree in Luke 1:74, 75.

2. Model your life after Christ's own earthly journey, treating it as the benchmark, motivation, and charm of genuine piety. Every Christian should frequently reflect on Christ's life because:

- (1.) It provides the gold standard for true religious devotion. It's the blueprint that we should strive to emulate, as highlighted in John 13:15, 1 Peter 2:21, and 1 John 2:6. Even the most devout have occasionally veered off course, while some adopt a form of piety that's more a product of their own misguided pride than genuine faith. However, in Christ, we have the ultimate model of religious commitment; it's how God, made man, lived amongst us. Why wouldn't we be inspired by it?

- (2.) It reinforces our reasons. We find in Christ's life not just a command but also an example that strengthens our commitment to religious devotion. The actions of those we look up to can serve as an

added mandate, urging us to emulate them. Given that Jesus Christ is both divine and human and that His life epitomised true piety, surely we should be inspired to follow suit.

(3.) It endears us to the path of devotion. Consider Eph. 5:1, 2, which encourages us to follow God's example and love as Christ loved us, even to the point of sacrificing Himself. There's no stronger antidote to biases against genuine piety than truly grasping the gravity of Christ's sacrifice. Can faith in Christ's death truly coexist with indifference or even aversion to emulating His life? Definitely not. As 2 Cor. 5:14, 15 suggests, Christ's love and sacrifice compel us to live not for ourselves but for Him. True religious devotion naturally follows when our conscience is stirred by His sacrifice. Yet, sadly, our indifference to following His exemplary life often stems from a lack of faith in His ultimate sacrifice.

To set yourself on the right path for the next life, it's crucial, first and foremost, to genuinely turn your heart towards God. Ensure that you truly embrace this transformation and begin your journey with complete conviction.

Reason 1: Understand the necessity of this transformation. Jesus himself emphasised its importance in Matth. 18:3, stating, "Except you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Given the nature of this commitment, how can one possibly tread the path of righteousness without genuinely turning towards God? This commitment forms the very starting point of a Christian's journey. Without it, one can neither make meaningful progress nor reach a fulfilling conclusion.

Reason 2: Hoping to be truly devout without genuine conversion is not just futile but a self-deception. This is akin to constructing a building on unstable ground, as noted in Luke 6:49, which is bound

to crumble. True devotion means walking with Christ, and for that, you first have to be one with Him, as indicated in Col. 2:16. It's about leading a renewed life, which demands a rebirth of the soul, as per Rom. 6:4. It's about walking hand in hand with God, but to do that, you first need to turn to Him.

Reason 3: Without this genuine transformation, your religious pursuits will lack substance and remain mere formalities, as mentioned in 2 Tim. 3:5. It's like a body without a soul; your religious practices will become mere rituals without any deeper significance. God is spirit, and true worship must be imbued with spirit and truth, as stated in John 4:24. But how can one achieve this without genuine conversion? As Phil. 3:3 points out, "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit." Without this, your devotion is merely a facade, superficial and hollow.

Reason 4: The absence of genuine conversion can lead to deviation from faith. As 1 John 2:19 observes, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us." Many seem devout for a while but eventually drift away. They might initially align themselves with Christ's teachings, but later shift their loyalties. However, those genuinely transformed by their faith would never waver. As Psalm 12:7 notes, "You, Lord, will keep the needy safe and will protect us forever from the wicked." But for those without a deep-rooted transformation, although they might relinquish some vices, the core of their being remains unaltered, leading them astray.

To assist in your journey, strive to build a strong foundation of faith. Remember, it's essential to...

1. Don't consider it sufficient just to improve your external behaviour. Remember, true devotion resides deep within the soul; 1 Sam. 16:7. The inherent resistance must be overcome,

and the heart must fully embrace the divine law, embracing every known aspect of it; Heb. 8:10, "This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." Genuine transformation means the heart truly aligning with God; 1 Kings 18:37, wholeheartedly accepting and submitting to His sacred will as expressed in His laws.

2. To achieve this, you should endeavour to grasp the full depth and breadth of the law, reflecting on how it relates to your personal spiritual journey. This was where Paul's transformation began; Rom. 7:9, "Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died." Through this, you'll realise the complete distortion of your nature, your heart's inclinations, and your actions. Recognising the depths of your guilt and its consequences might fill you with trepidation, grief, and a pressing need to find salvation. Then, turn your attention to the gospel's promises, considering their adequacy and relevance to your situation, and seeking Christ within them. This process solidifies one's transformation; Heb. 7:19, "For the law never made anything perfect, but the introduction of a better hope does, by which we draw near to God." By doing so, you'll attain a deeper understanding of Christ, recognising Him as the ideal Saviour, abundant in grace for your renewal, and possessing the merit to absolve your sins. This realisation can ignite your longing for Him, fostering hope for redemption through Him, leading you to place your faith in Him, and, through Him, draw closer to God.

DOCTRINE II. There's a spacious entrance and a broad path connected to it, but it ultimately leads to ruin.

Let's explore:

I. The expansive entrance in question.

II. The vast path that follows this entrance.

III. The unfortunate destination of this path.

IV. The broader implications of this topic.

I. Let's first consider the expansive entrance. If there were only the narrow entrance leading to the next realm, the choice would be clear: everyone would either go that way or not go at all. Such would be the case if the next realm only contained blissful destinations. But another part exists—a hell as well as a heaven. As such, there's an entrance towards the former, a broad one, which requires our caution.

Drawing a parallel to the narrow gate, this expansive entrance signifies the initiation into a life of impiety, setting individuals on a path of active ungodliness. This is when they orientate themselves towards darkness; Eph. 2:1, 2. Once one steps through this entrance, they embark on a journey that inevitably ends in ruin, often starting early in life.

This entrance, or broad gate, represents the inherent corrupt tendencies of the heart; Prov. 4:23; Mark 7:21–23. It begins to manifest as we develop our reasoning skills, gradually widening as we mature; Gen. 8:21. Our initial perceptions of the world tend to be skewed, marked by a reluctance towards virtue and an inclination towards vice; Rom. 8:7, "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God." This inherent disposition soon becomes evident, even in what

we term an 'innocent child', and intensifies throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood; Prov. 22:15.

This gate was established due to Adam's downfall; Rom. 5:12. By violating the initial covenant, Adam paved this ruinous path for himself and his descendants. Unaware of its eventual outcome, humanity naturally gravitates towards it. Were it not for the sacrifices and teachings of Jesus Christ, this would have been the sole passage to the next realm for fallen humans.

This entrance is expansive, allowing easy access for many.

1st, On one side, it vastly opens towards worldly desires and away from God; Jer. 2:13. This is the natural direction of the heart's inclinations. When God created humans, he intended for their hearts to find peace and joy in Him; Eccl. 7:29, "God made man upright." They were to cherish worldly pleasures, but always with God at the centre, seeing as without Him, these pleasures are meaningless; Matth. 19:17. However, in the initial temptation, Satan portrayed worldly desires separate from God. Even though these desires, detached from God, are empty, he inflated their value, making them seem fulfilling. This deception led our ancestors to prioritize them; Gen. 3:6. This mindset has persisted among humanity ever since. Specifically,

(1.) This gate opens to the vast allure of worldly pleasures; Hab. 2:5, compared with Prov. 30:15, 16. Just as animals are drawn to nature, humans are naturally drawn to these pleasures. They can't envision a happiness beyond this and gravitate towards it just as naturally as an infant seeks its mother's nourishment.

This gate is broad, reflecting the insatiable desires of the heart, the immense variety of worldly attractions, and their ultimate

inadequacy; Eccl. 1:2; Isaiah 55:1, 2. The vast yearnings of a heart without God, combined with the vastness of a world rife with fleeting pleasures, makes this inclination towards worldly desires exceptionally wide.

(2.) It diverts attention away from God; Heb. 3:12, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Naturally, a heart that seeks fulfilment in worldly desires will turn away from God; Matth. 6:24, "For no man can serve two masters." Aligning with the world inherently opposes God; James 4:4, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." People, when they embrace worldly pleasures, push God to the sidelines; Ezek. 23:35. They fail to recognise His significance, doubting how a relationship with Him can provide true happiness; they often dismiss it as mere fantasy; Psalm 4:6.

Thus, this natural lean towards worldly desires represents one side of the broad gate. But that's just one aspect of it.

OBJECTION: How can one argue that the heart's inclination towards worldly pleasures is a pathway to doom when every creation of God is good? Aren't we permitted to enjoy and incline towards God's creations, especially when, in many instances, it's clearly encouraged?

RESPONSE: One can perceive worldly pleasures in two distinct ways: (1) Separately from God and (2) In harmony with God and for His sake. In the former, they're seen as independent sources of contentment; in the latter, they're perceived as blessings from God that ultimately lead us back to Him. Our argument pertains to the former perspective, in which the heart naturally gravitates. The heart

tends to seek contentment from these pleasures without acknowledging God, replacing Him with worldly delights. This secular pursuit of pleasures, independent of God, isn't sanctioned. Instead, it reflects the tendencies of those who've ventured through the expansive gate; Eph. 4:17, 18. Here are two considerations:

1. The inclination towards these pleasures, apart from God, is evident in either openly disregarding Him or subtly sidelining Him in our desires or joys. Undoubtedly, one can rightfully seek health, wealth, relationships, etc., but it should be in alignment with God, driven by His teachings. Yet, most overlook Him in these pursuits, Psalm 10:4. Some, while holding certain principles, conveniently ignore Him, allowing unhindered indulgence in worldly joys; Jer. 9:6. Such behaviour underscores the inclination away from God.
2. The inclination towards these pleasures, purely for personal gratification and not for God's glory, reveals itself in our motives. Instead of seeking to honour God through our desires or enjoyments, the primary aim is self-satisfaction. Even though we're advised in (1 Cor. 10:31) that "whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do all to the glory of God", many are drawn to these pleasures purely for their inherent allure, not for their connection to God. Such an approach is akin to spiritual idolatry, where the soul is diminished by desiring anything solely for its intrinsic value.

Secondly, on the flip side, the heart's natural inclination strays towards sin, distancing itself from God's holiness expressed in His law; Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray, as soon as they be born, speaking lies." Initially, God intended humans to gravitate towards holiness, Eccl. 7:29. Thus, as God was

the core of one's soul and well-being, His sacred will and law should guide one's conduct. However, with the heart drifting from God and increasingly seeking secular pleasures, it began to resist His teachings. Consequently, the heart's inclination started to diverge significantly,

(1.) To sin; Jer. 17:9, "The heart is more deceitful than anything else and is extremely corrupt; who can understand it?" The natural preference is severely skewed; people are instinctively drawn to sin. They seek out worldly pleasures, attempting to draw satisfaction from them, and simultaneously, they are driven by their deep-seated desires; Eph. 2:3. These inherent desires, akin to the offspring of darkness, incessantly demand gratification, quenching their thirst only with the tainted waters of sin, which align with their nature.

(2.) Away from God's holiness, as depicted in His law; Rom. 8:7. It's not merely a casual disregard or indifference towards holiness but a profound aversion to it, comparable to a wild bull's resistance to the yoke. Therefore, living righteously and engaging in spiritual disciplines is inherently cumbersome to the impure heart, which cherishes its sinful freedom and despises the constraints imposed by divine commandments. Any adherence to these disciplines is typically superficial; the heart remains disengaged, Ezek. 33:31.

This inclination is vast, expanding widely. Human corruption is a deep abyss that seems insatiable. A life of sin, being a path of deviation, seems endless, with one misstep leading to another, paving the way for further transgressions. This expansive entrance beckons all descendants of fallen Adam, predisposing them to step in, a move we must now examine closely.

To enter this vast gateway means to surrender to the heart's corrupt natural tendencies, to not oppose them but to submit; Rom. 6:12,

"Do not let sin rule in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires." This gate ought to remain shut. The source of bitterness should be immediately sealed, the growth of corruption curbed at its outset, and individuals should promptly confront and battle their own sinful inclinations. However, instead of resisting, many quickly succumb to these natural urges. And in doing so, they...

1. Succumbing to the whims of their thoughts; Eph. 4:17. People experience a restless spirit, but instead of seeking solace in God, they turn to worldly things. The human mind is inherently clouded, and people chase whatever it portrays as happiness and contentment, following wherever their misguided thoughts direct. This leads individuals on a wayward path. Initially, they find temporary joy in basic comforts, then in fashionable attire, followed by indulgence in merriment. As they mature, they're drawn towards the expansive world of pleasure, gain, and prestige. In this vast realm, they roam aimlessly, ever in search of fulfilment, continually misled, yet with each letdown, another enticing distraction emerges, renewing their pursuit with fresh hope; Isa. 57:10. Engaging in this cycle is unmistakably stepping through the expansive gateway.
2. Succumbing to the corrupt heart's innate pull towards sin and away from righteousness; Rom. 3:11, 12. People feel the stirrings of desire, and rather than resisting, they contemplate indulging them. They breach the boundaries of divine law, entering into forbidden territory, neglecting their duty to God, and sinning in line with their innate tendencies. This too is clearly stepping through that vast gateway. This entrance can be categorised in two distinct manners:

1st, A more subtle kind, often unnoticed by the individual. We all once ventured down this path, unaware, due to the early emergence of our flaws during childhood; acting wrongly before fully grasping our actions, Psalm 58:3; Prov. 20:11. We unknowingly serve sin and malevolence before recognising their true nature. If early transgressions aren't addressed through proper guidance, they often grow too powerful to be managed later on, as illustrated in Prov. 29:15, "Correction and discipline are wise, but an unchecked child brings disgrace."

2nd, A more conscious, deliberate choice. As individuals mature and can differentiate between right and wrong, they encounter the narrow path of faith and the vast path of sin and superficiality. With a natural inclination towards the latter, they overlook the righteous path and opt for the more appealing broader route, resonating with their inner desires, Jer. 2:25. There are three prominent instances of this kind.

1. Rejecting the foundations of a good upbringing, feeling restricted by them. Many embark on a misguided path, ultimately leading to their downfall, as illustrated in Prov. 5:11–13. The guidance of our parents is the first governance we experience, so it's unsurprising that early teachings in the Proverbs, meant to guide the youth, start with an emphasis on heeding parental wisdom: ver. 8, "Listen to your father's advice and don't neglect your mother's guidance." Given the importance of this, how perilous must it be to either dismiss such teachings prematurely or, even after they've served their purpose, to abandon the values instilled by them? Such a dismissal can only arise from an inherent urge to indulge unchecked desires.

2. Associating with the wrong crowd. The Proverbs' subsequent piece of advice touches upon this: ver. 10, "My child, if sinners lure you, don't be persuaded." Given our propensity to be influenced by the company we keep, particularly if it's unsavoury, aligning with such individuals is akin to stepping onto the errant path. If one had no intention of joining them, why seek their company?
3. Apostasizing from previously shown religious inclinations; when someone, after demonstrating promising signs of piety, abandons those principles, adopting a more secular stance, it's depicted in Heb. 10:38: "If someone shrinks back, I won't be pleased with them."

The common trap leading one astray is often their most dominant weakness. This flaw finds its way into our lives with ease and exerts a strong pull, guiding us towards the broader, misguided path.

II. Let's discuss the expansive path connected to the wide gate. Reflecting on the nature of the gate, this broad path aligns with the human heart's inclinations; as per Isa. 57:17, "Due to the sin of his greed, I became angry and punished him. I hid myself in anger as he continued stubbornly in the desires of his heart." Given that the human heart is naturally flawed, this path is inherently one of impiety and disregard for holiness, as highlighted in Psalm 1:1. As soon as individuals surrender to their innate tendencies, they find themselves on this expansive path, led by their heart's whims. In this context, I will outline:

1st, How the path dictated by one's heart or innate tendencies indeed represents the broad way.

2nd, Identify the segments of this expansive path that lead to downfall.

3rd, Elaborate on the vastness of this path.

Firstly, I'll demonstrate that the journey guided by one's heart or inherent inclinations is undeniably the expansive route. This is evident:

1st, From the corrupted inclination humanity acquired due to Adam's downfall. Regardless of what some might argue about human nature's nobility, God's account of the human heart suggests otherwise; Jer. 17:9 states, "The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable – who can understand it?" Jesus portrays it as a tainted wellspring in Mark 7:21-22, and this tainting originated from Adam's fall, as mentioned in Rom. 5:12. Therefore, the path it prompts is surely the expansive route to ruin, leading to the assertion, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way," as found in Isa. 53:6. Through this inclination,

1. Humanity's inclination is to turn away from God, who is rightfully our ultimate purpose, as described in Psalm 14:3 and Jer. 2:13. Not only has man's heart departed from its peace in God, but it also harbours a deep-seated hostility towards Him, as mentioned in Rom. 8:7. There's a distaste for His pure nature and His law, a reflection of that purity. There exists a profound disparity between human nature and God's essence, and human will and God's intentions. As stated in Job 21:14, many voice, "Turn away from us, O God; we don't wish to understand your ways."

2. There's a leaning towards valuing creations as supreme, placing them above God, as referenced in Jer. 2:13. Hence, the heart's innate cry is, "Who will bring us happiness?" (Psalm 4:6). Adam, having forsaken God, sought solace in worldly creations, aiming to derive satisfaction that was meant to come from God. This is the legacy Adam left behind, and it's the path we naturally tread unless grace redirects us back to God.
3. There's an inherent resistance to righteousness, comparable to a wild ox's aversion to a harness, as described in Jer. 31:18. To the unenlightened individual, embracing the teachings of Christ is burdensome, as shown in Hos. 4:16: "Israel keeps slipping away, much like a rebellious cow." Thus, only a paralysing fear of retribution or an opportunistic hope for rewards can truly motivate them towards duty. Without these external factors, left to their own devices, they would likely never commit to it.
4. There's a predisposition towards wrongdoing, captured in Hos. 11:7: "My people are constantly turning away, even if they're called back, they refuse to honour me." The heart's tendencies lean this way, making it the natural path for many, as echoed in Psalm 58:3, "From birth, the wicked go astray, lying as soon as they begin to speak." No one needs to instruct them in the ways of sin; if left to their inclinations, they would naturally veer towards it, as surely as water flows downhill or fire sparks ascend. Given these tendencies, who could argue that following one's heart isn't treading the broad path?

Secondly, this is evident due to the essential nature of rebirth or regeneration, which is both complete and universal; John 3:3 states, "Unless someone is born again, they cannot see the kingdom of God." To perform righteous acts, one must first become a new being, as

mentioned in Eph. 2:10, and be connected to Christ through faith to achieve anything significant. As John 15:5 says, "Apart from me, you can achieve nothing." This necessity stems from the comprehensive corruption of our essence, making us unsuited for righteousness, as per John 3:6, "What's born of the flesh remains flesh." Hence, it's clear that the heart's natural path is the wide path. For a nature that is entirely corrupted can only act corruptly. And if one's nature needs to be renewed to do good, it surely continues in the wrong direction until such renewal.

Thirdly, this is demonstrated by the challenges faced when trying to convert sinners to God. As described in Jer. 13:23, "Can an Ethiopian change their skin, or a leopard its spots? Similarly, can you do good when you're used to doing evil?" This conversion is immensely challenging. Kindness alone won't achieve it, nor will threats; a sinner might ignore God's benevolence urging repentance, continuing in sin even when danger is imminent. Even a messenger from beyond the grave wouldn't convert a sinner, as cited in Luke 16:31. Only the unstoppable force of grace, capable of transforming the heart, can achieve it, as mentioned in Jer. 31:18. This affirms the heart's natural trajectory as the expansive path and nothing else.

Next, let's discuss "the sections of this vast path leading to ruin." It's so wide that detailing its individual parts would be extensive. Broadly, there are two segments: 1. The path of superficiality, and 2. The path of wickedness.

Firstly, the path of superficiality, as alluded to in Eph. 4:17. As soon as one steps through the gate of natural tendencies, shifting towards worldly attractions and away from God, they find themselves on the path of superficiality – a broad and inviting road to devastation. This journey represents a trivial life, a pattern of empty interactions, as

mentioned in 1 Pet. 1:18. Most people, except those reborn, tread this path. And it is...

1. This path distances a person further from God. Like the prodigal son, he embarks on a journey to a distant land; Luke 15:13. Each step taken on this path drifts him farther away; and the longer he remains on it, the greater the gap between him and God grows. The separation between God and the sinner begins at the point of original sin, and as the sinner chooses the path of vanity, he quickly distances himself.

2. It's a path where he becomes deeply attached to worldly things for his primary satisfaction; Jer. 2:13. Having departed from God, he turns to the hollow offerings of the world, attempting to forge happiness from mere creature comforts, much like Adam was lured by the forbidden fruit in place of God. Here, four aspects deserve attention:

- (1.) The individual recognises a void within; Psalm 4:6, "Who will show us any good?" He's aware of his own inadequacy. An emptiness resides in his heart that he's compelled to fill. Such a void is inevitable, given that he's lost God and exists without His presence; Eph. 2:12. Only God, an infinite good, can truly satisfy the boundless yearnings of the soul.

- (2.) Having lost sight of God as the source of true joy, he scans the world, searching for something to satiate his soul's emptiness, which he realises cannot thrive in isolation; Eccl. 6:9. Even though he has lost God, if he could truly see, he'd understand that the only way forward is to reconnect with God. But his vision is clouded on this wide path, unable to recognise that only God can truly fulfil him; 1 Cor. 2:14. While the gospel speaks of this truth and Christians share

their personal experiences, he fails to grasp it and seeks solace elsewhere.

(3) The worldly offerings seem tempting; its allurements shine brightly. The world flaunts its riches, and presents its many enticements - "the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life;" 1 John 2:16. He becomes captivated, believing that possessing these will grant him contentment. He perceives them as suitable companions for his heart, harbouring hopes of achieving his desires. Satan, too, plays a role here, embellishing the allure of the worldly and amplifying the sinner's longing for it, as seen in Matth. 4:8.

(4.) Thus, captivated, the sinner ardently pursues these worldly attractions, hoping to find the happiness he seeks within them; Psalm 4:6. Filled with optimism, he commits to this pursuit. This becomes the expansive path of vanity on which he tirelessly moves, until either God's grace enlightens him, guiding him back, or he finds himself in hell, realising he's been chasing a mere illusion all along.

The pursuit of worldly attractions as a source of contentment is not undertaken lightly. Instead:

1. It starts from an early age; Psalm 58:3. From the moment the descendants of Adam sense a void, they turn to worldly things for fulfilment. Even before they yearn for God, they're deeply drawn to what delights the senses. Just observe young children, how they are captivated by what's tasty and visually appealing, limited as they are by their understanding. They anticipate immense joy from these simple pleasures. And as they mature, with the world unveiling its alluring facets, their cravings and chase for them intensify in tandem.

2. This pursuit is relentless, sparing no moment in the quest for satisfaction. The endeavour is pursued with dedication, so that if it doesn't yield results, it's certainly not due to a lack of effort; Isa. 57:20; Psalm 127:2. They are consistently at the beck and call of these desires. Regardless of the setbacks encountered, they remain undeterred, unwavering in their quest for joy; Rom. 6:20.
3. The pursuit is undertaken with fervour. Success isn't a mere option, but a necessity; they are deeply committed to the cause. Their most cherished abilities are devoted to it; Isa. 55:2. They toil tirelessly, not merely dabbling but striving earnestly to achieve their goals; Isa. 55:2; Matth. 11:28. Even when confronted with challenges, they persevere, reminiscent of stone masons working on a formidable piece; Jer. 2:13; they persevere, regardless of the sparks that fly back at them.
4. Finally, this relentless pursuit persists until a divine intervention halts it. Either through mercy, where they recognise their misjudgement and return to find solace in God and Christ; or in wrath, where they are suddenly taken from this pursuit by death, uprooting all their aspirations; Matth. 25:45, 46; Luke 12:20.

This path is unmistakably one of vanity because:

1. It's a misleading and deceitful path, Psalm 119:128, appealing to people solely because of their unawareness or misunderstanding, ver. 104. Here, mere illusions are offered to the heart rather than any real substance, with the world promising what it cannot deliver. The lure is visible, but the hidden trap is what truly devastates; 1 Tim. 6:10. On this path, individuals unwittingly seek their own downfalls.

2. It's a futile path. Lives are exhausted without achieving any substantial goal, revealing no lasting gains by the end; Rom. 3:12. It's like children chasing butterflies on a sunny day: many evade their grasp and the vibrant wings of those they do catch crumble in their hands. This futility is evident:

(1.) As they completely miss the grand objective God sets for them, that is, His glory; Rom. 3:23. Rather than living to celebrate Him, they live in a manner that diminishes Him, placing worldly things on a pedestal, supplanting Him as their topmost priority. Surely, a life that doesn't fulfil its primary purpose is in vain. So, what's to be anticipated other than a fate mirroring the wasteful servant?

(2.) Since they never achieve the happiness and contentment they seek for themselves; Hos. 8:7. They pursue it throughout their lives, never finding it and never could in such a direction, which is inherently flawed. Isn't it a pointless life when one departs this world never having found what they deeply sought throughout their existence?

3. It's a frivolous path, where individuals squander lifetimes achieving nothing substantial or enduring, nothing that will offer solace when facing mortality, nothing that prepares for the afterlife; Psalm 90:9. God places us in this world to work towards eternity, to prepare for a joyous hereafter, yet those on this path overlook this profound calling, wasting time. They become so idle that they incessantly seek out diversions just to pass the time, as if they had no meaningful purpose.

4. It's an unrestful path; Matth. 11:28, 29. Solomon describes the restlessness of chasing after illusions; Prov. 21:6. Such is the entire journey of those on this wide path. Their hearts find no

peace here. Any fleeting distractions they come across can't bring lasting contentment. Seeking comfort in one thing, they soon discover it's hollow or riddled with issues, leading them to pursue another empty promise, which turns out just as unsatisfying. Their experiences can be likened to someone perched on a high mast, where no stable footing exists.

5. Finally, it's a path of ceaseless wandering due to continuous letdowns. Here, people mirror the blinded citizens of Sodom around Lot's dwelling, searching everywhere for fulfilment but never obtaining it. They tirelessly attempt to find what satisfies, to no avail. This cycle repeats endlessly; after countless disillusionments, another hollow pursuit is embarked upon; Isa. 57:10. Thus, they are perpetually ensnared in this cycle of emptiness unless they are graced with a change of heart that leads them to find solace in God, or until their life comes to its inevitable close, with dreams unfulfilled.

Secondly, the wide path is a route of degradation; Psalm 14:1. Once one enters via that broad gateway of natural predisposition towards sin, veering away from God's holiness articulated in his laws, they tread the path of degradation, leading directly to ruin; Tit. 1:5, 16; Rev. 22:15. And this is,

1. A route where individuals, already flawed by nature, rapidly become even more despicable and repugnant in the eyes of God, as they drift further from the sanctity his laws prescribe; Jer. 9:3. "They advance from wrongdoing to further wrongdoing, and they do not recognise me, declares the Lord." In this journey, inherent sin is compounded by deliberate sin, and the innate corruption permeates thoughts, words, and deeds. The further they travel, the more distant they become from any goodness.

2. A path where individuals strive to appease rather than suppress and quell their desires; Psalm 58:3. Lacking the inclination for the path of righteousness, they choose the path of sin, chasing it regardless of God's esteem or the anguish of their conscience. If unrepentant, they inevitably find themselves in the abyss of destruction. In this context, four points warrant consideration:

1. Man's heart is inherently filled with a swarm of sinful urges yearning for fulfilment. Observe the emanations from the heart; Mark 7:21, 22: "Evil notions, infidelities, improprieties, homicides, thefts, greed, malevolence, deception, lewdness, malevolent intent, slander, arrogance, and absurdity." If these weren't innate, they wouldn't manifest. Born from the inherent flaw in our nature and under malevolent influences, these urges intensify. They are ever-eager to consume what aligns with their essence.
2. Rather than resisting these urges, sinners make efforts to accommodate them, choosing to indulge instead of deny; Psalm 78:18. This is a demanding endeavour, like fuelling an insatiable fire. While these desires can be overwhelmed, they're never truly satiated. It's a taxing journey for the sinner, reminiscent of a fierce battle, as described in James 4:1-3.
3. Worldly pleasures, within the confines of the law, can't satiate these desires. It's unsurprising since they were never meant to offer us true contentment or heart's rest. Even in paradise, there was a void only God's presence could fill. Ordinary desires of a heart grounded in God can be fulfilled with regular indulgences; but unholy desires never find satisfaction in the ordinary.

4. Consequently, the sinner oversteps the boundaries of God's holy laws. When permitted pleasures don't suffice, they turn to the forbidden; Prov. 9:17. Thus, someone adrift on the path of emptiness often veers into the route of degradation. They resemble a ravenous animal in a barren field, consuming everything within its confines until it finally breaks free. Just as Dinah, lured by vain distractions, eventually succumbed to degradation and impurity. And within this space, two temptations await to ensnare these unchecked desires.

1. The cravings of the body seek satisfaction; Eph. 2:3. Within the wide path, there's a quagmire of degradation for individuals to immerse in, known as the impurities of the flesh; 2 Cor. 7:1. This encompasses intoxicated individuals, those given to excess in eating, those involved in illicit behaviours, vulgar communicators, and all who prioritise sensory pleasures, neglecting their inner selves. It's as if they perceive themselves solely as living flesh, or their souls merely as a preservative for their physical forms.

2. The cravings of the mind seek satisfaction; Eph. 2:3. This quagmire is termed the impurities of the spirit; 2 Cor. 7:1. Here, one finds profound animosity towards God, a deep resentment against true sanctity, scepticism of the gospel, rampant egoism, materialism, and numerous other vices that individuals indulge in while on the wide path.

These two lead to four main routes of the broad path, with many traversing each:

1. Profound ignorance, where many remain content, lacking even a basic understanding of religious foundations; Psalm 82:5. They

are taught life skills, but often not the value of education or spiritual growth. If they ever acquire knowledge, it is either forgotten or underutilised. Their physical and mental desires consume them, and they neither possess nor wish for a deeper understanding of God and his teachings; Job 21:14. They're aware that enlightenment could hinder their indulgences, which thrive in the shadows and shun illumination; John 3:20, "For everyone practising evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." Regrettably, they don't realise this ignorance may culminate in eternal darkness; Hos. 4:6; Isa. 27:11.

2. Mere moralism, adhering only to the letter of the Ten Commandments. Such people maintain civil decency but are completely detached from true spirituality, displaying no signs of it. They may be good neighbours but fall short as committed Christians. They act justly in worldly matters but don't engage with spiritual matters; they focus on daily tasks and responsibilities, overlooking the essential spiritual aspect. Their primary virtue is in what they don't do, reminiscent of the Pharisee; Luke 18:11, "I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector." It's as if their only obligation to God is to not overtly insult Him. This is a path of the wide way; Matt. 5:20, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."
3. Superficial piety, where individuals follow the external rituals of religion but remain disconnected from its essence and vitality, 2 Tim. 3:5. These are the polished façades, those who superficially adopt religious behaviours without an authentic change of heart.

They might have withdrawn from certain excessive behaviours but haven't experienced genuine transformation. Alongside their form of religion, they still harbour a deep-seated affection for sin and always have a cherished vice replacing God in Christ in their hearts. They can be compared to animals valuable only for their hide. Thus, we see many who once claimed faith, later renouncing it, and leading scandalous lives, merely revealing their true selves after discarding their façade. Scriptures caution such individuals; Psalm 125:5, "Those who turn to crooked ways the Lord will banish with the evildoers." And Matt. 24:51, "He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

4. Blatant impiety, where people brazenly display their wickedness, engaging freely in flagrant misdeeds, Gal. 5:19-21. They "flaunt their sins like Sodom and don't even try to hide them," taking pride in their degradation. They disdain being constrained by religious, sober, and decent principles, ridiculing righteousness and merrily marching towards ruin. Clearly, this is a conspicuous path of the wide way. It's improbable they hold any illusions of heaven, as they wouldn't consider it a place for the unredeemed. If they do, they're in for a rude awakening; Rev. 22:15, "Outside are the dogs..." A life of open wickedness will inevitably lead to a sorrowful conclusion; Eph. 5:6, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient."

This path is one of degradation, making individuals repugnant in God's eyes. In this journey, souls continue to accumulate contamination, and this impurity lingers; it isn't cleansed. Every sin marks the soul, staining it in a manner befitting the transgression. Consequently:

1. The soul becomes unrecognisable in comparison to God. The more sinful it is, the more it diverges from God's moral excellence. Since God cherishes His purity, He inevitably despises and is repelled by what deviates from His essence.
2. As the soul strays from God, its intrinsic beauty fades, making it repellent. Holiness represents God's majesty and splendour; Exod. 15:11 states, "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness?" Given that God is the pinnacle of perfection, holiness is also the hallmark of His creation. Consequently, sin signifies the soul's degradation.

Considering the expansiveness of this path, we note:

1. It offers ample space for travellers. The misguided mind is a profound abyss, and the route to ruin is boundlessly vast. Such minds have the liberty to drift aimlessly and explore the extensive path. Countless trivialities arise, with myriad degradations evident, as highlighted in Jer. 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Thus, if one vice loses its allure, another can replace it; and every desire can find its fulfilment on this path.
2. There are no confining boundaries on this path. It's a journey of unrestrained freedom, characterised by casting off all limitations and endorsing every indulgence. On this path, travellers dismiss the guidelines of the Bible, the inner voice of conscience, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, viewing them as constrictions. Consequently:
3. It's straightforward to join this path. It's so expansive that there's no challenge in finding it, as Psalm 58:3 indicates. Even if one walks carelessly, with eyes closed, they won't stray from it

because it aligns with innate tendencies. The real challenge lies in avoiding it.

4. It's effortless to traverse. This path provides ample space for all of a sinner's whims and unsavoury desires. Travellers on this route move with the prevailing winds and flow with the current, as it matches their natural inclinations, Jer. 4:22. Their only task is to continue forward.
5. It's challenging to abandon. As stated in Jer. 13:23, "Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil." Some may appear to deviate from this path for a while, both to themselves and others, yet they don't truly change their course. Instead, they merely switch from one lane of this expansive path to another, such as transitioning from blatant wrongdoing to mere ritualistic behaviours.

III. Let's consider the trajectory of this path towards devastation.

Within this exploration:

1st, We'll decode its implications.

2nd, We'll substantiate this claim.

Firstly, let's discern its implications. It suggests that:

1. Destruction lies at the culmination of this journey, even if travellers remain blissfully unaware. As Prov. 9:17-18 elucidates,

"Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he doesn't realise that the dead reside there, and that her guests are deep in hell." As assuredly as heavenly bliss awaits at the end of the narrow path, hell and devastation beckon at the conclusion of the broad one. These outcomes, designated by God, are inseparable.

2. The deeper one ventures along this path, the more distant they become from refuge and draw closer to ruin. Advancing on the broad path distances one from God, sanctity, and salvation. As Psal. 119:155 states, "Salvation remains elusive to the wicked, for they do not pursue your decrees." They are distanced from the God of salvation, the route to salvation, and thereby salvation itself. Concurrently, they edge ever closer to disaster.
3. Persisting on this path inevitably culminates in ruin; Rom. 3:16-17 observes, "Destruction and misery define their routes." Ultimately, they'll find themselves in a realm of disaster, as expressed in Psal. 9:17, "The wicked will be condemned to hell, along with all nations that forsake God." They will be engulfed in a state of desolation, as described in Matth. 25:46. This isn't an eradication of existence but a decimation of well-being; they won't cease to exist or be annihilated, but they'll experience torment that eradicates their comfort and ease. Destruction doesn't inherently mean annihilation, as evidenced by Luke 4:34 in comparison with Matth. 8:29. Annihilation is momentary, yet their suffering endures, as in 2 Thess. 1:9. Annihilation might imply a form of peace, but they will find none, as Rev. 14:11 states. Their enduring torment is highlighted in Rev. 20:10; the perpetual worm must have a host, and the fire is not eternal, but it ensures eternal punishment, as per Matth. 25:41, 46.

Secondly, To substantiate that this path leads to ruin, consider:

1. This is the recurring message of scripture. It was God Himself who initially voiced this, as recorded in Gen. 2:17: "The day you eat from it, you will certainly die." The text reveals Jesus Christ's affirmation of this fact. It's a consistent message conveyed by all the prophets and apostles and can be found on nearly every page of the Bible. Thus, God's truth ensures it. If people choose to find solace in ignoring these warnings, what can be done? But they'll be in for a harsh reality; as Deut. 29:19-20 states, "The Lord will not hold back, but His anger and jealousy will burn against that individual, bringing upon him all the curses written in this book, and the Lord will erase his name from under heaven."
2. God's just governance demands it. Gen. 18:25, when seen alongside 2 Thess. 1:6, reminds us that those who lead must act justly; they must penalise wrongdoings and reward good deeds. Surely, the supreme ruler and judge of all creation must also enact justice? Indeed, His honour and the well-being of humanity mandate it. This very hint of justice maintains some semblance of order in the world. While some enjoy prosperity on the broader path, others face hardships on the narrower one. Thus, there must be a reckoning at the conclusion of the broad journey. Some transgressors face repercussions in the present, a precursor to what awaits; yet, not all do, ensuring the inevitable judgement.
3. A considered understanding of our existence makes it evident. The human soul is eternal, persisting even after the physical body ceases. Only God can truly fulfil us, meeting the infinite desires of our souls. However, the broad path diverges from

God, and thus from true joy. As the afterlife is not a period of testing but of retribution, separation from God in that realm is total and final, resulting in unparalleled suffering for the sentient being. What can the outcome of a life of frivolity be other than sheer disillusionment, tormenting the soul? How can one avoid this despair when departing from this world, especially when the world itself will come to an end, rendering them devoid of the very things they derived pleasure from? The outcome of a path of degradation can only be devastation, where all that remains are insatiable desires, haunting memories of past misdeeds, and an eternal inability to ever satisfy these urges.

4. Lastly, our inherent conscience attests to this; as outlined in Rom. 1:32 and 2:15. There's an innate part of every wrongdoer that predicts doom on this course, even if it's overshadowed by overpowering desires or dismissed; as noted in Job 15:21. This very awareness keeps them perpetually restless, avoiding profound introspection. If they were to genuinely reflect and weigh the outcomes of both paths, they'd find their conscience urging them away from the former and towards the latter.

USE 1: For Insight. From this, we can discern:

1. The path one embarks on in life is of utmost importance. How one initiates their life journey holds significant ramifications. A promising start often foretells a favourable conclusion; whereas a misjudged inception typically results in a similar outcome, barring a profound transformation. Consider the vast entrance leading onto a perilous path that concludes in ruin. How crucial, then, is it to commence rightly, since any missteps at the outset

demand re-entry through an entirely different portal? This speaks loudly to:

(1.) The younger generation, urging them to scrutinise the gateway they choose, reflecting on the nature of their journey's commencement; as mentioned in Eccl. 12:1, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Often, this isn't given due consideration; young people venture forth haphazardly, minimising the importance of their formative years, with a misplaced optimism that maturity will bring rectitude. Such an approach is akin to entering through the vast gate, risking one's soul on the naive hope of a timely about-face. However, one step invariably leads to the next, and more often than not, the idea of a return is neglected, and the stakes are forfeited.

(2.) The older individuals, to reflect upon their initial choices; given the considerable distance travelled on their journey, it's paramount to recall the gateway they first chose. Irrespective of the path you're currently on, if it wasn't initiated through the right gateway, its correctness is questionable. Perhaps you've distanced yourself from the indiscretions of youth and have found a more balanced approach to life. Yet, even with these changes, you might still be on that wider, more dangerous path. Have you genuinely transformed? Have you become renewed beings? Refer to 2 Cor. 5:17. If not, you remain on that former path.

2. Succumbing to our innate desires and tendencies almost certainly directs us towards a perilous path. These tendencies represent that vast gate, with the ensuing path branching out from it. Most don't contemplate the significance of their inherent leanings towards worldly pleasures or sin. Yet, if one doesn't resist these leanings and instead succumbs to them,

they've entered through the expansive gateway, commencing on the treacherous path. Our gravest adversary resides within. A heart that's unopposed and follows its whims will undoubtedly lead to one's downfall. This yielding propensity is in direct opposition to God's intentions; as depicted in Isa. 57:17.

3. Lastly, the life choices that resonate most with our corrupted nature, those that come easiest to us, are the riskiest; they lead to our undoing. By nature, we are inclined to favour unrestrained indulgence, seeking out life's fleeting pleasures and partaking in its vices. Yet, such temporary comfort presages long-term suffering; such unchecked freedom culminates in everlasting constraint. Such abandonment of one's responsibilities and duties sets the stage for eventual retribution.

USE 2: A Call to Reflect. Thus:

1st, Reflect upon your path, consider which one you're treading — whether it's the wider, perilous path or not; as stated in Hag. 1:5, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways." If someone warned you about a dangerous route ahead, you would certainly check your course to ensure you weren't on it. Here is a message from above alerting you that, in this life, a path leads to ruin. So, don't be complacent; earnestly reflect on which path you've chosen. Take this seriously, examine your current course, and ask yourself, "Which path am I on?"

MOTIVE 1: This is a duty you owe to God, acknowledging all the divine signs and messages you've received, be it through rituals or events; as in Mic. 6:9 and Rev. 3:20. At times, He communicates through His word and sometimes through life events. Will you not

pause and reflect on your path and its destination? Ignoring these signs is perilous; as Prov. 1:24 warns.

MOTIVE 2: It's an act of self-respect you owe to your own soul, as 2 Cor. 13:5 suggests. If one were guiding a group of animals and was informed about a nearby path that ends in a cliff, they'd surely check if they were on it. Yet, people are repeatedly informed of a wide path leading to ruin, and many don't even grant their souls the courtesy of reflection. Instead, they thoughtlessly move forward.

MOTIVE 3: The path you choose determines your end. The outcome, whether life or death, is intrinsically tied to the path you tread. If you're on the wide path, it's a path of potential doom. If not, you're on the path to salvation. Isn't this reason enough to give it due consideration?

MOTIVE 4: Lastly, clarity on this matter is invaluable. If you find you're not on the perilous path, there's solace in knowing you're headed towards salvation and will undoubtedly reach it. If you realise you're on the broader path, there's still time to change course and avoid its perils. For many, a clear-headed, unbiased reflection would suffice to ascertain their path. Let's further explore this.

1. Those who've never recognised that they're on a perilous path, with potential ruin at its end, are undeniably on it. Their journey is one of ignorance, as noted in 2 Cor. 4:3, 4. If someone remains unconvinced of their errors, they're likely unconverted; for who will correct their course unless they acknowledge they're off track?
2. Those who haven't embraced the challenging journey of personal transformation and rebirth, but have instead found alternative routes to their current state, are referenced in Matth.

18:3 and John 3:3. If individuals, regardless of the enlightenment in their thoughts, the passion in their feelings, or the purity of their actions, haven't genuinely transformed their inherent nature and embraced an inclination towards virtue and commitment to Christ's teachings, but instead harbour a persistent affection for wrongdoing, they're undoubtedly on the wider, treacherous path.

3. Those who harbour a deep resentment towards the virtuous path, either in themselves or others, are highlighted in Rom. 8:7. Some may select a certain degree of religious adherence for themselves, but they resist complete commitment. They despise such commitment in others and won't embrace it personally. This signifies they're on the perilous path because true believers always aim for complete virtue and cherish it, as suggested by Phil. 3:13, 14.
4. Lastly, those who prefer a reckless, indulgent lifestyle, immersed in superficiality or impropriety, and find joy only in such a path are discussed in Rom. 8:15. This highlights a mindset entirely worldly, disconnected from divine life. Such individuals cannot value divine matters, only earthly ones; this is a dangerous state of being, as Rom. 8:5, 6 indicates. For these individuals, heaven, in all its sanctity, would seem imprisoning – a realm where they would find no joy. They can be confident they won't reach such a place, given they lack the heavenly disposition needed to befit it, according to Col. 1:12, 13.

Secondly, those of you who have been redirected from the opposite path, respond fittingly to this deliverance and live in a manner worthy of it, recognising that you've been steered away from the route of destruction. And,

1. Express gratitude to God for this transformation, as it was through His grace that you were drawn away from it, as seen in Psalm 107:20, 21. Reflect on the perilous ledge you once stood upon thoughtlessly, and the course of ruin you were confidently pursuing. Bless the One who opened your eyes to perceive the danger there and revealed another path, no matter how narrow it seemed. Acknowledge His grace that led you to abandon the wide path and embrace the narrow one. Thank Him for the strength of His Spirit that pulled you away from one path and guided you onto the other.
2. Don't long for that path again; resist the temptation to glance back at it nostalgically. This counsel is offered even to those committed to Christ, as in Psalm 45:10, "Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: Forget your people and your father's house." This isn't without reason, as even in the best of people, remnants of old sinful tendencies remain. When observing the unhindered access to worldly indulgence on the path of vanity and vileness, these remnants might feel a sense of envy and secretly yearn for a similar freedom. This is a dangerous inclination that, if not swiftly suppressed, can engulf the entire soul and lead to its ruin. This serves as a caution, much like the reminder of Lot's wife in Luke 17:32.
3. Don't resent the challenges and hardships faced on the narrow path. Instead, consider them with a sense of purpose and understanding. As stated in 1 Peter 4:12 and James 1:2–4, challenges arise, but remember that on the broad path, those challenges would have amounted to utter destruction. There's no justification for resentment; it's akin to someone being rescued from a path where they would have met a tragic fate and then begrudging the minor inconveniences encountered on the safe

path. The difficulties of the broad and narrow paths differ as much as a curse and a cross, a deadly weapon and a surgeon's scalpel, eternal wrath and the corrective rod of a caring father.

4. Finally, show compassion towards those still on the broad path and take an active interest in their restoration. Pity them, as they're oblivious to their actions, their location, and the life-threatening peril they face. Be genuinely concerned for them, for they're heading towards destruction without realising it, as described in Proverbs 7:22, 23 and 9:17, 18. How can you not feel this way about them, especially if you understand what your own situation used to be, as noted in Titus 3:3, "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another."

Thirdly, those on the broad path must make a U-turn from it as it leads to destruction. "Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why should you die?" Ezekiel 33:11.

MOTIVE 1. There's no evading the impending destruction by staying on it, regardless of what you may believe; 1 Thessalonians 5:3. God has declared it, and how can you expect safety on that path when faced with a clear proclamation from heaven? He possesses infinite knowledge, making it impossible for you to outsmart Him; infinite power, rendering you unable to defy Him; and He is intrinsically truthful, leaving you unable to make Him a liar; Numbers 23:19. See Deuteronomy 29:19, 20.

MOTIVE 2. It will result in utter destruction; 2 Peter 2:12, 13. This encompasses destruction of your souls, bodies, and comforts; Proverbs 6:32 and 8:36; Isaiah 66:24; Luke 16:24. Just as Sodom

was completely obliterated, leaving nothing behind, the same fate awaits you at the end of the broad path.

MOTIVE 3. The destruction will be eternal; 2 Thessalonians 1:9, "They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." This is not annihilation of your existence, but of your well-being, an endless state of dying without cessation; Matthew 25:46; Revelation 14:11; and 20:10. While your journey on this path may be relatively short, the destruction awaiting at its conclusion will be infinitely longer, continuing throughout eternity.

MOTIVE 4. You can abandon it now and avoid the destruction it leads to; Ezekiel 18:30. Satan and the allure of a sinful world may encourage you to persist on it, but they cannot coerce you. Your past choice to enter it doesn't compel you to stay on it. This path can be forsaken; the grace of Christ has the power to draw you away from it, and if you genuinely desire, it will lead you out; Jeremiah 31:18, 19.

MOTIVE 5. God is urging you to turn away from it; Ezekiel 33:11. Christ has unveiled an alternative route, a path of life, and is earnestly inviting you to embark upon it. He offers Himself as the path; John 14:6, and beckons you towards Him; Matthew 11:28. His call resonates along the path and reaches your ears while you're still on it, the wide path; Proverbs 9:5, 6. However, at the path's end, His voice ceases to be that of the Lamb of God, transforming into the roar of the Lion of the tribe of Judah; Luke 19:27.

MOTIVE 6. Lastly, should you persist, these calls to turn from the path will heighten the severity of your destruction; Matthew 11:22. Remembering these calls at the end will be deeply painful, with no hope of remedy. It will be an everlasting torment, a constant gnawing; contemplating how, for a few years of liberty on the broad

path, you condemned yourself to eternal damnation. Therefore, as stated in Hebrews 12:25, "See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?" Don't end up lamenting like it's described in Proverbs 5:11, 12, "At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, 'How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction!'"

If you wish to change your path and leave the wide gate,

1. Be unwavering and determined; expect opposition. Satan will vigorously resist the change through his temptations; the worldly influences will hinder you; your former indulgent companions will advise and ridicule you; and your own desires will be against you. But remember, as stated in Matthew 11:12, "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."
2. Don't procrastinate, but turn immediately, like the psalmist did; Psalm 119:60, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." If your resolve is genuine, it won't tolerate even a moment's delay, much like casting a burning coal from your hand. If you wait until the next day or the next hour, you might reach the end of your path before that time; what use would your intention to turn then be? Just as when a fire is spotted in a building, people rush to put it out, recognising that every minute counts as the fire spreads; likewise, when you're earnestly convinced, you'll promptly begin to turn.
3. Position yourself solely for the narrow gate; don't attempt to enter the narrow way through the wide side; Luke 13:24, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many will seek to enter in, and

shall not be able." This is a significant misconception among many, leading them to transition from a careless and loose lifestyle to mere moralists or legal formalists, yet not truly becoming Christians. Don't settle without a profound recognition of your sin and wretchedness, a faith in Jesus that unites you with Him, and genuine repentance and conversion to God through Christ.

4. Finally, don't be intimidated, disheartened, or deterred from moving forward due to the narrowness of the gate; confidently enter and persistently press on until you have fully traversed the narrow path of holiness; as mentioned in Luke 13:24, previously cited.

DOCTRINE III. The wide gate, joined with the broad way, greatly appeals to humanity, as the majority of people venture through it without concern for the consequences.

In discussing this topic, I shall:

I. Clarify the point.

II. Affirm this unfortunate reality: The majority of people enter through the wide gate into the broad way.

III. Explain how the multitude chooses the broad way, despite the impending destruction at its end.

IV. Finally, Apply.

I. We will elucidate this point. And we can comprehend its meaning in these four aspects, all of which align with the intended meaning of the text.

Firstly, there exists among humanity an inclination to enter through the wide gate. Regardless of its perilous nature, it attracts thoughtless souls. While it should rightly be repulsed for its corrupting influence and shunned due to its inherent danger, people still choose to enter through it. This signifies that:

1. They pass through the wide gate, yielding to the innate inclination of their hearts as they embark on their journey in the world, Psalm 58:3. This involves two facets, as previously discussed.

- a. Succumbing to the heart's inclination towards worldly pursuits, forsaking God. The descendants of Adam's fallen nature naturally drift away from God at the outset of their journey, Psalm 14:2-3, replacing Him with worldly attachments, Jer. 2:13. Recognizing their needs and desires, they seek fulfilment and satisfaction, longing for solace and contentment. Yet, where do they turn to address these needs? Not to God, but to the world, Psalm 4:6, John 5:40. They latch onto empty pursuits, spurning the Lord's offerings, Isa. 55:1-2.

- b. Yielding to the heart's inclination towards sin, rejecting the holiness required by divine law. God in Christ invites them to embrace His guidance, Matth. 9:29, but they resist, Rom. 8:7. They opt for sinful freedom, casting disdainful glances at the path of God's commandments. At the beginning of their journey, confronted with a choice between sinful liberty and religious devotion, they discard the latter and readily embrace the former. Sin presents itself as alluring and pleasurable, while holiness appears austere and unattractive. Thus, with their hearts set on sin, they hope to find the satisfaction they seek.

2ndly, After passing through the wide gate, they find themselves on the broad way, entering into it, which is the very path that the wide gate grants access to, and thus they continue,

1. Walking in the way of emptiness, Ephesians 4:17. Their lives are dedicated to pursuing happiness in the created world, which consistently fails them, leading to ultimate disappointment, as lamented in Jeremiah 2:5, "Thus says the Lord: 'What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?'" They exhaust themselves chasing after satisfaction, but ultimately gain nothing that can truly fulfil them, as stated in Habakkuk 2:13. Their existence is consumed by mere diversions, never transcending into a lasting and substantial happiness, which can only be found in the communion with God through Christ, Luke 17:28-29.
2. Walking in the way of moral degradation, Ephesians 2:3. Since the legitimate pursuits within the boundaries of divine law fail to provide the sought-after contentment, they break free from those confines, indulging in forbidden gains and pleasures, in the hope that what is obtained through illicit means can compensate for what is lacking in permissible avenues. As none of these fulfill their expectations either, they perpetuate their descent into one sinful act after another. Amid the recurring disappointment, their desires demand more, and they repeatedly strive to appease their cravings. Thus, their lives unfold, until their journey concludes, and they eventually fall into ruin. This constitutes their entrance into this path.

2ndly, They venture into this path recklessly and carelessly, without any thought. The peril of this path is immense, with destruction

awaiting at its culmination. Their perilous state is made clear to them—conscience speaks of it, they are admonished through the Scriptures, and the examples of others' ruin in providence are evident—but all these warnings go unheeded. Their foolish thoughts and corrupted desires propel them forward; they fix their gaze on the alluring bait but fail to recognize the hidden hook of destruction. And thus, regardless of the outcome, they continue heedlessly on their journey.

3rdly, Many are the ones who embark on this journey through the wide gate into the broad way. Despite its ruinous nature, a multitude of individuals choose this path. Those who seek companionship in this endeavour need not worry about finding fellow travellers. The path is teeming with people,

1. Indeed, there is always a significant presence of travellers on the broad way, encouraging each other. A multitude is ready to engage in wickedness. People from all walks of life are found there—both great and small, from various professions, spanning different ages and genders.
2. In comparison, this is in stark contrast to those on the narrow way. As the text suggests, the broad way is chosen by the majority, while the other path is taken by only a few. The disparity between the two groups is so great that those following the path of sinful liberty would undoubtedly outnumber those choosing the path of religion and godliness if put to a vote in the world.

Fourthly, the broadness of the gate and the expansiveness of the way play a significant role in this phenomenon. They appeal strongly to the corrupted minds of individuals, luring them to enter and continue on the path. Once entered, this path prevents them from

turning back and urges them to press forward. It exerts a compelling influence, one that the impending destruction at the end of the way cannot counterbalance.

II. We shall substantiate this sorrowful truth, that a multitude in the world enters through the wide gate into the broad way. This is evident from:

1st, Scriptural testimony, which originates from God Himself, who neither deceives nor can be deceived. Throughout Scripture, the prevalence of people on the broad way is consistently revealed. This is evident in several ways, most notably,

1. The universal corruption of human nature is attested; Psalm 14:2-3, "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one." If one assumes this only applies to the time of the Psalmist, the apostle's application of it to all of humanity dispels that notion; "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Now we know that whatsoever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." This reveals that the inclination of humanity is naturally towards the broad way, though not originally so; for, Ecclesiastes 7:29, "God made man upright," yet due to the corruption of our nature in Adam, John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Job 14:4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." Thus, the inclination of all people is to initially follow the broad way, continuing until they are turned by grace.

2. The general depravity of people's lives is equally evident. The testimony is striking; 1 John 5:19, "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." The righteous are a minority in the world, leaving the term "world" to refer to the corrupt portion. They are so corrupt that they are described as lying in wickedness. The straying into the broad way begins early; Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." God's chosen ones also initially engage in this path, as indicated in Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray." They continue until they are restored to Jesus Christ, as seen in 1 Peter 2:25, "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." However, the multitude continues to stray, as stated in Philippians 2:21, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

3. There's a constant call to the multitude to repent and turn. This call assumes that they have gone astray and are off course. In Matthew 9:13, it is stated, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." This was the message conveyed by the prophets and apostles throughout history, as they executed their divine commission. Similarly, in Ezekiel 33:11, the Lord addresses the house of Israel, saying, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?" The Apostle Paul echoes this sentiment in Acts 17:30, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." Throughout the ages, the necessity of this call to repentance remains, with only a few responding to it.

4. Furthermore, the significant judgments that a holy God has at times brought upon the world serve as clear indicators that the multitude follows the broad way. The entire population of the earth, excluding just eight individuals, was wiped out by a flood. Sodom and Gomorrah were consumed by heavenly fire, with only Lot and his family escaping; and God was willing to spare the cities if even ten righteous people were found. The destruction of Jerusalem is another example of divine judgment, as mentioned in Matthew 24:21-22, "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened." Finally, the biblical concept of the world being consumed by fire at the end serves as a clear sign that the multitude still tends towards the broad way.

Secondly, we can observe this truth from our own experiences, by simply observing the world around us through our senses and interactions. I will not delve into the practices of many nations immersed in pagan idolatry, nor those beyond the reach of the visible church. However, it is evident that even among those exposed to the light of the gospel, the majority follows the broad way.

1. Anyone can perceive the stark contrast between the lives of the majority who hear the gospel and the principles it teaches. Though it teaches sobriety, righteousness, and godliness, few truly embrace these principles. The excesses of passions and vanity often lead individuals beyond the bounds of sobriety to their own detriment. Instances of unrighteousness and harm to others abound in every community, large or small. Regrettably, there's a noticeable lack of regard for God, His laws, and His interests, often provoking the disdain of His glory. If the

multitude were not on the broad way, why would this persist? If you don't see the multitude on it, you might be unfamiliar with the term, unaware of the concept of the narrow way.

2. Those with discerning eyes can observe how rare genuine, experiential religion is in the world. The majority pays little heed to it, leading lives devoid of a transformative relationship with Christ. Many remain oblivious to the life of faith and struggle against the bondage of sin. Conviction about one's lost condition due to their natural state is a rarity, and the process of conversion is even scarcer. Few exhibit a profession or appearance of religion, and among those who do, how many lack a genuine connection to the power of godliness? The truly devoted will acknowledge this reality, as they might resonate with Micah's lamentation in Micah 7:1-2.

IV. How is it that the multitude chooses the broad way, despite knowing the destruction that awaits it at the end?

This can be understood by considering the following factors:

1. The broad way aligns with their corrupt nature. It resonates with their hearts; as stated in Isaiah 57:17, human hearts are naturally inclined towards vanity and vileness. Thus, the broad way of indulgence and wickedness naturally appeals to them. Likeness fosters affection and preference; their souls naturally gravitate towards the broad way that promises, albeit falsely, to

satisfy the vanity of their minds and the sinful desires of their hearts.

2. The blindness of their minds contributes to this. As mentioned in Ephesians 4:17-18, they remain oblivious to the danger, refusing to see it even when it's presented repeatedly. Their unmortified desires create a fog that obscures their perception, preventing them from acknowledging the danger. They either don't see the factors that could divert them or, even if they do, they fail to believe in them, as indicated in Deuteronomy 29:19-20. The attractive virtue, beauty, and glory of the alternative way remain unnoticed to them, as seen in 1 Corinthians 2:14.
3. Prejudices against the narrow way also play a role. They not only lack a positive view of it but actively hold a negative one. Acts 28:22 reflects their perception of it as a daunting, arduous path—a perception that, if they consider their own interests, would discourage them from taking it. Christ's yoke is perceived as difficult, and His burden as heavy. Consequently, they dismiss it without giving it a fair chance.
4. The broad way appears easier temporarily. As stated, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." It requires simply following their hearts' desires, going with the flow of corrupt passions and affections. On the other hand, the narrow way entails struggling against their lusts to mortify them, facing resistance like having the wind in their face. This apparent ease of the broad way attracts them, despite its ultimate destination of destruction, while the immediate difficulty discourages them from the path leading to eternal life.

5. Satan, the adversary of salvation, exerts considerable influence to steer and retain them on the broad way. Referred to as "the god of this world" in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, he holds sway over humanity by default, as seen in Acts 26:18. His favourable party within them aligns with their natural inclination, allowing him to easily goad them forward, as he capitalizes on their predisposition. His cunning enables him to outmanoeuvre them, while his diligence seizes every opportunity to lead them astray, driving the multitude along with him.
6. Peer influence is also a significant factor, as noted in Matthew 18:7. When one individual enters the broad way, others follow suit, creating a ripple effect. While there are counterexamples, the power of negative examples outweighs that of positive ones, considering humans' inherent corruption. They need just one leader to set the course, following their natural inclinations, akin to water flowing downhill when the path is clear. Conversely, following positive examples goes against their innate tendencies.
7. Finally, lack of thoughtful consideration contributes to this phenomenon, as illustrated in Luke 15:17. Few take the time to ponder and deliberately select their path; instead, they opt for the broad way without thorough assessment, merely because it's the first option presented. They fail to look ahead, beyond the immediate moment, ignoring the ultimate consequences. They become embroiled in the broad way before realizing it, echoing the notion that "childhood and youth are fleeting" (Ecclesiastes 11:10). Youth is impulsive, and powerful passions propel individuals until they become entrenched habits that are hard to overcome, akin to the impossibility of changing one's inherent nature, as suggested in Jeremiah 13:23: "Can the Ethiopian

change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil."

USE 1. For Learning. Therefore, we can deduce that:

1. Rampant idleness and a fondness for comfortable living wreak havoc in society. These are the factors that make the wide gate and broad way so appealing that the majority enters through it. This inevitably leads them to utter ruin, as noted in Proverbs 6:9–11. Sloth dominates, preventing them from enduring any challenges, even for significant matters. What is easiest and requires the least effort is deemed the best choice, and they disregard the consequences.
2. The broad way, leading to destruction, is the most frequented path. While some may choose an alternative route, the majority opt for the broad way. Despite their diverse civil and religious disagreements, they unite on this single path. Various lanes within this way cater to the rich and poor, old and young, professing believers and the irreligious. However, they all follow the same path, converging at a destination where these distinctions cease to matter (Psalm 125:5; Matthew 24:51). Currently, they collectively form the multitude on the broad way.
3. Relying on the majority's choice as justification for one's lifestyle is feeble reasoning. Alas! Isn't the multitude on the broad way? Does that make it a path worth emulating? The apostle describes the Ephesians' conduct when they were spiritually dead, characterising it as "in keeping with the ways of this world" (Ephesians 2:2). He implores the Romans not to "conform to the pattern of this world" (Romans 12:2). Any path that garners the most approval from the majority should be viewed with suspicion.

4. The reason why sin and iniquity persist despite their disgraceful nature is the multitude of followers (1 Peter 4:4). Although sin carries inherent shame and filth, individuals refuse to feel ashamed of their debased actions (Jeremiah 8:12). Some even take pride in their sinful behaviour, glorifying their shame. Why? The multitude lends authority to these actions, allowing them to parade their deeds unabashedly. However, the future revelation of Christ's glory, accompanied by the holy angels, will diminish the authority of the multitude. At that point, shame will engulf them (Daniel 12:2).
5. It's no surprise that genuinely devout individuals experience isolation, discomfort, and scorn in society. This predicament mirrors Israel's situation, as stated in Numbers 23:9, "The people will live alone and will not be reckoned among the nations." Micah mourns his solitary condition due to the prevalence of the multitude on the broad way (Micah 7:1, etc.). He finds few allies, few with whom he can share his thoughts. Consequently, God's people become objects of astonishment in the world (Zechariah 3:8; Psalm 71:7). They are despised as eccentric, peculiar, and capricious individuals, due to their refusal to tread the path favoured by the majority.
6. The church's tranquillity and prosperity in the world cannot endure indefinitely. The dominant force in the world is the corrupt faction, with the multitude following the broad way (Song of Solomon 2:2). This is why "there was silence in heaven for about half an hour" (Revelation 8:1). The corrupt multitude swiftly reinstates chaos. Consequently:
 - (1.) Her peace has often been disrupted by persecution, with the prevailing multitude crying, "Crucify him, crucify him." The

multitude, like surging waters, threatens to overwhelm her and reduce Jerusalem to rubble. Had the Lord not been on her side, they would have obliterated her long ago.

(2.) Her peace restored, her purity wanes (Song of Solomon 1:6). The multitude on the broad way tarnishes her glory and beauty, causing her to "lie among the pots." A corrupt multitude perpetuates corruption, infecting all spheres, until the contagion spreads and corruption becomes universal.

We can observe that this is the current situation. There was a time when persecution, violence, and bloodshed prevailed, and the multitude in both church and state cried out for crucifixion and destruction. Now the tide has turned, and both persecutors and the persecuted are despised. However, a general moral corruption in beliefs and actions prevails, causing truth and holiness to suffer severe harm—a hundred times more perilous for the church than the previous persecution.

USE 2. Let this serve as an exhortation. If you wish to avoid eventual destruction, do not follow the path of the majority, the way most people take. Instead,

1. Believe that the multitude is on the broad path leading to destruction. Accept this truth, as Christ himself has affirmed it. Open your eyes, and you will witness it. It's vital to firmly hold this belief, as we are naturally inclined to favour the majority and assume that truth and goodness align with their side. If you are swayed by this in this situation, you may find yourself swept away by the current.
2. Never attempt to find refuge in a wrong path, surrounded by the crowd following it. The crowd may obscure the impending

destruction at the end of the path, but it can never provide protection. Even if the entire world followed the broad way, it could not alter its inherent nature, making that which is harmful and destructive suddenly good and safe.

3. In your life's journey, do not mimic the world's multitude; distinguish yourselves from them, even if it means being labelled as different. (Exodus 23:2; Romans 12:2). Do not consider the world's majority as your role models; choose the path followed by the best, not by the most.

MOTIVE 1. Reflect on how the path of the multitude leads to destruction, as explicitly stated in the text. While some may find comfort in the company of fellow sinners, it will be no solace to end up in hell alongside others, as Luke 16:28 teaches. Why should the allure of a multitude sway us to accompany them in their path to destruction?

MOTIVE 2. Attaining heaven requires swimming against the current of the world's multitude (Ephesians 6:12). God calls you to separate yourselves from them (2 Corinthians 6:17), to detach from your people (Psalm 45:10), and even to save yourselves from them, treating them as destroyers (Acts 2:40). You must fight through their resistance if you ever wish to attain the crown. Be unwavering in refusing to go along with them, no matter the cost, as our Lord teaches in Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple."

MOTIVE 3. The cloud of witnesses before us chose not to follow the multitude's path. Noah did this in the ancient world, and so did Abraham, Moses, and all the prophets. Our Saviour himself faced opposition from the multitude, yet he and his followers walked in a

life completely opposite to theirs. Can we hope to walk with the multitude and yet dwell with the saints in the end?

MOTIVE 4. What weight does a multitude hold against God? As Job 9:4 questions, is it reasonable that human authority should supersede divine authority? All humans are fallible; God cannot deceive nor be deceived. Shouldn't his word be our steadfast guide in all matters that it commands or forbids? Can a multitude protect you from the consequences of sinful paths? No, they cannot even save themselves (Psalm 9:17).

MOTIVE 5. Finally, to follow the multitude is to reinforce the rebellion against God. How will you justify this to him? When you witnessed the current flowing against God's work and ways in the world, yet chose to join it, adding to its strength? In such a situation, God is asking, "Who is on my side? Will you also go away?" Everyone should consider their answer to this question.

ADVICE. Do not let the fear of being seen as different deter you from choosing the path of the multitude. Noah was extraordinarily unique in the ancient world, and Lot in Sodom; had they not been, they would have perished alongside the rest. Only those who are distinct will find their way to heaven (Mark 8:38).

DOCTRINE IV. The gate that leads to life is narrow.

When discussing this, we will examine:

I. The narrow gate.

II. The narrow path that leads to life.

III. Finally, Application.

I. Let's consider the narrow gate. While I've touched on this before, I'll provide a few more insights:

Firstly, the narrow gate serves as the entry point and the sole entry point into the narrow path that leads to life. This conveys four key points.

1. Humanity is naturally off the path to life (Romans 3:12). If people continue on the path they're on, they will never reach life. Every individual must choose a new path at some point and veer away from their natural course. God initially set Adam on the path to life, the path of perfect obedience (Ecclesiastes 7:29), but he and all his descendants deviated from it (Romans 5:12). Christ has opened a new and living way, the way of walking in him (Colossians 2:6). This is the narrow path, one that unbelievers have never been on.
2. There is a chance for sinners off the path to life to get on it (Proverbs 9:4–6). Those straying may yet find their way back; those on the road to death can redirect towards life. As long as they haven't reached the end of their journey (death), there's still hope (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Thus, Matthew 5:25 advises, "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court." However, once they reach the end of their journey, there's no more hope.
3. There exists a gate, albeit a narrow one, through which they can enter onto the narrow path to life. This gate is the designated entrance; whoever desires to be on the path must locate and enter through it (John 10:9). Therefore, it's essential to identify this gate.

4. Finally, one can only access the narrow path through the narrow gate (John 3:5). Attempting to ascend through any other means is futile. Just as the entry is, so will the journey be. Actions must align with the principles, and good fruit won't manifest on the narrow path until the tree is made good by entering through the narrow gate (Matthew 7:17).

Secondly, the narrow gate serves as the entrance to the path leading to life. In straightforward terms, it entails an inward and profound transformation, both in relation to the individual and in actuality. This transformation is an essential prerequisite for embarking on the path of genuine holiness, the path that leads to life. Here's what I mean:

1. It involves a change within the sinner, altering their very essence (2 Corinthians 5:17). No one who acknowledges their inherent sinful nature can deny this reality. Continuing in sin, vanity, and wickedness is incompatible with beginning the journey on the narrow path to life (Romans 8:13). You must undergo a transformation, departing from your natural inclinations, if you are to seek a life of purpose.
2. It's an inner transformation (Ezekiel 36:26-27). An external transformation alone won't suffice. Adorning a new way of life while clinging to an old corrupt heart and nature is akin to a superficial façade, unsatisfactory to the One who "looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7; Matthew 23:27-28). True holiness originates internally, even though it manifests outwardly (1 Peter 3:4). Without an inner gracious disposition, everything becomes mere hypocrisy, a mere display.
3. It's a genuine change that affects one's very nature, making it new (2 Peter 1:4). A new disposition of the spirit, a redirection of

the heart's inclination, is necessary. This change shifts one's preference from the former aversion to holiness and draws them away from the prior inclination toward vanity and wickedness. Hence, it's referred to as being "born again" (John 3:3) and "putting on the new self" (Ephesians 4:24). Such a change is crucial for a life of holiness since it instils new godly qualities within, forming the basis for righteous living.

4. It's a transformative change that affects one's spiritual status (1 Corinthians 6:11). Those in the state of being children of wrath will inevitably remain children of disobedience. Similarly, trees cursed at their root can't yield blessed fruits. Those who walk the narrow path to life must find themselves in a state of grace and favour with God, standing in new relationships (Romans 8:1). It's futile to anticipate obedience from those who aren't God's children, acceptable service from those not at peace with Him, or holy living from those bound by the curse of the law. While the first covenant may bear children, they'll be like bond-servants, cast out, and not heirs (Galatians 4:24, 30).
5. Lastly, this transformation is all-encompassing (2 Corinthians 5:17). It must permeate the entire individual, although no part is entirely sanctified in this life (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Merely illuminating the mind while the heart lacks gracious transformation, forsaking some sins while retaining others, or adhering to select aspects of the law as a life guide while discarding the rest, are all signs that one hasn't entered through the gate.

In this manner, you can discern the gateway that serves as the entry point to the narrow path. With this, you gain a comprehensive

overview. To provide a more detailed account, consider these seven progressive steps:

1. **Conviction** – This initial step involves the awakening of the sinner through a deep awareness of their sinfulness and wretchedness. It's a new light from heaven that reveals their sin in ways they've never seen before (John 16:8). Sins are laid out before them, stark and unsettling, exposing their actual and original transgressions. Moreover, they grasp the gravity of their situation, realizing they're lost and without hope (Luke 15:17; Romans 7:9), facing God's wrath and the curse of a broken law.
2. **Illumination** – This step brings a saving knowledge of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). It's akin to a merchant discovering the one invaluable pearl (Matthew 13:46). Here, the sinner perceives a Saviour with transcendent glory in both his person and roles, fully capable and willing to rescue them from their state of sin and misery. This Saviour aligns perfectly with divine attributes and their personal needs, making salvation a risk worth taking. This step elevates the view of the narrow way as the sinner glimpses it ahead.
3. **Renewed Will** – The sinner's will is transformed, becoming receptive to the gospel's call (Ezekiel 36:26; Psalm 110:3). The once stubborn heart now yields, drawn by cords of love (Hosea 11:4). The splendour of Christ's glory captivates the heart (John 12:32). This inward work renders the spiritually dead alive, instilling a vital essence that both persuades and empowers the sinner to ascend the next step.
4. **Faith in Christ** – This involves believing in Jesus Christ and placing faith in his name (John 1:12). It's comparable to the merchant purchasing the priceless pearl (Matthew 13:46). The

soul, drawn to Christ, freely approaches and embraces him as the all-sufficient and comprehensive answer (Psalm 73:25). The soul bids farewell to the pursuit of happiness in vanity and vileness, finding solace exclusively in Christ, forsaking all else (Jeremiah 16:19). Faith unites the believer with Christ, providing rest.

5. **New Heavenly Relationships** – By faith, the believer forges new ties with heaven. This monumental step arises from belief. The believer becomes united with Christ (Ephesians 3:17), subsequently justified (1 Corinthians 6:11) and reconciled to God (Romans 5:1). Adoption into the heavenly family follows (Ephesians 2:16, 19), cementing God's relationship with the believer (John 20:17). Formerly outside of Christ, the believer was condemned, God's enemy, a child of the devil, devoid of God's presence.
6. **Ongoing Sanctification** – Habitual sanctification involves renewing one's nature (Ephesians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 6:11). Through this, the entire person, body and soul, is sanctified (1 Thessalonians 5:23). New qualities infused into the mind, will, and affections lead to the believer's transformation into a new creation, mirroring the image of God (Ephesians 4:23-24), receiving grace upon grace from Christ's abundance (John 1:16). Thus, the seeds of all graces are sown within them, forming habits of grace, the driving forces behind every righteous action.
7. **Genuine Gospel Repentance** – The pinnacle of the narrow gate journey is true gospel repentance (Jeremiah 31:18-19; Ezekiel 36:31). Unlike legal repentance that emerges from conviction under the law, aligning with the first step of the gate, true gospel repentance stems from a comprehensive process. It's

rooted in the conviction of sin and misery, illuminated knowledge of Christ, renewed will, faith, heavenly relationships, and ongoing sanctification. This repentance entails turning from sin to God out of love for God and hatred for sin, due to its contradiction with his holy will and nature. It's the only repentance pleasing to God. Prior to undergoing this transformative process, reaching this step remains unattainable.

However, until a person is brought to this kind of repentance, they will never step foot onto the narrow path of holiness that leads to life (Acts 2:18). Before one can proceed correctly, they must first turn in the right direction. And such a turn from sin to God cannot occur without undergoing this transformative repentance. The entire gate is narrow, and this step is constricting, yet no individual, without first embracing it, will ever take a single stride along the narrow way (Luke 13:3).

II. We now delve into "the narrow way leading away unto life." In this regard, we shall address, 1. The narrow way itself. 2. Its journey towards life.

Firstly, the narrow way itself. It's the path onto which the strait gate guides an individual; the gate propels them onto this path. Here, we consider 1. What characterises this path. 2. Its constituents. 3. The extent of its narrowness.

1st, What defines this path? It's the path of holiness (Isaiah 35:8), which stands in stark contrast to the broad path that originates in one's heart. While the broad path is characterised by vanity and worthlessness, the narrow path exemplifies purity and holiness (Psalm 24:3-4).

Holiness manifests in two distinct forms: habitual and actual. Habitual holiness relates to the new disposition and frame of the soul, where the individual reconciles with the holy law, their inclinations aligning with its commands and veering away from what it forbids. This state is akin to having the law written on the heart (Hebrews 8:10), signifying the harmony between the renewed heart and the law, much like an individual's thoughts correspond to their written words.

Actual holiness pertains to a life characterised by holy thoughts, words, and deeds that mirror the principles of the renewed nature. It adds vitality to the new nature (2 Peter 1:5-7), permitting the individual to navigate the narrow way. More specifically, the narrow way signifies obedience (1 Peter 1:14-15), a path akin to that of Jesus Christ, who obeyed even unto death, ascending to glory (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The narrow way hinges upon two elements that shape holy obedience:

1. The path's content aligns with God's commandments (Psalm 119:32), particularly those delineated in his holy law. Without commandments, there can be no obedience. Any display of holiness without God's commandment is but superstition (Matthew 15:9). Transgressing a commandment, whether through omission or commission, diverts from the path of holy obedience, confined on all sides by God's holy law. This distinction underscores the difference between the narrow way and:

(1.) Profanity, where individuals follow their desires, forsaking God's commandments. They view these commands as restrictive, echoing Psalm 2:3: "Let us break their bands

asunder, and cast away their cords from us." Their rule is their desires, not God's law.

(2.) Superstition, where people, without God's command, feign holiness. This narrow path, self-constructed (Matthew 5:2), involves fabricating their own mandates and deeming actions as duty or sin without divine warrant (Colossians 2:20-22).

In contrast to both, the narrow way adheres solely to God's commandments—specifically, those presented in the moral law of the Ten Commandments. While the profane disregard it and the superstitious augment it, the genuine Christian treats it as the unadulterated guide for life. They refuse to neglect or modify it, embracing it as the exclusive rule for their conduct.

2. Regarding its structure, it is the path of living in Christ (Colossians 2:6). Without this, adherence to the path dictated by commandments lacks true holiness. Instead, it becomes a self-centred, legalistic way of life. While it might serve social purposes among humans, it falls short of God's acceptance due to its lack of Christ's influence (John 15:5). True Gospel obedience is characterised by four elements:

(1.) Acknowledging the law as not emanating from an abstract God, but from a God who is in Christ (Matthew 17:5). The spiritually blind, like Adam, perceive the law simply from God's standpoint, without recognising the Mediator's role in its conveyance. Consequently, they strive to obey it in their own way, hoping to attain life through their obedience. However, this mars their obedience, making it servile and displeasing to God (Galatians 4:24, 30), for it lacks perfection. Conversely, true Christians receive the law from a God who is both Redeemer and Saviour in Christ (Exodus 20:1, 2). They trust in the free promise of life through faith, prompting them to obey out of love

for a reconciled God and gratitude towards the Redeemer. They view obedience as the path prescribed by grace to approach the perfection of the life that Christ has procured and freely bestowed.

(2.) Relying on Christ for strength in every stride, much like branches draw nourishment from the vine (John 15:6). The Apostle encourages this practice (2 Timothy 2:1) by urging believers to be strong in the grace of Christ. Christians embark on the path of holy obedience, akin to how David faced Goliath in the name of the Lord of Hosts (1 Samuel 17:45), but for them, it's "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17). Consequently, their obedience is characterised by self-denial and humility. They acknowledge their insignificance, even after performing all that is required.

(3.) Depending on Christ for the acceptance of all their obedience, rather than trusting in the nature of the work itself (Genesis 4:4, compared with Hebrews 11:4). This step, demanding true Christians' participation, is challenging (Philippians 3:3). Refusing to rely on their diligence, sincerity, or achievements for acceptance is no small feat. Yet, it is certain that acceptance rests solely on account of Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

(4.) Lastly, seeking Jesus Christ daily to cleanse the errors in their path (Zechariah 13:1). No one walks so flawlessly that they do not stumble or become tainted. These imperfections can only be cleansed through the application of the cleansing blood. Even the best actions carry a trace of defilement, necessitating the washing of one's feet (John 13:10). This daily practice characterises the narrow path, and one can only walk it in Christ.

In summary, the narrow path consists of holy obedience, wherein one walks in Christ and follows God's commandments. This way of holy obedience can be divided into two aspects:

1. **The Path of Doing or Working:** This involves obeying the precepts of God's will (Ecclesiastes 9:10). God assigns each person their tasks – the work of salvation and their roles in their generation. Our obligations in our relationship with God and fellow humans are determined by His commandments. We are required to commit ourselves to fulfilling these duties in obedience to His will, all in Christ Jesus.
2. **The Path of Bearing or Suffering:** This entails bearing the burdens and trials assigned by God's providential will (Matthew 16:24). Every individual is allocated their share of crosses and afflictions as a test. This provides an opportunity to exercise bearing graces such as faith, self-denial, patience, and hope. We must approach these challenges in a Christ-like manner, obediently submitting to His will.

In this way, we traverse the narrow path – both acting and enduring in Christ, accepting our responsibilities and trials from His hand, and proceeding with faith in Him.

This path is marked by two distinct sets of characteristics, present from its inception to its culmination:

1. **The Footsteps of Christ's Flock:** This is the way that generations of saints have followed (Song of Solomon 1:8). The tracks of Christ's flock are visible along the narrow path, just as the footprints of the devil's followers are evident on the broad path. On the former, you will find the imprints of the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and all the saints from the Old and New Testaments. On the latter, the tracks of individuals like Cain, Pharaoh, and Judas, as well as other wicked individuals from various generations, are visible. The consistent practice of the

saints shapes these footsteps on the narrow path, composed of two discernible parts:

(1.) **The Front Part:** This entails faith in Christ and His promises. Faith is the foremost element in their journey, enabling the saints throughout generations to accomplish great deeds and endure trials (Hebrews 11:1–39). They believed and acted on their faith; they believed and faced challenges and suffering. The promise of Christ was given in Genesis 3:15, initiating their journey, and the first step was Adam and Eve's belief in that promise. This pattern continued throughout the footsteps of the flock, including now (Galatians 2:20).

(2.) **The Rear Part:** This involves sincere obedience. This signifies the imprint of the heel (Hebrews 11:4, 5, 7, etc.). In response to their belief in the truth, they aligned their lives with it. Embracing the Gospel, they adopted the law as the guide for their lives, adhering to all its commands as they recognised the authority of their God – both Creator and Redeemer. Having accepted Christ as Lord, they walked in Him, practising all aspects of holy obedience.

Hence, the marks of the flock's footsteps stand out distinctly. The broad path may display a variety of footprints, but none of them resemble these. The broad way bears the footsteps of atheists, infidels, the profane, mere moralists, formalists, and hypocrites. However, the fore part of their steps is marked by unbelief, and the hind part reveals profanity or shallow external hypocrisy, which God finds unacceptable. They may be legalists who disregard faith and focus on obedience or carnal believers who disregard good works. They may even be openly contemptuous of both. Yet, the flock's

footsteps incorporate both faith and obedience in harmony (James 2:18).

2. The Footsteps of Christ Himself: Every individual had strayed from the path, but God, in His wisdom, sent His Son in human form to display the path of God-pleasing conduct (1 Peter 2:21). Thus, Christ came and journeyed the narrow path from start to finish, leaving His footprints as an example for all to follow (Philippians 2:8). While the examples of the best saints may include missteps, Christ's footsteps are flawless and unwavering, never deviating from the path.

(1.) **Faith in God and Covenant Promises:** Christ, in His divine nature, is the object of faith (John 14:1), yet in His human form, He exercised faith. He placed complete trust in God, relying on His faithfulness (Psalm 22:8-9; Hebrews 2:13). He held the promises of assistance, acceptance, and reward (Isaiah 42:6, 49:8; Hebrews 12:2). This faithful anticipation was affirmed through His experiences (Psalm 40:1) and remains evident even in His exalted state (Hebrews 10:12-13). This underscores the significance of waiting on God, as Christ Himself continues to be a faithful believer (Hebrews 10:12-13).

(2.) **Perfect Obedience:** Christ's obedience was flawless and complete (1 Peter 2:22). His obedience extended to all aspects of righteousness (Matthew 3:15), both in action and suffering. He demonstrated love towards even His enemies and endured hardships with patience (Philippians 2:8; 1 Peter 2:23). His obedience was characterised by the highest degree of love, rooted in His Father's glory and the salvation of sinners (Psalm 40:6-8). This obedience was continuous, from birth to death (Philippians 2:8).

In this manner, Christ journeyed the narrow path, leaving distinct marks that unmistakably differentiate it from all other paths. The imperfections in the saints' journey may obscure the path's nature, leading the unspiritual to misconstrue it as broader than it truly is. The adulterer may see David's footsteps in his own path, the drunkard may identify with Noah's, and the cursers, swearers, and apostates may relate to Peter's. They often fail to realise that these steps led the saints astray but were followed by sincere repentance. Yet, Christ's footsteps unmistakably define the path – a path of purity and holiness, characterised by faith and obedience, inherently distinct from the broad way of sin.

Next, let's consider the components of the narrow path. The journey, from the point of conversion to God to the final breath, consists of many steps. The length of the path varies among individuals due to differences in lifespans and conversion experiences. Yet, whether shorter or longer, the path is comprised of two fundamental parts.

1. **The Path of Mortification:** This path involves "putting to death" sinful deeds through the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13). It stretches from the beginning to the end of the journey and requires constant progression. Although believers set foot on this path at conversion, the remnants of the old nature persist. The journey comprises two main aspects:

1. **Mortification to Earthly Desires:** This involves renouncing the allure of a deluding world and its fleeting pleasures. This process starts when the soul turns to Christ (Jeremiah 16:19) and continues throughout a believer's life (Song of Solomon 4:8). The apostle Paul exemplified this when he stated, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been

crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14, NIV). The Lord uses various means, such as Scripture, sacraments, prayer, and meditation, to reveal the emptiness of worldly pursuits. Providences also introduce bitter experiences, gradually weaning believers away from worldly attachments (Psalm 131).

2. Mortification to Sin: This involves developing an aversion to the allure of sinful behaviour that unregenerate individuals embrace (Romans 6:6-7). It means losing the taste for sinful pleasures and uprooting the sinful tendencies that flourish within the heart. This mortification extends to all the sins of the flesh (Colossians 2:11). A true act of mortification spares no sin; otherwise, one leak might lead the ship to ruin (Psalm 119:6). This process particularly applies to:

- **Specific Lusts and Corruptions:** All kinds of lusts, be they fleshly or spiritual, must be subdued. The Gospel teaches believers to resist these cravings (Titus 2:12). Those journeying towards life vigilantly oppose these sinful tendencies, striving to defeat them before they gain a foothold (Colossians 3:5).
- **Predominant Sin:** One's most potent temptation, often called a "predominant" sin, must be mortified. This may be influenced by personal constitution, circumstances, or calling (Hebrews 12:1). Tackling this sin is as crucial as removing a stumbling block (Matthew 5:29-30). Progress on the narrow path hinges on the defeat of this sin (Psalm 18:28).

- **Inherent Sinful Disposition:** This pertains to the inherent sinful nature within us, known as the "flesh" (Galatians 5:24). This disposition inclines us towards evil and away from good. To tread the narrow path, the root of this disposition must be targeted.

These sinful aspects are subdued by resisting their influence and exercising the opposing graces (Galatians 5:16-17). This process weakens the power of sin and strengthens the growth of grace (Romans 13:14; Hebrews 5:14).

Secondly, we must consider the path of vivification, or a renewed way of life (Romans 6:4). This involves the practice of good deeds—thoughts, words, or actions aligned with God's will and pleasing to Him (Titus 3:8). This constitutes another aspect of the narrow path, extending from the strait gate to the end of life. It is driven by the grace implanted during regeneration. The new nature must bear fruit in a new way of life, leading individuals to honour God, benefit themselves, and bless others. This way involves two key aspects:

1. **Living for God, Not the World:** This stands in contrast to living for mere creaturely pursuits (Galatians 2:19). The unregenerate are oriented towards earthly matters, finding joy in worldly gains and sorrow in their absence. However, through regeneration, believers come alive to God (Romans 6:11) and dead to worldly allurements (Colossians 3:3). They tread the narrow path by focusing on God as their ultimate portion, seeking His goodness above all else, finding delight in His presence, grieving over sin, and yearning for His light to shine upon them (Colossians 3:1-3). The consistent tenor of their lives attests to this perspective (Psalm 30:5; 4:6-7).

2. **Living Righteously, Not in Sin:** This entails living in righteousness as opposed to indulging in sin (1 Peter 2:24). The unregenerate are dead to righteousness and alive to sin (Romans 6:20). Their association with sin is akin to those in the grave being disconnected from earthly affairs (Ephesians 2:1). In contrast, regeneration marks a transition from being dead to sin and alive to righteousness (Romans 6:4; Colossians 3:1). Awakening to this reality, they navigate the narrow path as servants of righteousness (Romans 6:18). This commitment extends to embracing God's entire will, known to them through the Scriptures (Acts 13:22; Colossians 4:12), resulting in universal obedience (Colossians 1:10). This is manifested through:

- **Righteous Living Toward God:** This involves living devoutly, honouring God as Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer. These responsibilities are manifested in acts of piety outlined in the first table of commandments. Those on the narrow path live out these duties as an expression of both righteousness and gratitude. They prioritise glorifying God in the world, considering it their chief occupation (Philippians 1:21). Their aim is to see God honoured in their roles, recognising their purpose intertwined with His glory.
- **Righteous Living Toward Oneself:** This entails living soberly, recognising the duty towards oneself. Since believers belong to the Lord, they must treat their bodies as His temples, avoiding harm or defilement. Likewise, they pursue the growth of their souls, striving for truth and holiness (Philippians 3:14) while avoiding anything that obscures or stains their souls. This aspect constitutes a significant part of their journey on the narrow path.

- **Righteous Living Toward Neighbours:** This encompasses living justly, fulfilling duties towards fellow human beings as outlined in the second table of commandments. Recognising their shared humanity, those on the narrow path consistently uphold a sense of goodwill towards all. Regardless of social standing, they exhibit a universal benevolence, seeking the welfare of others through acts of kindness and generosity, in line with their capacity and opportunities. This embodies the principles of justice and compassion inherent in Christianity (Galatians 6:10; Luke 6:36). Neglecting to contribute positively in one's generation or harbouring a self-centred attitude contradicts the spirit of the narrow path (Luke 16:9). A disposition of selfishness or causing harm to society only aligns with the broad way and not with the values of heaven (Isaiah 11:6; Titus 3:3; James 2:13; Revelation 13:10).

In summary, those on the narrow path engage in an upward, inward, and outward perspective, seeking to make a meaningful impact in their world by living righteously. Christ, through His death and resurrection, has exemplified these two aspects of the narrow path—mortification and vivification—for His followers to follow.

Thirdly, let's explore the narrowness of the path to life. This narrowness is not an absolute limitation but rather a relative constraint, due to the imperfections of our current state. The boundaries of this path are eternal; in essence, it mirrors the very path that saints will tread throughout eternity, where they will experience the utmost freedom. However, what might be a confined route for one can appear spacious and straightforward to another, contingent on the varying capacities of the travellers. Consider a shoe that feels tight when one's foot is swollen but fits comfortably when

the foot is healthy. The glorified saints possess a sound foot, so the path feels broad and accommodating in their spiritual journey. Meanwhile, we possess a swollen one, causing the same path, though fundamentally unchanged, to feel narrow as we travel towards life. This narrowness arises from a combination of three factors.

1st. The rigour and purity of the law that delineates the boundaries of this path of holy obedience (Psalm 119:4). It allows no room for sinful compromise; every misguided step is condemned by it. It encircles the traveller from all sides, particularly in two aspects:

- **Right Scope of Obedience:** Our actions are not determined by human preferences but by God's commands (Matthew 15:9). Acts of worship devised by human minds, even if they appear sanctimonious, are rejected with the question, "Who has required this from you?" (Isaiah 1:12). More so, if they go against God's commands, they are abhorrent to Him, even if one mistakenly believes them to be righteous (John 16:2). Genuine holy obedience exists solely in what God has commanded.
- **Right Attitude of Obedience:** Even if an action is inherently righteous, it must be performed with the right disposition, or it ceases to be part of the narrow path. This compels the traveller to:
 - Embrace love for God as the driving force behind obedience. Labour must spring from a heart of love; otherwise, it is in vain (Hebrews 6:10). True obedience stems from love for God Himself. Without this love, God does not consider our actions as genuine obedience since He sees our hearts. Actions devoid of heartfelt devotion can never find favour (2 Corinthians 8:12).

- Ground obedience not only in adherence to God's rule but in the recognition that His will is the reason for our actions (Ephesians 6:6-7). True faith arises only when one believes something because God has stated it. Similarly, authentic obedience transpires when a task is completed because God has commanded it. Fulfilling a command without genuine obedience to it is inadequate.
- Focus on bringing glory to God as the ultimate goal of obedience (1 Corinthians 10:31). If any other motive supplants this, God will not deem it obedience (Zechariah 7:6). Despite performing duties that are inherently righteous, tainted intentions rooted in self-interest can undermine their value (Matthew 6:1). Ministers can lose the impact of their preaching, individuals can diminish the potency of their prayers, and anyone can compromise the good they do by harbouring selfish motives.
- Lastly, exercise faith in God through Christ, shaping obedience according to the model of gospel-obedience, the sole form of holy obedience for a sinner (Colossians 3:17). In this context, the role of faith is to draw strength from Jesus for holy obedience (2 Timothy 2:1), thus enabling its execution (Philippians 4:13). Subsequently, faith entrusts the completed obedience to Jesus for acceptance by God (Hebrews 11:4, 6).

Secondly, there's the inclination of the heart that veers away from and conflicts with the holy law. The apostle laments this, acknowledging that it made his journey in the way a challenge (Romans 7:21). Even the best among us bear evident traces of this lingering natural enmity, a regrettable disposition that resists

conforming to the unadulterated commandments. Within the heart, lusts pull in various directions, unable to be contained without causing discomfort. Consequently, the path seems constricted, and moving along it feels tight and confining. In truth, walking this path is an ongoing battle, for the way of holy obedience contradicts innate inclinations. Travelling this route requires surmounting these inclinations. Yet, in the heavenly realm, such struggles will be absent, rendering the way of obedience expansive for the saints there.

Thirdly, there's the multitude of external challenges on this journey. In our passage, the original term describes it as an "afflicted" or "compressed" way. If God's children merely had to forge ahead through the path of His commandments, contending with their own corruptions, that would indeed provide ample challenge. However, that is not the extent of it. Whatever obstacles or entanglements Satan and the malevolent world can scatter across their path, those obstacles are certain to be encountered. This results in a thicket of temptations, tribulations, and discouragements that must be navigated. At times, the world's allurements attempt to lead them astray, while at other times, its opposition seeks to deter them. Instances of poor influence threaten to derail them. Beyond these, they must also grapple with trials sent by God's hand. Hence, this path is strewn with metaphorical briars and thorns (Ephesians 6:12; John 16:33). Consequently, the exhortation in Hebrews 12:1-2 rings true: "Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne."

Secondly, let's consider the way the narrow path leads towards life. In this regard, I will explain: 1. What this life is that the narrow way guides us to. 2. How the narrow way brings us to it.

Firstly, what is the nature of this life that the narrow way directs us towards? In a nutshell, it's a blessed life in the afterlife (Mark 10:30). Upon entering the narrow gate, the spiritually dead individual gains life, for without it, they could never proceed along the narrow way. This life, once received, is eternal, never to be extinguished throughout the endless ages. Yet, there exists such a profound disparity in degrees and accompanying circumstances between the believer's life here and the life in heaven that the latter is referred to as life in the supreme sense. This is due to several reasons:

1. Heaven stands as the realm of life where death has no entry. In that blessed place, all who reside there are alive (Revelation 21:4). Contrastingly, this world, at its best, is a blend of the living and the dead, even among the living; moreover, the deceased form the majority, rendering this world a sombre and dismal place for those who have begun to experience spiritual life. However, upon their arrival in heaven, they will find themselves in a land of vibrant life, where perpetual spring prevails, and life reigns over death.
2. Their life will be perfected in heaven (Hebrews 12:23). Although initiated here, it's mingled with death, even in the most vibrant saints; they bear the weight of an entire body of death with them (Romans 7:24). In heaven, not a vestige of this burden will remain. Even their life of solace will attain its fullness there, though it might require substantial effort to sustain it from fading away in the present world.

3. Lastly, death will never gain entry there; instead, life will stretch out into eternal joy and comfort, devoid of any interruptions. While on earth, the knowledge of impending death remains ever-present; yet, upon reaching heaven, they understand that they are beyond its grasp forevermore. They are situated there beside the wellspring of life, granted unrestricted access to the waters of life, ensuring they shall never perish again.

Secondly, how does the narrow path guide us towards this life? And,

Firstly, let's explore the matter negatively. The narrow way does not lead to life by way of merit, whether proper or improper. Proper merit arises from the inherent value of a deed, perfectly matching the reward. This is exemplified in Christ's obedience and death. However, our works lack such merit, for there's no proportional connection between our obedience and eternal life, despite the claims of certain groups (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17). Furthermore, whatever works we offer are owed to God (Romans 8:12; Luke 17:10). Improper merit, on the other hand, is based on an agreement guaranteeing a reward for a specific action, transforming the reward into a debt upon completion. Although legal Protestants don't explicitly term it "merit," they assert that God has promised eternal life based on our obedience. Their aim is to distance themselves from the doctrine of merit, as they don't assert an inherent worth in works proportional to the reward. Yet, aren't they merely conceding what innocent Adam would have offered had he fulfilled his obedience? This conflates the two covenants, as the distinction is purely quantitative and not qualitative. Scripture rejects this stance alongside the notion of merit (Romans 4:4; 6:23), a view that Paul adamantly dismisses (Philippians 3:9).

Secondly, let's explore the matter positively. The narrow way leads to life through an ordered and interconnected process. It leads towards life in two ways:

1. In terms of the natural order of events, where one step necessarily precedes another. Just as the beginning of an endeavour precedes its end, one cannot attain the end without initiating the journey. Similarly, the narrow way serves as the beginning of the Christian journey, leading to eternal life in heaven as its culmination (Romans 6:22). Just as the sun must rise before reaching its zenith, the planting season precedes the harvest, and the initial yield comes before the full harvest, similarly, walking the narrow path must precede the eternal life in heaven (Proverbs 4:18; Psalm 126:5; Romans 8:25). This undeniably underscores the necessity of holy obedience, as it's as impossible for obedient individuals to attain life without it as it is to finish a task without initiating it (Hebrews 12:14). But can anyone claim that a sunrise, beginning, or initiation is the prerequisite for a reward, like the sun's zenith?
2. Through the principle of connection, where one element is intertwined with another, either due to the nature of things or divine appointment. This applies both to means and ends, and to the journey and its destination. Neglecting the means hinders the attainment of the end, just as avoiding the path prevents reaching the destination. Hence, the narrow way serves as the medium to traverse, leading to the ultimate destination of eternal life (Philippians 3:13-14). Similarly, divine appointment connects the contest and the prize, the struggle and the crown, yet the former neither merits the latter nor serves as its condition (2 Timothy 4:7-8, compared with Revelation 4:10). While the narrow way entails struggle due to opposition,

embarking on this path will lead to life, similar to following specific routes leading to certain cities. However, taking a particular route isn't a condition for gaining entry to the city.

The truth lies in this explanation: Eternal life is freely bestowed upon the soul at the moment of belief; it commences within them (John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 5:12). This life is active and progressive throughout the journey on the narrow path. As the journey culminates in death, shedding the weight of sin, the soul's life attains its completion, analogous to a traveler reaching a city upon completing their journey. This perspective dismantles all notions of works-based merit or conditions for attaining eternal life. Meanwhile, it irrefutably underscores the necessity of righteous works in relation to the perfection of life in heaven.

Practical lessons can be drawn from the entire discourse.

Firstly, an easy initiation into religion can raise suspicion and calls for careful examination, given that the entrance is through a narrow gate that leads to life. I won't presume to dismiss the possibility of a sovereign gospel-led conversion that bypasses a significant period of law-based soul-searching, though I lack personal experience in this matter. A sovereign God's ways should not be confined. However, I can assert the following:

1. This is not the typical route. Normally, a period of wrestling with the law, varying in intensity from person to person, precedes conversion, as Galatians 3:24 explains, "So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith." This pattern is evident in the conversions of individuals such as the ones in Acts 2, Paul, the jailer, and others. This generally aligns with the experience of most Christians. As for Lydia, she

was already a convert, having embraced Judaism as a proselyte (Acts 16:14).

2. An easy initiation into religion can indicate a flaw in the foundation for some, similar to the seed sown on rocky soil mentioned in Matthew 13:20. Here, observe that (1.) The initial reception of the Gospel message is quick and immediate. (2.) Profound emotions are stirred at this reception, leading to joyous elation. (3.) The flaw lies in the shallowness of the conversion; it lacks depth due to the absence of genuine conviction and humbling, illustrated in Luke 6:48, resulting in the absence of deep roots (Matthew 13:21). (4.) Just as the entry was light, it departs lightly as well.

3. Those who claim an easy entry into faith should thoroughly evaluate their experience before settling into complacency. This assessment can be accomplished by examining:

(1.) The effect of their entry. Did it lead to a genuine and profound repentance for their sins? If it did, then there's little room for dispute. However, if it didn't, their claims hold little weight. A true and thorough repentance involves a deep understanding and sorrow for both personal sins and inherent sinfulness, as well as genuine turning away from them (Galatians 5:24; Luke 19:8).

(2.) The direction of their path. If their ongoing way of life consistently reflects holy obedience, there's no need for doubt regarding their initial entry. Entering the narrow path requires passing through the right gate (Psalm 119:6). While the strictest encounter with the law that leads to a lax lifestyle will ultimately prove to have been a mere taste of hell, an easy religious initiation followed by a loose and indulgent lifestyle leads to the

broad path of destruction. This was the approach taken by individuals our forefathers rightly termed Antinomians and Ranters. Claiming a sovereign gospel-led conversion, they indulged their desires and lived scandalously, bringing disgrace to the Gospel. If their way is indeed the path to life, then we can disregard the Bible, a notion we should dismiss. Instead, these individuals, as described in 2 Peter 2:17, are "springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them."

Secondly, Commitment to religion with a strict, precise, and focused manner of living is not only justifiable, but essential. The way that leads to life is narrow, and it doesn't allow for broad strides. The world often labels entering through the narrow gate as "melancholic," "madness," or "distraction," and it brands rigorous adherence to the narrow path as "eccentricity," "extremism," and "unnecessary precision." Regardless of the world's dismissive stance, the Bible, including our text, upholds the value of this strictness, not only as justifiable, but as necessary.

However, before I delve into justifying and demonstrating its necessity, I must first establish its accurate understanding. There is a counterfeit strictness in religion, often mistaken for the genuine form, even by those who practice it. The former belongs to the wide path, while the latter pertains exclusively to the narrow way. The existence of this counterfeit strictness is undisputed, as seen in Acts 26:5 when Paul speaks of the "strictest sect" of his religious background, the Pharisees. This is why the apostle's warning is crucial (Galatians 4:18), "It is always good to be zealous for a good purpose." Now,

This counterfeit strictness in religion, which should be rejected as a human creation, arises from men's own interpretations. God's command doesn't bind them in such a manner; rather, they impose restrictions upon themselves where God hasn't, making their strictness a form of superstition according to the biblical definition, regardless of their claims of opposing superstition (Matthew 15:9; Colossians 2:20–22). This is even the case when they mistakenly believe they are bound to it by God's command when, in reality, no such command exists (John 16:2). An erring conscience, believing something to be God's command when it isn't, cannot make it so (Acts 26:9). This can be identified by:

(1.) Its imbalanced nature, causing individuals to be stricter in these matters than in those that are undeniably commanded by God (Matthew 23:25). Human nature tends to favour its own preferences, treating them like beloved children, while established duties are treated as stepchildren. It's akin to the way the earth provides nourishment to weeds while flowers struggle.

(2.) Its displacement of substantial religious duties (Matthew 15:2–6). The apostle illustrates that the counterfeit strictness of some was in conflict with the sixth commandment (Colossians 2:22, 23). No duty of religion can contradict another. Therefore, when a form of strictness clashes with a clear moral duty from the Ten Commandments, diverting one from it, it is undoubtedly the wrong kind of strictness. For instance, if someone's strictness hinders them from participating in the ordinary means of grace through which Christ nurtures his followers or prevents them from showing love and kindness to their neighbours, it's unquestionably a counterfeit form.

3. Lastly, it imparts a disposition to individuals that is significantly different from the spirit of the gospel. Counterfeit strictness arises from a legalistic mindset, which steers the spirit towards legalism, esteeming their strictness highly (Philippians 3:6, 7). This kind of strictness fosters pride and self-conceit (Colossians 2:18), engenders a bitter spirit (Titus 3:3), and fuels a fervour inconsistent with the gospel's spirit of love and meekness (James 3:17). This form of strictness should be avoided due to its dishonouring of God, harm to one's own soul, and negative impact on others.
4. However, a genuine form of strictness does indeed exist, as advocated in our text. It involves adhering rigorously to God's revealed will in all matters to the best of our knowledge. This authentic strictness refrains from compromise, steadfastly adhering to these principles even if it results in worldly loss. It remains unyielding in the face of temptations, contrary worldly examples, enticing allurements, and severe opposition.

What upholds a person's unyielding stance is the weight of God's authority upon their conscience (Acts 4:19, 20). Thus, whether the matter at hand is seemingly trivial or the potential loss or risk is great, if God's commandment dictates, they must stand their ground. This resolve is encapsulated in Psalm 119:4, "You have commanded us to keep your precepts diligently."

There are two criteria for measuring this strictness, with anything beyond these bounds being deemed as laxity.

1. The law of God, represented by the ten commandments (James 1:25; Ezekiel 18:5–9). This serves as the eternal standard of righteousness, impervious to any circumstances that might suggest it no longer applies. Anything that falls short of this

standard—be it related to our duties to God, ourselves, or our neighbour—indicates a deficiency in true strictness. Conversely, anything exceeding this standard constitutes counterfeit strictness, which God does not accept, for wisdom lies in adhering to what is written.

2. The example set by Christ (1 Peter 2:21). Christ's example serves as a vivid illustration of the former criterion, making it more discernible and emphatically enforced. The life of our Lord Jesus perfectly epitomised authentic strictness (1 Peter 2:22). Despite being falsely accused by legalistic individuals of not being strict enough because he did not adhere to the elders' traditions, refused to withhold tribute to Caesar, associated with tax collectors and sinners to bring spiritual good, and even performed acts like making clay on the Sabbath to honour the sixth command, he was, in fact, adhering strictly to God's law. The accusers were the ones deviating from it. Similarly, those who, under the guise of strictness, refrain from following Christ's example are, in reality, the ones demonstrating looseness. The more aligned our conduct is with Christ's example, the truer our strictness becomes.

This kind of strictness can be identified through:

1. **Consistency:** True strictness is consistent across all aspects of life (Psalm 119:6). It is not confined to specific opinions while neglecting practice; it encompasses duties to God and others. The genuinely strict person is careful not only with their actions but also with their words and thoughts. They diligently fulfil their roles as parents, children, masters, servants, and more, in addition to religious obligations like prayer and reading. They

value truthfulness in both interpersonal relations and spiritual beliefs.

2. Proportional Approach: True strictness maintains a balance, apportioning zeal in proportion to the significance of the matters at hand. Neglecting this balance is criticised (Matthew 23:23). This means that while no revealed truth or commanded duty should be disregarded, our fervour should correspond to their weight and value. Just as a larger piece of gold holds more value, more significant matters deserve greater concern. Overemphasising minor issues while neglecting substantial ones is as illogical as protecting the extremities but leaving the heart vulnerable to the enemy's attacks.

3. Gospel-Centered Spirit: True strictness is rooted in faith in Christ (Philippians 3:3). A genuinely strict person lives as though their strictness could win them heaven, yet they simultaneously place their confidence in God's grace. This authentic strictness is marked by a gospel-oriented disposition. It combines a commitment to upholding God's holy law and honouring the grace of the gospel. It is characterised by self-denial, humility, meekness, love for God, love for humanity, goodwill, and benevolence towards others.

Given this understanding of true strictness, it becomes evident that:

First, this strictness is entirely justifiable, regardless of the negative perceptions and criticisms it faces in the world. To justify it, consider:

1. God's Infinite Majesty: God's commands are to be strictly adhered to (Exodus 20:2). Just as one would not disregard orders from a prince, the infinite gap between God and humans

justifies a meticulous commitment to His commands. Recognising this should lead to unwavering obedience without questioning or compromising (Acts 4:19).

2. **The Perils of Compromise:** The potential consequences of compromising one's beliefs should not be underestimated (Matthew 10:28). When weighing worldly loss and hazard against God's displeasure, the latter should outweigh the former. As long as God's disapproval remains more alarming than the world's, religious strictness remains justifiable.
3. **Christ's Example:** Jesus lived a strict life (John 8:29). His example is justifiable; therefore, those who emulate His strictness should not be condemned. Moreover, Christ provided an example for followers to emulate, and their level of strictness still falls short of His. Criticisms aimed at strict Christians ultimately reflect on Christ Himself, who upheld even higher standards. Such critics will be held accountable (Jude 1:15).
4. **Aiming for Perfection:** Every being strives for its perfection, and humans are no exception. Striving for religious strictness is not a crime; rather, it is a pursuit of personal and spiritual perfection. This pursuit aligns with the purpose of glorifying God by obeying His eternal law. The more closely one conforms, the closer they come to perfection. This aspiration was initially set for Adam, who fell by lowering his strictness. Glorified saints in heaven have achieved perfect strictness, without deviation. Therefore, criticisms against strictness seem misplaced, as they arise from a desire to move beyond human shortcomings and towards personal perfection.

Secondly, this level of strictness is not only justifiable but necessary for several reasons:

- 1. God's Command:** Psalm 119:4 states, "You have commanded us to keep your precepts diligently," implying an exceptional degree of exactness. This is evident in Mark 12:30-31, where the command to love God and neighbour encompasses the totality of one's being. Ephesians 5:15 advises Christians to walk circumspectly, implying the utmost precision. The unadulterated law demands the utmost purity and exactness. It is blasphemous to assume that Christ has lessened the purity required in each command. Therefore, strictness is as necessary as the authority of God mandates.
- 2. Commanded on Peril of Soul:** In Matthew 5:19-20, breaking even the least commandment is grave, and teaching others to do so results in being called the least in the kingdom of heaven. Our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the kingdom of heaven. Just as a single leak can sink a ship, neglecting even one aspect of obedience can endanger salvation. Neither the passage of time nor worldly risks can excuse laxity.
- 3. Conformity to Christ:** 1 John 2:6 emphasises the necessity of walking as Christ walked. Romans 8:29 highlights our predestination to be conformed to the image of Christ. Baptism signifies this, as Galatians 3:27 explains. We cannot bear the image of the second Adam unless we live a strict life of adherence to His teachings. A careless life reflects the image of the first Adam, while strictness conforms us to the image of Christ.
- 4. Sincerity and Evidence:** Psalm 119:6 indicates that strict obedience prevents shame, as respecting all of God's commands signifies sincerity. James 2:10-11 illustrates that breaking even

one command makes one guilty of breaking them all. Hence, treating God's commands selectively undermines their divine authority. One's willingness to selectively obey indicates a lack of reverence for God's authority. John 15:14 serves as a litmus test for sincerity: "You are my friends if you do what I command."

I offer the following advice for cultivating genuine strictness in your religious practice:

1. **Commence at the Right Starting Point:** True strictness begins with a genuine conversion, entering through the narrow gate, as highlighted in Luke 13:24. Those who are strict but unconverted face a desperate situation, as illustrated in Matthew 21:31-32. King Solomon provides insight into this matter, saying, "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 26:12).
2. **Focus on the Correct Standards:** Keep the true standards of strictness before you, which are the law of God and the example set by Christ. Over time, the regulations of churches, viewpoints, customs, and examples of various groups have often resulted in misguided and superficial strictness. Remember the instruction from Isaiah 8:20, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." As Christians, let Christ's example be your guiding light.
3. **Embrace the Bonds of True Strictness:** Allow the binding authority of God to continuously influence your conscience, coupled with the compelling love of Christ in your heart. These are the divine constraints that guide you. Exodus 20:2 emphasises, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

4. Understand the Essence of True Strictness: Authentic strictness only pertains to matters where God has specifically bound us, not self-imposed restrictions lacking His sanction. You can recognise it by two key characteristics:

(1.) It resists the pull of natural inclinations and desires of the heart. This genuine strictness restrains those desires; echoing Matthew 5:29, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out," etc. In contrast, false strictness aligns with these desires, nurturing and sustaining them. The former proves challenging, while the latter appears effortless to the unregenerate. It is easy to maintain strict opinions or separate from a church when there's no risk. However, real strictness entails practising substantial religious duties and distancing oneself from the worldly, unregenerate crowd in one's state and way of life – a much more arduous task.

(2.) Genuine strictness promotes the sanctification of the soul, fostering personal growth and greater conformity to God's image across the entire being, as Romans 14:17 suggests. Consider the Pharisees, who diligently avoided eating with unwashed hands and associating with publicans and sinners. Was their strictness beneficial in any way? Moreover, superficial strictness that fosters spiritual malnourishment can easily be identified as trivial and counterfeit.

Here are the following pieces of advice for cultivating genuine strictness in your religious practice:

1. Prioritize the Core: Above all, be strict in both your faith and your pursuit of a holy life.

(1.) Treasure every truth deeply, holding onto them regardless of any challenges, as stated in Proverbs 23:23, "Buy the truth, and sell it not." Every truth of God holds more value than anything we may risk or lose. Yet, it's a misconception to believe that maintaining truth requires compromising peace with those who differ from us. This can be seen in Romans 14:14 when compared to verse 3, and in Philippians 3:15-16, where foundational truths form the bond.

(2.) Dedicate yourself to probing into matters of sin and duty in specific cases as a habitual practice. If you claim Christ as your guide, then consult Him in all things. Seek His guidance through His Word and providence. Much like a vigilant observer of a pillar of cloud and fire, be attentive to its movements and rests to guide your actions.

(3.) Operate with a religious foundation in all matters. As Colossians 3:17 and 1 Corinthians 10:31 affirm, every action, whether covered by explicit or general commandments (such as Philippians 4:8), pertains to both temporal and spiritual domains. Therefore, genuine strictness necessitates acting in accordance with these principles.

(4.) Do not evaluate whether an action is a minor or major sin when making decisions. If something is sinful, regardless of its scale, avoid it and do not engage with it. Abstain from anything that even hints at evil, as highlighted in 1 Thessalonians 5:22 and Jude verse 23. Even a small sin can leave a significant blemish on the soul, which can only be cleansed by Christ's blood. Furthermore, small sins pave the way for larger ones.

(5.) In cases where doubt arises regarding certain practices, choose the path that safeguards your conscience, regardless of

any factors pulling you toward another option. If you're unsure whether an action is sinful, but you're confident that refraining from it cannot be sinful, then abstain from it, as advised in Romans 14:5 and 14:23.

(6.) Be diligent in fulfilling your obligations to God, including those required by the first table of the Ten Commandments. Do not take lightly the omission of duties such as secret or family prayers or attending sermons. Reflect on the example of Thomas in John 20:24-25. If providence prevents you from fulfilling a duty, it is not you who neglect it, but rather God ceases to demand it.

(7.) Be precise and meticulous in your interactions with others, ensuring you adhere to the requirements of the second table of the Ten Commandments. Learn from the Pharisees' mistake, as stated in Matthew 23:23. Practise strict justice in your interactions, prioritising the well-being of others over material gain. Conduct your business affairs with integrity, for any gains from dishonest practices are unjust and akin to theft. Maintain an unwavering commitment to truth, and disdain falsehood. Those who casually disregard the truth in everyday life, while pretending to value divine truths, will ultimately share in condemnation, as noted in Revelation 21:8.

(8.) Conscientiously fulfil your relational responsibilities, recognising that your roles in relationships are designed to test you. Whether a parent, child, spouse, master, or servant, consistently uphold the duties of your role. Avoid any inconsistency in your behaviour within your relationships, such as being kind but tyrannical as a spouse. If the behaviour of

others disrupts your ability to express gentler virtues, respond with a sense of justice and reason.

(9.) Respect the authority that others have over you, for it reflects a part of the divine image. True strictness does not disregard this authority or focus solely on the person's appealing qualities, as this effectively places personal preference above God's design. As Jude verse 8 and 1 Peter 2:18 emphasise, it's not true strictness but a lack of conscience that diminishes the respect due to authority.

(10.) Maintain consistency in private and public life. Practice strictness where no eyes but God's observe you, just as you do in the public eye. As Acts 24:16 reminds us, the law and conscience are consistent, and God's presence is unchanged, regardless of the setting. Your authenticity in private is essential; otherwise, your strictness only exists for public display.

(11.) Lastly, closely observe your inner world as much as your outward conduct. Proverbs 4:23 urges, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." While outward actions may appear strict, hypocrisy is exposed if your inner self remains unchecked. As Matthew 23:27-28 and Romans 2:29 caution, focus on the integrity of your heart and not merely outward appearances.

So, as you arrange your life according to these principles, you will embody Christian strictness, which Christ will acknowledge and commend on the final day. At that time, the emptiness of the world's loose ways and the insincere strictness of others will both be exposed as worthless.

DOCTRINE V: The final point is that only a small number of people in humanity discover the narrow gate and path leading to life.

In discussing this matter, I will:

I. Explain the doctrine.

II. Confirm it.

III. Provide the reasons behind it.

IV. Lastly, Apply it.

I. To explain this point, we will:

1. Consider the rarity of those who find the narrow gate and path.

2. Discuss the aspects in which they are considered few.

Firstly, let's contemplate the rarity of finding the narrow gate and path. This can be understood through the following three observations:

1. Everyone is naturally distant from it. As seen in Romans 3:23, humanity deviated from this path through Adam. Every individual without exception was led astray, as stated in verse 12. The inherent state of mankind is one of wandering – a state of aimlessness on the mountains of vanity, akin to lost sheep and stray travellers. Regrettably, this course leads to the congregation of the spiritually dead, as mentioned in Proverbs 21:16.

2. **It's not easily discovered by anyone.** In most cases, the finest things are the hardest to attain. While the wide gate and broad path are easily stumbled upon, the narrow gate and restricted path are like hidden trails that are not easily found. We are susceptible to passions, biases, and misunderstandings about it, and it surpasses our natural capacities. The only way to discover it effectively is through the guidance of the Spirit of Christ.
3. **Only a few genuinely identify it and can say, "This is it."** Due to numerous deceptive gates and paths that appear to be the right one but are not, it's a rare individual who isn't misled by one or another of them.
4. **Only a small number choose to enter through the narrow gate and tread the narrow path, even though this is the only way for sinners to attain eternal life.** This path and gate are seldom frequented. Few individuals even catch a glimpse of them, and among those, many retract, with only a minority entering and persevering. The number of truly regenerated, soundly converted, and authentically holy individuals in the world is limited. Most people choose the path of sin, while only a small minority commit to the path of holy obedience – walking with Christ in accordance with God's commandments.
5. **Lastly,** it's important to note that despite the rarity, there are those who indeed enter through the narrow gate and traverse the path. Even in the darkest times, there are always a few genuinely holy and soundly converted individuals in the world. This will remain the case until the end, as affirmed in Matthew

16:18. Once their number is complete, even though they are few, the world will reach its conclusion.

Secondly, in what ways are they considered few?

1. They are not few in an absolute sense, when viewed independently. If we consider the entire assembly of those who have, are, and will find the path, as described in Hebrews 12:23, they form a splendid gathering. They constitute a vast multitude, surpassing human enumeration, as indicated in Revelation 8:9. Their numbers are so great that they are comparable to stars – countless, just as God promised Abraham in Genesis 15:5, a promise reaffirmed in Galatians 3:29. The redemptive sacrifice of a Saviour has resulted in an immeasurable lineage.

However, they progress along the path in segments, akin to an army that began its march at the sound of the call to move (Genesis 3:15) toward the celestial city. This march commenced from that moment and continues through the present day, extending until the world's end. Over four thousand years have passed since the vanguard, the initial generation, completed their journey and settled in the city. The righteous Abel was the first to enter it. Since that time, successive generations have joined in their proper order. While a portion of this host is currently on the path, making their way towards the city, the rear has yet to commence. Those who journey together are scattered across different nations and parts of the world. Even within the same country, they often find themselves in small numbers at any given location. Consequently, they express their experiences through laments of solitude, such as those found in Psalm 12:1, "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men," and Micah 7:1, "Woe is me! For I am like those who gather summer fruits, like those who glean

vintage grapes." However, when the entire host concludes their march and converges in the celestial city, they will constitute an uncountable multitude, guided by the infinite understanding of their captain, Christ – both fully man and fully God.

Let not the scarcity of those who find the path deter anyone from it due to fears of isolation and a lack of companionship. For only a brief stretch of their journey will they experience solitude. Those who live devoutly in the most remote corners will soon find themselves eternally surrounded by a glorious assembly, enjoying splendid companionship.

2. Nonetheless, they are comparatively few when contrasted with those who, entering through the wide gate, tread the broad path. Although they are substantial in number on their own, they pale in comparison to the multitudes taking the alternative route. The number of the regenerated is dwarfed by the unregenerated, the genuinely converted by the unconverted, the truly sanctified by the unsanctified, the saints by the sinners, and those who find the narrow path by those entering the wide gate.

II. To confirm this weighty truth, we shall examine it from two angles: 1. By delving into the scriptural perspective on this matter. 2. By observing the state of the world.

Firstly, let's take a closer look at the scriptural perspective on this matter.

1. Our Lord himself explicitly informs us that out of the many who are called, only a few are chosen, as stated in Matthew 20:16 and 22:14. Now, all those who enter through the narrow gate and walk the narrow way are chosen, as affirmed in Revelation 17:14. Faith is designated as the faith of God's chosen ones, as

mentioned in Titus 1:1, and it's only they who are led into holy obedience, according to 1 Peter 1:2. All of the elect are called, as highlighted in Romans 8:30. However, not everyone who receives the external call of the Gospel is elect or chosen. On the contrary, while many are called through that means, only a few are chosen and led through the narrow gate onto the narrow path. The majority of those who receive the Gospel call continue to wander, and indeed, many are not even called externally.

2. Christ's flock consists of those who, after entering through the narrow gate, tread the narrow path, faithfully following him, as expressed in John 10:27 and Song of Solomon 1:8. Nonetheless, Christ's flock is a comparatively small one, particularly when compared to the multitude that the devil herds. As Luke 12:32 affirms, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." It's baseless to attempt to restrict this statement to the disciples or believers present at that time, as it pertains to all believers until the end of the world, as seen in verses 35-40. Christ's children are relatively scarce in the world, so much so that they become signs and wonders, as proclaimed in Isaiah 8:18, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me, are for signs and for wonders in Israel." This certainty indicates their rarity. The context makes it clear that this refers to Christ, as evidenced by Hebrews 2:13, "Behold, I and the children which God hath given me." Israel was a prototype of a chosen people, set apart from the world, and they were few in comparison to the rest of the world. Similarly, Christ's flock are His chosen ones.
3. The scripture portrays them using terms that differentiate them from a larger multitude. They are referred to as the firstborn, as conveyed in Hebrews 12:23. Everyone is well aware that

firstborn children are few in comparison to other siblings – only one in each family, even in the largest of families. They are also likened to first fruits in Revelation 14:4 and James 1:18. However, these first fruits are considerably small compared to the entire harvest. Thus, the scriptural account underscores the idea that they are indeed few.

Secondly, let us turn our gaze towards the world. At any point in history, we can observe that the majority still walked the broad way, while the rest chose the narrow path.

1. Consider the generation before the flood. In that era, good individuals were few and far between, while evil abounded greatly. The situation was dire, as we can read in Genesis 6:11-12, "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." The flood itself, which wiped out all but eight people, is conclusive evidence that there were very few, if any, righteous individuals among them. The apostle Peter refers to them as the "world of the ungodly" in 2 Peter 2:5.
2. From the time after the flood until the calling of Abraham, virtuous people were scarce. The massive apostasy led by Nimrod, who, along with his followers, built the Tower of Babel, attests to this reality (Genesis 11). The vastness of their company caused them to be divided into numerous nations, each with their own languages. The original holy tongue was preserved among the descendants of Shem, who had no part in the rebellion against Heaven. However, even among Shem's descendants, virtue had greatly declined by the time Abraham was called (Joshua 24:2).

3. From the era of Abraham until Moses, the state of the world was lamentable, with widespread idolatry and profanity prevailing. While I won't assert that there was no true religion or godliness beyond Abraham's family, the prevalence of these virtues was indeed meagre. Virtuous individuals, such as Melchizedek and Ishmael, did exist, but their numbers were limited. Even in Abraham's own family, his wife Rachel had stolen her father's idols. Religion's decline continued during their time in Egypt, as attested by Ezekiel 20:6-8 and Romans 5:13.

4. From the time of Moses until Christ, or from the establishment of the Jewish Church, spanning the period of the Old Testament, until the inauguration of the Gospel-era among the Gentiles by the apostles, marking the formation of the New Testament Church, the situation remained the same worldwide. The ceremonial law functioned as a protective barrier around the Church, separating it from other groups and confining it to the Jewish nation and a small number of proselytes. The rest of the nations at that time were steeped in idolatry, ignorant of the true God and the proper way of worship (Acts 14:15-16). The Jewish Church frequently turned to idolatry, and profanity and formality were rampant. Prophets were consistently murdered, leading up to the ultimate act of killing the Lord of glory (Matthew 23:31-32, Acts 7:52). Truly godly individuals were sparse in their ranks. Moses faced immense challenges among them, and David's lament in Psalm 12:1 captures the sentiment: "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men." Isaiah 1:9 conveys the same, "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." Jeremiah expressed his despondency in Jeremiah 9:2, "Oh! that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place

of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them; for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men." Micah 7:1 adds, "Woe is me, for I am as when they have gathered the summer-fruits, as the grape-gleaning of the vintage; there is no cluster to eat; my soul desired the first ripe fruit."

5. From the establishment of the New Testament Church until the grand apostasy during the era of Antichrist, the narrow path was trodden by only a few in comparison. This is evident from accounts in the New Testament, the persecutions faced by the apostles, and the state of the churches soon after their founding – as seen in Corinth, Galatia, and the seven churches of Asia. For the first three hundred years, Paganism remained the established religion within the empire, and Christians were persecuted relentlessly. Once peace was achieved and Christianity became legal, heresies such as Arianism emerged, leading to an apostasy that culminated in the darkness and deviation under Antichrist.
6. During Antichrist's reign until the Reformation, darkness covered the Christian world. The dominance of this darkness was so pronounced that people marveled at the condition of Christians, particularly in Europe. Those on the narrow path were represented symbolically by two witnesses prophesying in sackcloth (Revelation 11:3).
7. Finally, from the Reformation to the present day, which
 1. At the present time, less than a third of the world professes Christianity. Therefore, even if all those who are baptized and bear the name of Christ were godly, they would still be a minority. Furthermore, if we divide the world into thirty

parts, nineteen parts are inhabited by Pagans who do not acknowledge the true God, while six parts are occupied by Jews and Muslims who reject Christ's role as the Saviour. This leaves only five parts where Christianity is professed.

2. Among these five parts, two are associated with the Greek church. However, their practice of Christianity is often marked by unfortunate misconceptions. For instance, they believe that departed souls cannot attain the beatific vision until after the resurrection. They pray for the deceased, admit children to the Eucharist at the age of seven, and adorn their churches with images. Both ministers and congregants frequently suffer from severe ignorance. The remaining three parts are divided between the Catholic and Protestant churches. The former is associated with idolatry and Antichristian practices.
3. Lastly, even in the Protestant churches, only a few appear to be on the narrow path in comparison to those treading the broad way. This group includes:
4. Gross heretics who hold fundamental errors, denying the imputation of Christ's righteousness, his satisfaction, and his divinity, and even blaspheming the holy Trinity. A considerable number of these individuals can be found within Protestant churches. Deists, who reject both Christ and Antichrist, disregarding the Bible and the Gospel entirely, should also be excluded. Galatians 5:19–21 warns, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Jude verse 4

further states, "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."

5. The profoundly ignorant are also prevalent. Many individuals within the churches lack a basic understanding of fundamental principles. By observing the abundance of ignorance even among those who are being instructed, one can imagine the extent of this issue in regions and congregations where instruction is lacking. Consequently, in many places, the majority of people are indifferent to and unacquainted with these matters. Isaiah 27:11 aptly states, "It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour."
6. The profane, who openly lead a wicked life, actively following the broad way. These individuals are widespread and contribute negatively to society, thus sully the reputation of the Christian profession. This has inevitably led to Christianity being held in contempt. The aforementioned passage from Galatians 5:19–21 is relevant here as well.
7. Mere moralists, who maintain a civil existence in society and are good neighbours, but fail to worship God except in public congregations. These individuals lack even a semblance of godliness and must also be excluded. Matthew 5:20 reinforces this point, "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

8. Finally, there are those who profess to be religious, but their conduct is contrary to their professions. Their behaviour contradicts their claimed faith and only serves to discredit the Christian faith.

1. Those who bring disgrace to their profession through a consistent pattern of living without tenderness or care. They may talk about religion, yet their actions don't reflect any true devotion. They might engage in religious practices, but their speech, actions, and behaviour outside of those times are unrestrained and uncontrolled, as if they are using their religious acts as a cover to indulge in licentiousness. This resembles the scenario described in Proverbs 7:14-15, "I have peace offerings with me; this day have I paid my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee."
2. Individuals who, while generally leading a disciplined life, still engage in scandalous behaviours, revealing themselves through acts of injustice, falsehood, malicious gossip, excessive pride, conceit, deception, and more. Such behaviours create internal resentment among fellow believers and distance them from one another, as cautioned in Matthew 5:19.
3. Those who outwardly appear blameless due to the limitations of human frailty, yet secretly hold onto idols of jealousy in their hearts and never wholeheartedly surrender to God's complete revealed will for them. Psalm 66:18 and 119:6 highlight this issue.
4. Lastly, those who profess faith but lack a personal experience of God's transforming grace in their hearts. They are strangers to the inner work of grace and the vibrant life of God within their

souls. They have not encountered the power of conversion and regeneration or the dynamics of a life lived by faith, spiritual warfare, and genuine communion with God through acts of worship. This aligns with John 3:3 and 2 Timothy 3:5.

Once these individuals are removed from consideration, it becomes abundantly clear that only a few individuals remain. This unmistakably demonstrates that only a small portion of humanity discover the narrow gate and the challenging path that leads to eternal life.

V. Why only a few manage to find the narrow gate

I shall now provide the reasons for this point, explaining why only a few manage to find the narrow gate and the challenging path. This arises from:

1. The inherent blindness of human minds; Ephesians 4:17-18. They are unable to perceive its heavenly excellence, beauty, and glory; 1 Corinthians 2:14. They may hear about it and be directed towards it, yet their vision is obscured, preventing them from seeing or discovering it, similar to the Sodomites who were unable to find the door to Lot's house. Until the Spirit opens the eyes of understanding, this gate will remain undiscovered; and such a privilege is reserved for only a few; Isaiah 53:1. Human knowledge, intelligence, and common sense hold no significance here.

2. The stubbornness of human wills; John 5:40. People inherently display apathy towards it; they lack interest, hence fail to locate it. In fact, they possess an aversion to it, with their hearts opposed to it; Romans 8:7. It is only when their wills are renewed that they begin to walk the narrow way. A day of divine power, a mercy granted to the few, becomes necessary to guide them onto this path; Psalm 60:3. And when the Spirit engages in this transformative work, individuals may struggle against it like a fish hooked in the water.
3. The inherent inclination and attachment to the broad path. This broad path aligns with their own desires, just as water flows downhill, not uphill. Left to themselves, they would never opt for, desire, or search for an alternative; Isaiah 57:17. Wisdom's depth decrees that the majority is allowed to follow their inclinations to the fullest extent; they shall have their fill; Job 21:14 and Hosea 4:17 confirm this.
4. Satan actively works to deter them from it; 1 Peter 5:8. He is the grand deceiver, leading sinners astray, guiding them into divergent paths based on their individual temperaments and dispositions. He portrays the narrow way with alarming imagery while presenting the broad way as pleasant and secure. This serves to cultivate biases against the former and foster favour towards the latter. If a sinner ever appears on the verge of entering the narrow gate onto the challenging path, Satan redoubles his efforts, vigorously striving to divert them.
5. Lastly, the influence of negative role models, aligning with the innate inclination, sweeps many along with it; Matthew 18:7. Positive examples do exist in the world, but they stand against the current of inherent inclination, thus proving ineffective.

However, negative influences, moving in harmony with that inclination, wield considerable power; individuals tend to promise themselves peace within a wicked path, inspired by observing others who walk that route and seem to enjoy tranquillity in doing so.

USE 1. for gaining insight. Hence, understand that:

1. The majority of humanity is bound for destruction, given that the only path to life is through the narrow gate and the challenging path that only a few discover. Arrogant individuals, driven by their belief in their own superiority, may struggle to accept that God will ultimately reject the majority. However, even though the fallen angels possessed a higher natural excellence than humans, God cast them all away without salvation. Some may find it incongruent with His mercy, but mercy must be balanced with justice; otherwise, it would be a weakness unfitting for the Judge of all the Earth. Mercy will triumph by saving some, all those who choose the path harmonious with justice. Some argue that in this scenario, Adam's influence to ruin surpasses Christ's power to save. However, saving a single sinner is a greater triumph than ruining thousands or even an entire world.
2. Consequently, saints must inevitably stand apart in the world, as they tread a distinctive path unlike the one the majority follows, considering that few locate the narrow way. This characteristic is bound to make them seem peculiar, eccentric, and unconventional in the eyes of the world. Those who are unable to tolerate this perspective imposed by the world and feel compelled to conform to the multitude's way to maintain their reputation are not suitable candidates for heaven. Such

individuals are marked as fearful (Revelation 21:8), deniers of Christ (Matthew 10:33), displaying shame towards Him (Mark 8:38).

3. It should come as no surprise that the cause of religion struggles in the world, given that it garners few devoted adherents. Truth is neglected, and genuine inner and outward holiness is a rarity. Both aspects of religion are out of step with the prevailing trends; after all, only a few find the narrow way. The decline of religion, its periods of persecution, perpetual mockery, and slander are inevitable consequences of the scarcity of those who locate the narrow way.
4. Finally, it is undeniably not a simple task to be a Christian, to embrace the narrow gate and the challenging path. The indifference and negligence people show towards matters of faith, as if they can hardly go astray in this regard, are difficult to comprehend. Can it be logically believed that hitting a target that the majority miss is an easy feat? Discovering a path that few in humanity locate can hardly be deemed straightforward. Nonetheless, the misconception of the ease of finding it is one of the primary reasons why only a few succeed in doing so.

USE 2. Encouragement. And,

First and foremost, let everyone thoroughly reflect and assess which path they are treading. Ask yourselves, "Am I on the broad path or the narrow path?" and make an earnest effort to ascertain this crucial point.

MOTIVE 1. This is a matter of paramount significance for you; life and death hang in the balance. If you find yourself on the broad path, you are headed towards destruction; if on the narrow path, you are

journeying towards life. Will you be complacent about a matter of such gravity? Will you not give your own souls the fairness they deserve by pondering over it?

MOTIVE 2. It is undeniable that you were once on the broad path (Ephesians 2:3). The relevant question here is whether you have been redirected from it onto the narrow path or not. If you have never acknowledged your presence on the broad path, it is a worrisome sign that you might still be on it, even if you are unaware of it (Revelation 3:17, 18). Even if you have recognized your perilous position on the broad path, the crucial question remains: Have you genuinely turned away from it?

MOTIVE 3. Given that most individuals are treading the broad path while only a few have found the narrow one, it is all the more essential for you to discern which of these paths you are on. Even if a significant number had discovered the narrow path, the fact that some have missed it should impel you to scrutinize your own direction. Moreover, considering the scarcity of those who locate the narrow path and the abundance of those who miss it, you are even more obliged to examine your own trajectory.

MOTIVE 4. Many paths may resemble the narrow path, but not all of them truly are. Self-deception is rampant, and confidence is often strongest in the fool (Proverbs 21:2; 12:15). Therefore, before placing your trust in your chosen path, test and verify it.

MOTIVE 5. Finally, the heedless sinner will confront a harrowing disillusionment in the end—an alarming awakening for the apathetic and thoughtless sinner, resulting in their ultimate downfall (Matthew 25:11, 12). Isaiah 50:11 warns, "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled; this shall ye have of

mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." Therefore, rouse yourselves in due time, and meticulously ponder your path before it becomes too late.

After discussing both paths, there are two points I'd like to add:

1. If you are on the narrow path, you have entered through the strait gate of conversion to God (Matthew 18:3). You have experienced the bitterness of sin and, as a result, the bitterness of death. You have been drawn away from your own self towards Christ through faith, and through Him, you have reached God through sincere repentance.
2. If you are on the narrow path, you are well aware of its challenges, yet you remain determined not to abandon it but to persevere. Your life is a continuous struggle (Philippians 3:14). You live by God's commands, follow Christ's example, your walk is guided by God's will, the purpose of your life is to honour God, and your strength for this journey comes from Christ.

To those who have not yet embarked on the narrow path, make it your aim to find it. Make every effort to enter through the strait gate, for this is the only way to reach it. And,

1. Do not settle for anything less. Seek a genuine conversion in your souls. Pray for it, listen to the Word with the intention of finding it, and reflect deeply on your own situation, allowing conviction to take root and nurturing it. Strive to see Christ in His glory and beauty, leading you to sincere repentance.
2. Dedicate yourselves to a life of obedience, imitating the example of Christ and following the path of the flock. Engage in the practice of mortification, dying to the desires of the flesh and to

sin daily. Embrace a life of newness, living for God in contrast to worldly desires and practicing righteousness over sin.

Lastly, to those who are already on the narrow path:

1. Offer thanks to God and express gratitude that while He reveals this path to only a few, you are among those few who have been shown the way.
2. Walk cautiously. Satan will set traps to cause you to stumble and fall, and if possible, divert you from the path. Since there are fewer on this path, the world pays closer attention, ready to magnify your missteps to discredit the way. It would be even more serious if you fail to live in a manner befitting such a rare privilege.
3. Walk steadfastly, despite the narrowness and challenges of the path. Remember, it leads to life. On the other hand, the broad way, though seemingly easy, leads to death and destruction.

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