

There are two roads before you, one on the left and one on the right. And the one on the left is a road which is paved, a road which is gentle, a road which is very wide. A very easy road for you to travel on. But the road on the right is rough. It is steep. It is broken up and narrow. A very difficult road for you to travel on. But you have to choose one or the other. Which way will you go?

And while you're thinking, you notice that there is a sign right in front of you. And this sign says that to the left is the way of the flesh and to the right is the way of the Spirit. So the way on the left, the way of the flesh, is the easy way. But the way on the right, the way of the Spirit, is the hard way. You have to choose one. Which way will you go?

And be very clear here, Christians, too. You have to pick one or the other. Just like it's physically impossible to go down two roads at the same time, you can't go on both of these roads. Just as Paul says in verse 17 of our reading: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." They're in conflict. You can't have both. You need to pick one or the other. So make your choice. Which way will you go?

But choose wisely, Christians, because these two ways are not the same. We may be tempted to think that both of these roads eventually end up in the same place. That it really doesn't matter which one you go down, because eventually you're going to get to heaven anyway. But that isn't true. These two roads go to two very different places. Because the road on the left, the way of the flesh, leads to destruction, and the road on the right, the way of the Spirit, leads to life. As Jesus himself says, Matthew chapter 7: "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. But the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." So we must not think that we can just go the easy way, the way of the flesh, and still follow after Jesus. Because that way will lead us directly into hell. So which way, then, Christians, will you go?

But we might ask at this point: "Well, why would anybody want to go down the left-hand road? Why would anybody want to go that way, knowing that it will destroy them? Wouldn't we all want to go on the right-hand road, the way that leads to life, especially as Christians? This seems like a simple choice. That's the way we want to go." But Christians, the road on the left is easy. It's a road which doesn't demand anything of you. It's a road where there is no need to change anything. A road where there is no need to stop doing anything. A road where you don't have to do anything, really. A road which never demands anything. And it promises great pleasure. It promises you the world. It is a road which is very attractive to our eyes. Who wouldn't want to go on a road like that? But the road on the right, the way of the Spirit, is a hard road. It is a road which demands much of us. A road where we have to change. A road where we have to leave behind our sins. A road where we have to stop doing things. And a road which, frankly, makes us uncomfortable from time to time. It can even cause us a little pain. It is a road that is very hard for us to go on. That's why people are tempted, Christians, because the way of the flesh is easy. And even if it leads to our destruction, people will still go that way. We are still tempted to go down that road simply because it doesn't demand anything. And those who go that way, as Jesus says, are many.

But maybe we would say, "Well, I don't want to make this decision right now. I want to push it off a little bit. I'm going to travel down the way of the flesh, travel down the easy way for a while, and I'll make this decision later. I'll get to it some other time. Yeah, I know I should start doing this. I know I should stop doing this. But I just don't want to right now. I'll get to it later. I can always come back to this some other time." But Christians, do you know that you will have another opportunity? Do you know when your end will be? Can you give me the day and the hour of your coming end? And how do you know, Christians, that you're even going to have tomorrow? God alone knows when our end will be. We may not have time, and it is incredibly dangerous for us to continue down the way of the flesh, simply because we just don't know when our end will be.

It's like a story which comes out of the Middle Ages. The story is of a man who was living in the flesh. He wanted to go down the easy way. He wanted to live life however he wanted to do it. And he didn't want to change anything about himself. But he had a plan. And that plan was: just before he died, he was going to curse the devil and call out to God. And so in that way, he would turn away from the easy way and turn towards God right at the very end. It was a flawless plan, he thought. It was perfect. There was absolutely no way that it could fail. But not long after he made that plan, he was crossing a bridge with his horse, and the bridge collapsed. And as he was beginning to drown, in his fear he called out to the devil and cursed God, going exactly the way he had always gone all those years of his life. His plan had failed, because he didn't realize just how difficult it may be to turn away from these things when you've been doing them for so long. So for us, Christians, too, we must be on our guard, because we simply don't know how long our time will be.

So this is, ultimately, then, why you must choose wisely, Christians. Because the way of the flesh, the road on the left, is an easy road. It is a road which promises you the world, which promises you everything, but a road which will only destroy you in the end. Because even though it promises everything, it gives you nothing, and eventually leads you directly into hell. But the road on the right, the way of the Spirit, is a hard road, yes. A road which may demand much of us. But it is a road which will give far more than the world could ever give, because it is the way which leads to heaven. So when we go on the way of the Spirit, then, we are not missing out on the world. When we go the way of the Spirit, we are not missing out on life. We are only leaving behind what was going to destroy us anyway. And we are going to something far greater than the world could ever give us: the glory of God himself. That is what we are headed towards.

So how then, we might ask, do we know that we're going down that way? How do we know which road we're on? By the fruits we can see in our lives. Because both of these roads produce unmistakable fruits that show which way we are going on. The works of the flesh, Paul says, are evident: "Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these." So we need to ask ourselves: do these things rule my life? Are these the kinds of things that I'm caught up in, that I'm not fighting against at all? So, for example, do I let my anger have free reign, and do nothing to keep it in check or to lessen it? Do I cause divisions between myself and others simply because I want to win, because I want to be right above all? Do I live for pleasure so that I never do anything uncomfortable, never do anything painful, even if I know it's the right thing to do? Christians, if we persist in things like these, if we never fight against them, we are

walking down the easy way, the way of the flesh. And going that way will only lead to destruction. As Paul says: "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

But the fruits of the Spirit are just as clear, Christians. They are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law." These fruits show that the Spirit is at work within us. They show clearly that we are walking down the hard way to life. And yes, they may seem very weak in us. They may seem to not even be there at all, because we struggle with them so much. It seems like our sin is just too great. But Christians, that's why they're hard. Paul says that it is crucifying the flesh. It is putting to death what is easy within us. It is waging war against ourselves. And that is never an easy thing to do. But this Christian warfare is not pointless. It is not fruitless. In God and through God, these things do increase, becoming more and more.

And more than this, we are not alone in this fight. God himself is at work within us, changing us, making us into something new, forgiving our sins through Jesus, and making us more and more like him. In fact, we wouldn't be able to go this way at all without him. Apart from God, we would be lost. We could only go down the easy way. But in God and through God, we have been set free so that we can walk in this way, so that we can do what is pleasing in his sight. So when we see these fruits in our lives, then, no matter how weak they may be, we know that God is there. We know that the Spirit is at work in our hearts. Because when our end comes, when we finally reach our destination, we will be like Jesus in every way: perfect in love, perfect in joy, perfect in every fruit of the Spirit, a new creation in him.

So these two ways stand before you, then, Christians. Which way will you go? Though the way of the flesh may be easy, don't go down that way. It will only lead you into hell. Fight against your sins. Fight with all that you have. Don't give them an inch. Struggle and fight against the sin within you. And go the way of the Spirit, because that is the way which leads to life. And no matter how hard it may be, God is with you. He is making you new, and he will lead you to himself to be like Jesus Christ forever. Walk by the Spirit, and he will lead you to everlasting life.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have called us to yourself through Jesus Christ, your Son. Help us always to walk in the way of the Spirit, that we may do what is pleasing in your sight, and help us to fight against the sin that is still within us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.