

Jesus tells us that the way to salvation is narrow and the way to destruction is broad; few find salvation, but many find destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). The reason this is the case is certainly not because God's grace is somehow limited. God's grace is *boundless*. We can be certain of this because God's love is grounded and revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ His Son who loved us and gave Himself for us – and not only to take *our* sins away, but the sins of the *whole world* (1 Jn. 2:2). The way to salvation is indeed narrow, because it is in Christ *alone* that we find divine mercy. But although the way is narrow, it is as straight as an arrow.

The Holy Spirit does not lead us through a maze in order to locate some mysterious narrow door at the end of our journey. No, the Holy Spirit leads us, without illusion or riddle, by means of Word and Sacrament, directly to Jesus as He places clearly and squarely before our eyes that sacrifice which has made eternal satisfaction for all our sins. This is the work of the Holy Spirit even as He continues to guide our feet in the path of righteousness.

But life sure still seems like a winding journey. This is because we are sinners who live in a sinful world. We can blame the twisting maze of life on our own flesh. St. Paul tells us in Galatians 5 that our sinful flesh fights against the guidance of the Holy Spirit. *“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish”* (Gal. 5:17).

Now, we can train our flesh to be outwardly obedient, but its very nature is like a wild animal. You can tether it, or coax it with threats and rewards, but you can't change it into something it's not. Until the day we die, no matter how pious and religious we ever become, there are two things that our flesh will *always* continue to do: it will urge us to sin by disobeying God's Law, and it will urge us to trust in our own obedience in order to escape God's judgment. *These are the lusts of the flesh.*

But the Spirit lusts *against* the flesh. Thank God, because His desires are holy desires, and He desires to save us. And so He desires to keep our flesh from doing what it naturally does.

The Holy Spirit works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Eph. 2:13). It is God who grants us a sanctified life. But even before we find any budding fruit, the Holy Spirit works in us an even more precious desire: to find our righteousness by faith in Christ alone and not in our own new obedience. *Trusting* in our own love for God and neighbor is just as much of a fleshly pitfall as *failing* to love God and neighbor. That is why the Holy Spirit constantly redirects us to where the battle with the flesh first began: when we were baptized. He does not direct us to where our flesh was tamed, or tied down, but where our Old Adam was drowned and died with all evil desires so that a new spiritual man could rise up and live before God by faith alone – showing itself in acts of love (Gal. 5:6).

Therefore as often as our own fleshly inclinations urge us into sin, we return to our Baptism, that is, we return to the promise God made to each one of us there, which quenches every fiery dart of the devil. And as often as our fleshly pride touts its own moral success above Christ's righteousness, we return to our Baptism again where we were clothed with what is more glorious than anything our hearts could manufacture. As long as the struggle between flesh and Spirit continues, we continually find in our “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5) the victory of the Spirit of God. For here is where the victory of Jesus over sin, death and the devil was freely given to each one of us.

The way of the flesh is broad. And its end is destruction. The way of the Spirit is narrow. Yes, but He guides us as straight as an arrow to Jesus, in whom we are always sure to find salvation for both body and soul. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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