

HENRIC SCHARTAU
AND
THE ORDER OF GRACE

Biography by Henrik Hägglund and
Fifteen Sermons by Henric Schartau

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St. Michael's Day

Introduction.

*For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way,
that leadeth unto life, and few be they that find it.*

Hear this, O man, you who are hoping and longing for eternal life. Your Saviour, who has opened the way, says that you cannot enter without opposition and, hence, that there are few who attain the goal. "For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way," etc. Mt. 7. 14.

Conversion is like a gate to the straitened way of godliness. Conversion is the change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit by means of the Word of God, leading to a hearty confidence in the redemption of the Son of God, to the forgiveness of sins and strength to lead the new life determined upon. It is only by means of such a change that a Christian life can begin. The gate of repentance is the entrance to the way of life.

This gate is narrow. Man must enter there alone. You cannot bring your sins with you, O man, you must lay them away. Human friendship cannot be retained, for you must bear the reproach of Jesus. You cannot expect worldly enjoyments, for you must take up the cross of your Saviour. "Narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life."

The straitened way of godliness follows upon the narrow gate of repentance. If you have been converted and

have come to the faith and have thus received the forgiveness of sins, then you must more and more lay off the remaining sinful desires for the manifestations of which you have been forgiven. Upon conversion follows sonship, and with this childlike obedience must be associated.

But straitened is the way that leadeth unto life, and few be they that find it. The evil desires cannot be conquered without battle, and few are they that enter upon this warfare, few are they that "run with patience the race that is set before them." No one can do the will of God without interference, and few are they who pass beyond the first stumblingblocks. Few are rightly converted, and few are they that endure unto the end. "For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few be they that find it."

The gate of repentance is narrow, but not closed. Let us, therefore, pray that some of you may enter. The way of godliness is straitened, but not inaccessible. Let each and every one pray that he may be one of the few that find it. For the sake of Jesus, who has opened this way, let us pray for this very thing in His prayer, wherein the way is marked out. "Our father" etc.

Proposition.

THE ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1. The entrance to the way of godliness by means of the narrow gate of repentance.
2. The entrance into the kingdom of heaven by means of the straitened way of godliness.

First Part.

The early disciples took it for granted that they should enter the kingdom of heaven. They merely asked Jesus who would be greatest therein. Jesus, however, declared that they would not enter at all, unless they were first converted and had thus become like little children.

Conversion, then, takes its beginning in such a way that a person who has previously in his state of security taken for granted that he would enter into the kingdom of heaven, becomes convinced that a true conversion must first take place.

Conversion is an entirely foreign matter to a spiritually unconcerned person, for, though such a person may have heard of it in sermons or read about it in devotional books, he has not taken the matter seriously, nor considered that he himself needs to be converted. Either he does not think that he must experience such a change, or he imagines that it has already taken place, so he is of the opinion that the only thing which he must yet do to enter the kingdom of heaven is to pass away from this world by death.

Conversion takes its beginning in a person when he becomes convinced by the Word of God that conversion is necessary for salvation, and that he himself is not converted. When a person has been moved by the sweetness of the first workings of grace to use the Word of God diligently, he learns how conversion takes place and what a man's condition is after he has been converted. In the light of the spiritual knowledge thus acquired under the guidance of the Spirit of God, he realizes that

he is as yet not converted, for his condition is not such as the Word of God attributes to those that are rightly converted. "Through the law cometh the knowledge of sin." God's commands and the law then reveal to his conscience that he is still harboring sins which it is not possible for a truly converted man to cherish.

Conversion makes progress when a person, by the threats of God's law, with fear perceives and with pain feels that he is under the wrath and condemnation of God, and when he is thereby impelled to seek salvation for his soul. Even as a person cannot by his own natural reason comprehend that he has offended God and merited eternal condemnation, so neither can he by his own strength fear the wrath of God and grieve over his lost condition. This grief, which is called a grief after God's mind, is the work of God. The Spirit of God, who has wrought it by the Word, also urges a person more and more into the Word, so that he uses it, not only by reason of its delightful taste, but because it is entirely indispensable as a means unto the salvation of his soul. To use this means of conversion with watchfulness and prayer is, indeed, the only requirement which our Saviour has laid in the gospel for those who are to be converted and thereby enter into the kingdom of heaven. While a person uses the Word to be converted, his conversion is perfected when he rightly believes on Jesus.

The law is a tutor impelling a sinner to seek for salvation. It is a tutor unto Christ. When salvation is offered in Christ the Saviour, the soul is therefore found prepared to receive, and is concerned about receiving, the salvation offered in the gospel. God's gracious

promises, offering grace and forgiveness, also enable the awakened soul to appropriate the promises of grace and the assurances of justification and salvation which God has given in the Word for Jesus' sake. These enable the frightened heart to trust in the merits of Christ the Saviour and to be hopeful of obtaining sonship and pardon. This childlike confidence of a man in God is the first part of what the Saviour calls to "become like children." The apostle Peter also says, "Set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as children of obedience."

This faith is the entrance to the straitened way of godliness and is at the same time an entrance to the kingdom of heaven. Faith embraces Christ and is an entering into the kingdom. So the Scriptures teach everywhere. They promise eternal life through faith in Jesus. The true faith is an entering into the kingdom, because it is an entering upon the way of godliness and sanctified life. Peter expresses this immediately after the words just quoted. Having admonished unto faith, he also admonishes unto a Christian life, "Not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in the time of your ignorance: but like as he which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy." True faith is the entering upon the way of godliness, for it gives both incentive and power unto a Christian life. When a person has "known and believed the love which God hath to us, he abideth in love." Faith manifests itself in love, even as the apostle John continues, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not

grievous. For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." It is from Jesus that faith obtains strength to lead a holy life, as the Lord said to Paul, "The Gentiles receive an inheritance among them that are sanctified *by faith in me.*" We shall speak more especially about the entering into the kingdom by way of the straitened way of godliness when we now come to the second part of our discourse.

Second Part.

If a converted person is to make progress along the way of godliness, he must be humble, "poor in spirit," or, as the Saviour elsewhere expresses it, he must humble himself like a child. As the ambition for honor is one of the chief results of our corruption by sin, it is very important for a Christian to work against an undue love of self. The Spirit of the Lord has laid a foundation for this in the new birth by then making us poor in spirit. God promotes Christian humility by letting us in temptations and suffering feel our wretchedness and infirmity, and it behooves us to further this purpose of God with watchfulness and prayer, as Peter admonishes, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due season."

Christian love is the first and chief fruit of faith; it is also an essential and necessary step on the straitened way of godliness. Christian love should, says our Saviour in the gospel, be shown even to children, who are otherwise generally considered as of less consequence. The Saviour describes this love as primarily exercised

in His name, for His sake, because a person is redeemed by Jesus, even though he does not, like the little children, believe on Him, and has not become a child of God — as the little children have become — under the care of the holy angels. A converted person should show love to the little children and to other believers, not alone by giving some insignificant alms, but also, where this is necessary and possible, by complete care for the helpless neighbor. Jesus speaks in the gospel of receiving the little ones that believe on Him, that is to assume the manifold duties and the hidden care given by a real father. The apostle Paul also admonishes the Christians to show such love, “As we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith.”

If a converted person is to be able to continue on the straitened way of godliness, he must with earnest determination separate himself from everything that is detrimental to his progress. This is what the Saviour means when He admonishes those who would enter into eternal life to sever from their body such members as tend to hinder their spiritual advancement, members that “cause thee to stumble.” Even if it were something as innocent in itself as the pleasures of vision, if you observe that it leads you into temptation, you must make haste to relinquish it. If some privilege be as useful to a person as his hand, he must forsake it, if he finds that it becomes a snare for the soul. Yes, if some of his earthly goods were as indispensable as his foot, he must rather suffer the greatest temporal want than to have everything in abundance and lack the one thing needful, to possess all privileges in time and lose everything in

eternity, first to enjoy all the pleasures of life and then to be consumed by the anguish of eternal death, to have two eyes, two hands, two feet, and be cast into eternal fire. The Saviour has declared this to be needful for every one that would follow Him on the way to eternal life, saying, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

It is by this way of godliness that we enter into the heavenly kingdom. Although no man will be saved by life and works, neither will any one be saved without these, that is, without having entered upon the way of a godly life, without doing good works. The Saviour Himself asserts this, saying, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." It is by faith in Jesus that a converted person may enter into the heavenly kingdom, if he remains in this faith to the end; but it is by its exercise in godliness that faith endures. Spiritual poverty makes the riches of divine grace all the more indispensable for the faithful soul. Faith finds exercise in Christian love, and the hindrances to growth in faith are removed by Christian self-denials.

Application.

Learn of this, you that lead a manifestly sinful life, that a godless life is no way to the kingdom of heaven; it is the broad way that leads to destruction. When you do what others consider sinful and you yourselves know to be sin, then you belong to those whom the Word of God calls ungodly, even though you do not wish to bear that name. Know, then, I tell you again, that you are

not walking on the straitened way of godliness, but on the broad way that leads to destruction. It does you no good to hope for salvation, for your hope shall perish. It is vain to dream of heaven, for if you continue in this condition, you shall certainly come whither you had not imagined.

Some of you may lead an honorable life, though you are not converted; but you must know that mere honesty is not Christianity. There is no other entrance to the way of godliness than by the narrow gate of repentance. To avoid things punishable among men — this is not the fear of the Lord; it is merely the fear of men. Be convinced by the Word of God that all human righteousness is manifest ungodliness before God, in order that you, thus convinced, may be driven to Jesus and by Him find an open way to eternal life, for He is “the way, the truth, and the life.”

Some of you are moved by the Word of God. You have come to the narrow gate, but you have not thereby passed through it, for emotions are not conversion. They are, however, wrought by the Spirit of God. Their aim is that you may be brought to use the Word of God. As this means of salvation has already brought you near the kingdom of God, enabling you to taste its power, so this same Word of God will also bring you to a true conversion. It is not to stop with a mere taste of the sweetness of God’s grace, but you will come to possess it. Not only will the hope of salvation delight your heart, but the assurance of childhood will gladden your soul.

You, who are awakened to anxiety for your soul’s salvation, you are standing in the very gate of conversion. Press earnestly on, that you may pass through the gate.

On the other side you will find the mercy seat of Jesus, where pardon is awaiting you, if you but receive it, and deliverance from your sins, if you but seek it by prayer in Jesus' name. Continue to use the Word, and this will bring you to the Saviour and place you on the way that leads to eternal life. Then you are protected against eternal death, which you fear. If you should be called from this world after such a change has taken place in you, there can be no danger of your coming to destruction, for no man comes to destruction, unless he walks the way that leads thither. You are not on that way if you are earnestly concerned about your salvation; you are on the way to eternal salvation. If you continue along this way, you will assuredly enter into the heavenly kingdom, whither this way leads.

This continuing must be your chief concernment, if you are assured that you have entered upon the straitened way of life, for it appears to you that you have only advanced a few steps on that way. Even this, that you feel as though you were far behind, means progress, if you but press on to advance rightly. Jesus is the way. Hence, the clearer your knowledge of Him becomes in the light of the Word, the farther you have advanced. The more you endeavor to assist and serve your fellow men for Jesus' sake, the more has your love increased. The more faithfulness you show in forsaking everything that leads from the way of salvation, the more has your spiritual strength grown. In order that you may remain on this way, whither the Lord has brought you, it is very important that you use the Word of God diligently, and that you conscientiously follow its directions. Then will the Lord, in the light of the Word,

show you the right way and with its power bring you onward. Holy Communion will give you refreshing nourishment on your spiritual journey, and Jesus Himself will follow you on the way: and so you are to enter into eternal life by means of the straitened way of godliness, even as you have entered upon His way by means of the narrow gate of repentance. Amen.