

Call to Obedience #255
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How not to be narrow-minded on the narrow way!

On Being Too Narrow-Minded

By Reimar Schultze

“...and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us” (Luke 9:49).

“Enter ye in at the strait gate...Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13–14).

The way to heaven is narrow. It is by far narrower than most people imagine. In fact, it is so narrow that even some who look for it shall not be able to find it. This can be very unsettling, yet it need not be so. What distinguishes the seekers who find the narrow way from those who do not find it? The answer is found in Jeremiah 29:13: “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” All those who seek the Lord with all their heart will find him. They will find the way of the Lord, the way of light, the way of holiness, and the way of fellowship with God that leads them on, right into the celestial gates. Is this not wonderful?

The seeking for the narrow way Jesus is talking about, then, requires the end of seeking all other things. It requires the whole heart in pursuit after God. We cannot be divided in this seeking. We cannot be part-timers in this seeking. We must come to the end of all selfish pursuits to find the gate to Christ’s riches and blessings untold.

Jesus said that the way to life is narrow. But, while we need to know that and preach it, we must be careful that we do not become narrow-minded. We must be careful that we do not become harsh, legalistic, and sectarian, because if we do so, we shall ourselves no longer be on the narrow way. The narrow way is not only a way of righteousness, but it is also a way from which flows mercy, compassion, gentleness, kindness, and forgiveness toward all mankind.

Where, indeed, do we find this more evident and more beautifully illustrated than in the life of Jesus. The Master of the narrow way, who taught that unless we forsake all we cannot be his disciples (Luke 14:27, 33), also would not even let a man bury his father, nor another one say farewell to his family when he called them to his ministry (Luke 9:60–61). Jesus was a man of absolutes, yet he displayed an unfathomable kindness, love, and generosity toward all men—except toward the hypocrites.

Why did Jesus not get upset with Judas who robbed him of his financial support over and over? Rather than deny Judas’ place as a disciple, the Lord loved him unto the end. “Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” (John 13:1). Why did he not condemn the Samaritan adulterous woman nor the rich young ruler who refused to sell all? Jesus still is a man of the narrow way; but from his narrow way, his nail-scarred hands reach out to a confused, lost, and dying world.

Let us now examine some examples of narrow-mindedness, even among Jesus’ best followers.

The Unwanted Exorcist

“And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us” (Luke 9:49–50).

Here is a true story where the disciples saw a certain person casting out devils in Jesus' name. John, possibly the most spiritually sensitive disciple, the one who lay on Jesus' breast, with others, forbade the man who cast out devils because he did not attend Jesus' meetings, he was not part of that privileged inner circle. John said, “We forbade him to cast out any more devils.”

Is there not a tendency in many of us to look down at other ministries and at other Christians who do not attend our meetings, who do not use our literature, who do not share our label? Is it not a tendency for us to view them with distrust and suspicion and disdain? Is there not something within us that says, “Lord forbid them,” because they are not a part of us? Oh, the danger of people upon the narrow way of becoming narrow-minded, sectarian, and exclusive toward brothers and sisters of other groups who also were born of the same Spirit of God, who were washed by the same blood of the Lamb, and whose names are written in the same Book of Life. Oh, beware dear brother, if you become narrow-minded, you are no longer on the narrow way.

The apostles' attitude was to forbid the man. Jesus' attitude was to forbid him not. How often are we at odds with Jesus in the way we go about our ministries? At the name of Jesus, the devils tremble. There is no other name under heaven by which the lost can be saved and the devils can be cast out but by the name of Jesus. There is no power in denominations, religious organizations, or disciplines to cast out devils. It is only in and by the name of Jesus. Hence, forbid them not. He that is not against us, is for us.

The Unwanted Children

“And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:13–14).

The disciples of Jesus rebuked the parents who brought their children to Jesus. Here is another display of a sectarian, narrow-minded attitude in the disciples. Did not these men make themselves gatekeepers as to who should and should not come to Jesus? Is there not a gate-keeping attitude in our hearts?

The disciples condemned the one man who was casting out devils because he was not coming to Jesus, and here they condemned the parents of children because they did come to Jesus. My friend, what manner of spirit did these fellows have? What manner of spirit do we have? Jesus had no part with this exclusive spirit, but he answered them, “Allow these little children to come unto me, and forbid them not! Forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.” Dear ones, let's not play gatekeepers to the throne of God, nor to the vineyards of the Lord.

The Unwanted Blind Man

“And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace...” (Luke 18:35–39).

We are not sure whether those who went before Jesus were his twelve disciples, but most probably they were, and they rebuked this man! They were concerned about the program, and they were more interested in ministering to the multitude than to a poor blind man. They didn't want this man to come to Jesus either! They criticized the man who had cast out devils for not coming into Jesus' presence; they criticized the parents of little children for wanting to come to Jesus; and now they rebuked a blind man for wanting to come to Jesus. They said, "Stay out of his way—don't bother him! You are not important." But Jesus wanted him; Jesus wants everybody to come to him! He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). And, my friend, what did Jesus preach in his first sermon? He quoted Isaiah the prophet, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor...and recovering of sight to the blind..." (Luke 4:18). Jesus came to recover the sight of this blind man, yet his followers rebuked this man.

The Unwanted Samaritans

"And sent messages before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him...And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them...?" (Luke 9:52-54).

Notice that in every case mentioned above, there has been an inappropriate zeal in the disciples to protect Jesus and his ministry. None of these cases show a lack of expression of love to Jesus, but all of them show a lack of love to their fellow-men. The disciples knew the worth of Jesus, but they did not know the worth of a blind beggar, of children, of people of other orientations, and of persons who resented Jesus. They were good at loving God, but failed miserably at loving men. Hence, Jesus rebuked them, saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (v. 55). So, let us not fool ourselves by thinking that we can please Jesus without loving men as he did.

When Christians get off the narrow way, when they cease to abide in Christ, they become narrow-minded, they become sectarian. This is the lesson of church history, for soon after Pentecost, most Christians backslid, and you have the beginning of factions, of strife, of competition, and the beginning of the "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, and I am of Christ" mentality (1 Corinthians 1:12). Do we have to ask again the same question Paul asked? Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? Yes, indeed, Jesus wants us all to be like-minded.

But until we get to this like-mindedness, let us make an effort to reach out graciously to all who are of like spirit, born of God, washed in his blood, who preach and teach, baptize and cast out devils in Jesus' name. That must be our beginning point, and without that we have no beginning, nor continuance, nor future in pleasing our Lord and in restoring the church to her virgin, Pentecostal power that turned the world right-side-up for Christ.