**The Way of Life and the Way of Death**

*by Dan King*

As we drive along the highways of our land, we are often confronted with alternate routes which we may take to get to where we wish to travel. Our choice, whether to go in one direction or the other, may take us to entirely different destinations, widely separated both as to geographical location and type of scenery we shall view, whether mountains, valleys, oceans, or deserts.

Life in general is very much the same as driving down the highway. When we encounter various choices in our lives, we too often pass them off as having little importance in terms of the direction of our existence or of the future, but very often they are monumental and even historic in terms of our own particular circumstances and eventual spiritual destination.

The Bible, in several places, grapples with this notion of making choices which critically touch upon the overall direction and bearing of the soul. What brings me to consider this matter is my recent rereading of the story of King Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem during the days of the prophet Jeremiah. Israel was under attack from Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon. When the king sent to inquire of the prophet as to how he should proceed, in hopes that the Lord would be gracious and grant Jerusalem a reprieve from this malevolent man and his brutal armies, Jeremiah told the people to surrender. Now this was not what the king or his nobles wanted to hear! And you can imagine how traitorous it must have sounded for the prophet of God to make such a suggestion. But Jeremiah explained that there were only two directions to go here, and neither of them a very happy alternative, but one would at least save their lives.

After he had defined the two possibilities, the seer put the options in these terms: "Thus saith Jehovah: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death" (Jer. 21:8). There was no middle ground, no third or more desirable choice. That was it. The prophet continued: "He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; but he that goeth out, and passeth over to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey. For I have set my face upon this city for evil, and not for good, saith Jehovah: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire" (Jer. 21:9-10).

The way of surrender is no more easy for us today than it was for them when Jeremiah set it before King Zedekiah and his princes. But it is the way of life, for us as it was for them. One cannot fight against God (Acts 5:39). How difficult it is to make this spiritual capitulation is illustrated in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. On the Damascus road Jesus said to him, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5). Still later, he was three days without sight and did neither eat nor drink (v. 9) till finally Ananias came in to him and commanded him to be baptized: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). Spiritual surrender is ever a difficult choice to make, but it is the way of life!

Again, it is pictured in the record of a hardened jailor's transformation, as told by Luke in Acts 16. At midnight he was roused from sleep by an earthquake which threw wide the doors of the prison and loosed the prisoner's bonds. He drew his sword to take his own life, supposing that all the prisoners had escaped, but heard the voice of Paul from within, a voice which only a few moments before had caroled hymns of praise to God, telling him to do himself no harm, since none of the prisoners was gone. Calling for lights, he rushed into the chamber where only a while before he had locked their feet fast in the stocks. He then fell down at their feet and asked what he needed to do to be saved (v. 30). He had surrendered! He had relinquished control to the Lord of his prisoners, Paul and Silas. He decided to travel the way of life.

The same thing is illustrated in the metamorphosis of those people who came to compose the church in Ephesus.

The city was the cult-center of the goddess Artemis, or Diana as the Romans called her. Her temple at Ephesus was so majestic that it was considered by first-century tourists to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Much of the town's economic and cultural life was bound up with that heathen deity, her mythology, priesthood, altar, and sacrifice. In A.D. 52 Paul the apostle traveled to the city and began to teach the people about Jesus Christ. After a notable miracle wrought by Paul, the response of these once-pagan citizens of Ephesus was overwhelming: "And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, that dwelt at Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Many also of them that had believed came, confessing, and declaring their deeds. And not a few of them that practiced magi-cal arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed" (Acts 19:17-20). They had chosen to surrender, and along with that spiritual submission, they had decided to travel the way of life rather than the way of death.

"Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death," the Lord told Zedekiah and his nobles. And the way of life was the way of surrender. It is no different today. In all these cases, and many more like them that could be marshaled from the pages of Holy Writ, men were forced to lay down their arms and relinquish control to him who makes his prisoners his willing slaves, then exalts them to glory. Let us also choose the way of life!

## Condemning Others' Religion

by Frank Himmel

Is it ethical to condemn another person's religion? Should the followers of Christ just show love rather than criticize what others believe and practice?

Not everything done in the name of religion is right. Respect for God's word demands that we love what is right and "hate every false way" (Psa. 119:97, 104).

Jesus condemned the Sadducees for denying the resurrection (Matt. 22:23-33). He charged the Pharisees with following their own rules instead of God's, a practice which makes worship useless (Mk. 7:1-13).

Jesus' apostles followed His example of condemning error. Paul commanded the people of Athens to quit worshipping idols (Acts 17:23-31). James warned against vain religion (Jas. 1:26). John wrote against false prophets (1 Jn. 5:1-3). Peter exposed the scoffers who denied that Jesus would come again (2 Pet. 3:1f).

It is not lack of love that leads one to expose error; in fact, the opposite is true. Love for God, love for truth, and love for people's souls motivates Jesus' followers to speak out against whatever is false, whether among the religious or the irreligious. Those who are going the wrong way need to be warned. Of course, we must always speak kindly, "with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition" (2 Timothy 2:25).