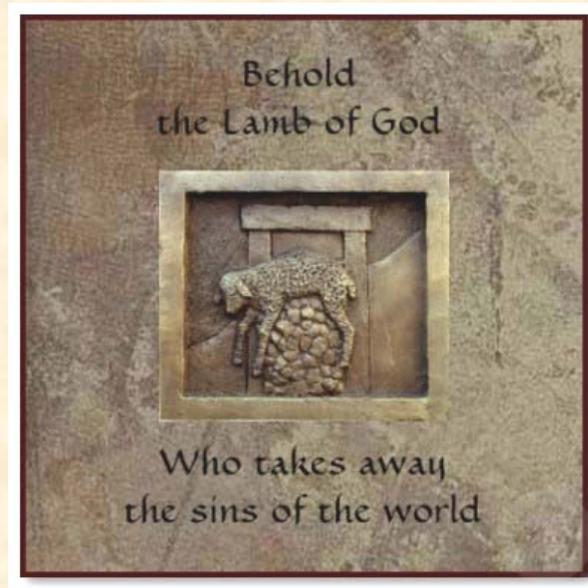


“The Most Excellent Way”

“FOCUSING ON JESUS” ~ “THE LAMB OF GOD!”

As we anticipate “Resurrection Day” ~ Easter Sunday ~ it’s appropriate to consider just what it is we celebrate as this most special of Christian observances fast approaches. While the world romps and basks in “Spring Break,” frolicking with “Spring madness” to fill baskets with candy, toys and brightly colored eggs, we have something much more meaningful to reflect upon and enjoy: the demonstrated, proven Love of God in His gracious sacrificial gift of His one and only son, Jesus. And we need to remind ourselves of the cost He paid for us!

*“... [Jesus] was wounded for
our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace
was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one,
to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him
the iniquity of us all.”
Isaiah 53:5-6 NKJV*



- **He paid the price of death for our transgressions. What are transgressions?** The Hebrew OT word means “revolt” or “rebellion,” violation of a law, command or duty. Every occurrence of the Greek word in the NT means “a deliberate breach of the law.” Sin is another word for transgression. Until we come to realize that we are sinners by nature, we are only able to do what comes naturally. When we discover the truth about ourselves, we recognize how desperately we need a Savior — “[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins ...” (Romans 4:25).
- **Jesus was bruised for our iniquities. What are our iniquities?** The Bible often uses this word to describe evil and wickedness — depravity in general. We’ve all heard the phrase “depraved indifference.” In our natural sinful state, we were indifferent to God. If we had been fulfilling God’s original purpose for our existence, we would have been doing His will rather than seeking after whatever came naturally to satisfy our self-centered selves. As the result of our iniquities, “we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Titus 3:3).

In “The Most Excellent Way” ministry we come to recognize our iniquity and our need of a Savior. We turn to the Lord, as the Psalmist did: “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight” (Psalm 51:2-4).

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1).

- **What does "chastisement for our peace" mean?** We are law-breakers by nature, and the only way we can be at peace with the law is to suffer the punishment that the law demands. Jesus kept the Law perfectly, yet He suffered the scourging that belonged to us. Because He took our place, we now have peace with God and cannot be condemned by God's law.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1-2).

We take comfort in *"no condemnation,"* but often overlook *"who do not walk according to the flesh."* We condemn ourselves if we follow the ways of the world, which is governed by Satan, and focus our new life on what the world calls "recovery." If our focus is not Jesus and His Word our "peace" is incomplete.

- **How do the stripes Jesus suffered for us heal us?** The "healing" in Isaiah 53:5 refers to the forgiveness of sins, not the healing of the body. However, sin is not only like a burden — but it is also like a sickness that only God can cure.

Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies..." (Psalm 103:1-4).

Most of us enter The Most Excellent Way believing we are suffering from an addiction disease. We learn that our addiction *disease* can be healed by faith in Jesus Christ when we begin to understand that our *physical disease* is a symptom of *everyone's spiritual disease* — **sin**.

- **How are we like sheep that have gone astray and our own way?** We may think sheep are sweet, soft, innocent, harmless creatures in their woolly coats. The harsh truth is that sheep just aren't that beautiful—except at a distance.

"Sheep are very, very stupid! They are incredibly stubborn and have a very offensive odor. They are prone to sickness, susceptible to innumerable parasites and diseases. Timid, helpless, fearful creatures, they move under blind compulsion of the mob instinct. Under improper management when left to their own devices, they can be most destructive of the land and its resources. They are, when, unattended, harsh and hardheaded with one another. They have a natural [tendency] to wander away, ending up in [numerous] difficulties. They are easy prey for predators. They are a perpetual worry to their owners. No other class of livestock demands so much constant care and attention.

"No, sheep are not naturally attractive animals; and neither are we!

"Man in his pride, arrogance and haughty intellectualism proclaims himself to be 'homo sapiens'—the wise man. In the blindness and folly of his own supposed wisdom and philosophy, he insists that he is the ultimate product of the evolutionary process. This chance system, he argues began purely by accident and proceeds by fits and starts with no specific design or direction. In ignorance, stupidity, and incredible perversion, man has gone on to proclaim there is no God. He declares vehemently that because he is the product of pure happenstance, he need not answer to anyone for his conduct or behavior. Man, he insists, is but a molecular entity with chemical and physical responses to external stimuli. Ultimately, he states, each one is entitled to go where he may choose; to behave

as he may wish; to do his own thing in his own way no matter what the consequences.
'And every man did that which was right in his own eyes,' could be our modern lament.'"

— Excerpted from *A Layman Looks at the Lamb of God* by W. Phillip Keller, pgs. 73-74.

Yes! We have gone astray! Our Lord, the great Good Shepherd, says we are "lost sheep." The devil would have us remain vulnerable in our old nature (stupid sheep) rather than victorious in Christ. The devil rejoices when Christians follow the mob to discover *THE SECRET*, to become mind-numbed robots practicing *CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER*, to seek heaven on earth through fellowship in the worldwide *EMERGENT CHURCH*. The devil rejoices as he watches us pursue *RECOVERY* from our addictions, when we could be pursuing Jesus by believing and living the truth — we are *healed* by His stripes.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life!" Jesus also said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own." John 10:11-14.

Just as the devil influenced Eve in the garden with subtle lies, he influences "hirelings" to employ worldly methods to minister to those of us who struggle with addictions. These hirelings are not necessarily evil — they believe they are being compassionate — they really want to help people. Many have achieved sobriety through worldly programs, and they sincerely want to share their successes with others. **And many have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, but they remain babes (immature) because of ignorance of God's Word — "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:5).** They haven't yet learned and believed that *"... the word of God is living and active; Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).* God's Word is enough!

Addictions are nothing more than habits developed over time in the pursuit of pleasing self. We can replace the old-man doing-what-comes-naturally habits of thoughts and attitudes by putting on Jesus Christ with the power of the Holy Spirit. It takes time to develop a habit, and it takes time to develop new, spiritual ones. It requires the knowledge and wisdom learned from God's Word. Hirelings do not possess power — only empty words. We are indeed stupid if we persist in following them and remain ignorant. It is a choice. If we don't choose to follow our Good Shepherd, we are indeed making the choice to please the devil.

- **And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all! "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son ... "** *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)!*

Jesus did not die because of anything He had done, but because of what we have done — what we do. We desperately need our Good Shepherd every day, and our need should motivate us to love and obey Him with all our heart, our mind, our soul and our strength. However, we cannot wholly love and obey Him if we don't know what He desires and deserves from us. **We must know Him!**

Jesus said: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." John 10:27-29. Are YOU His sheep?

