

**LESSON 13: DECISION TIME** (Part I: Matt. 7:15-20)**I. INTRODUCTION: I**

1. **2** Today we continue our study of the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher that ever preached: Jesus' sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7; cf. Lk. 6:20-38; 11 & 12).
2. **3** Recall we've been considering Jesus' statement: "*For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. 5:20)
3. Jesus has given us several examples of the superior righteousness required in His kingdom.
4. In the process Jesus gets to the heart of true righteousness, because true righteousness begins in our hearts! Matt. 15:17-20
5. Through these contrasts, Jesus sweeps away the spin and gets to the heart of the true righteousness kingdom citizens must possess.
  - A. In chapter 5 He addresses various aspects of moral righteousness (e.g., murder, adultery, MDR, oaths, loving our enemies, etc.).
  - B. In chapter 6 He discusses religious righteousness (e.g., charitable deeds, prayer, fasting, forgiving others).
  - C. **\*\*** Chapter 6 closes by addressing two very big threats to righteousness: Materialism and Trust.
6. So far in chapter 7 He has addressed judging and asking/relying on God for the strength to apply the principles of this sermon.
7. It is so important to examine ourselves regarding Jesus' teaching in the sermon. Regarding my behavior in His kingdom:
  - ☛ Why do I do what I do? Habit, tradition or from the heart?
  - ☛ Because it's expected by society/brethren; or because it's God's will?
  - ☛ To gain notoriety/popularity? Or, to receive the praise of God?
  - ☛ To glorify myself or God? What are my motives? Pure or impure?
8. **4** Acceptable righteousness flows from possession of the basic character traits of the beatitudes.
  - A. The character of kingdom citizens is radically different from people of the world, and these traits are absolute and enduring requirements:
 

☛ "poor in spirit" (5:3)	☛ "mourn" (5:4)
☛ "meek" (5:5)	☛ "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (5:6)
☛ "merciful" (5:7)	☛ "pure in heart" (5:8)
☛ "peacemakers" (5:9)	☛ "persecuted for righteousness sake" (5:10)
  - B. And, kingdom citizens must put that character to work in the world!
    - (1) Salt of the earth: 5:13
    - (2) Light of the world: 5:14-16
9. Every good sermon has a good conclusion.
  - A. **\*\*** Two of the best preachers I've ever had the pleasure of hearing had a habit when it came to the conclusion of their sermon: "decision time."

B. “Decision time” means the hearers of the sermon must make some choices:

- (1) Will we choose to accept or reject the words of the preacher?
- (2) Will we choose to act on the principles set forth in the lesson? In other words, will we make the application to ourselves?

10. \*\* That’s where Jesus is taking us now in the Sermon on the Mount: it’s “decision time.”

## II. Discussion:

### I. 5 The two roads of life:

A. The Jews put tremendous stock and pride in the fact they were the physical descendants of Abraham (**Jn. 5:39**: “*They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’*”).

- (1) From the very beginning of this sermon Jesus has made it clear that something more essential than physical lineage was required to be a true child of God.
- (2) His sermon has made it clear a relationship with God that is much deeper than the ceremonial rituals of the scribes and Pharisees defines true righteousness in God’s sight.
- (3) Now, as Jesus brings the sermon to a conclusion, He dramatically describes only two possible roads man can travel from time to eternity:

**\*\*Matt. 7:13-14:** “*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*”

B. Only two roads in life? Surely there are more! No! The most important things in life are simple: Profound, but simple!

- (1) “In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus begins to draw his sermon to a conclusion and calls on his disciples to make a decision. They are to choose a path to travel. He presents two paths leading in opposite directions.” (Smith, p. 78)
- (2) “This sermon is not just to be heard; it is to be lived! The gospel doesn’t say, ‘Consider me’ or, ‘Admire me.’ It says, ‘Follow me.’ Jesus calls for a decision and a commitment.” (Smith, p. 78)
- (3) “The absolute nature of the choices is stark and arresting. I am persuaded that most of us would prefer more choices, but we are offered no middle ground, no neutral alternative. It is straight and narrow.” (Smith, p. 78)

**Deut. 30:15, 19:** “*See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil... 19 I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;*”

C. Let’s take the two statements and break them into their component parts and then compare and contrast them.

**Matt. 7:13-14:** “*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*”

(1) 6 First, note their similarities:

- (a) Both describe a road to be traveled; a choice to be made.
- (b) Both describe a person’s journey in life.
- (c) Both roads have an “entry way,” a “gate.”

- (d) Both roads have travelers.
- (e) Both roads have a destination.
- (2) Second, note their differences:
  - (a) Entry way: each road's entry way or "gate" is different.
    - ☛ One has a "narrow [strait] gate."
    - ☛ One has a "wide gate."
  - (b) Width: each road's width is different:
    - ☛ The road with the "narrow/strait gate" has a well-defined, and restricted width.
    - ☛ The road with the "broad way" does not have a well-defined and restricted width; it is wide open, so to speak.
  - (c) Way of travel: Each road's "way" of travel is different:
    - ☛ The "narrow" road's way of travel is "difficult."
    - ☛ The "broad" road's way of travel is easy (implied as opposite the other).
  - (d) Travelers: Each road's travelers are different:
    - ☛ The "narrow" road's travelers are "few."
    - ☛ The "broad" road's travelers are "many."
  - (e) Destination: Each road's destination is different:
    - ☛ The "narrow" road's destination is "life."
    - ☛ The "broad" road's destination is "destruction."
- D. Let's now look at each road individually: \*\*
  - (1) Broad road: represents the way of life which leads to eternity in hell (Mk. 9:42ff; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15).
    - (a) Gate:
      - ☛ It is so appropriate that the "broad way" of traveling in life is accommodated by a "wide gate."
      - ☛ The "broad way" is easy to travel; anything goes; there are no rules; you are free to make it up as you go.
      - ☛ So, the gate that leads to the "broad way" is naturally similar; it is wide; it is convenient; it is free from restrictions; you can bring all the baggage you want; you can bring all of your sins; you are not required to leave even one of them behind to travel on the "broad way."
      - ☛ Because those who travel the "broad way" don't leave anything behind, they don't have to squeeze through its opening; it is the "path of least resistance."
      - ☛ The "broad way" makes no demands on us whatsoever! It is the way of indulgence and selfishness.
    - (b) Width of road:
      - ☛ The "broad way" is spacious and roomy; there is plenty of room for diverse doctrines and practices (Every "way" leads to 'heaven'; denominationalism, Buddhism, Islam, paganism, secularism, it doesn't matter! No particular philosophy or theology is required; anything goes! Postmodern mindset).

- ☛ Moral standards on the “*broad way*” are, at best, defined to suit your own taste, or at worst, are non-existent; in the final analysis it just doesn’t really matter!
- ☛ Each man can do what is right in his own eyes, because it is a road of tolerance and permissive (except for those traveling the “*narrow road*”! postmodernism).
- ☛ The “*broad way*” has no lane markings, no curbs, no boundaries, no warning signs, no speed limits, no restrictions or restraints whatsoever.
- ☛ It’s sort of like driving in the Philippines! Explain  
 “In a real setting, no one would really want such a road to travel. Imagine any major roadway without traffic laws, and one would have an accurate picture of man apart from divine spiritual guidance.” (Smith, p. 79) Ironical!

(c) Way of travel:

- ☛ By way of contrast, the “*broad way*” is by far the easier of the two “ways” of travel.
- ☛ The “*broad way*” makes no demands; every man can make his own standard, make his own rules.
- ☛ The travelers on the “*broad way*” are free to follow their own hearts and to determine their own direction and guide their own actions.
- ☛ On the “*broad way*” there is no pressure to conform to any other standards other than what one chooses (e.g., “cafeteria-style” religion).
- ☛ The “*broad way*” is the “default” way; by not making a choice, one automatically chooses the “*broad way*”; it’s easy in that it doesn’t require a commitment; it is like a leaf floating down a stream.  
 “Ponder the path of thy feet (Prov. iv, 26). Men are ready enough to do so in temporal matters, why not so in spiritual? They do not enter a train or even a bus without first ascertaining where it is bound for: then why not pause and ask, ‘Whither will this godless mode of life take me?’” (Pink, p. 331)

(d) Nature of travelers:

- ☛ Because of its ease of travel, the “*broad way*” is the busiest of the two roads; as the KJV says “*many there be that go in thereat.*”
- ☛ It is packed with the carefree multitude who just float along with the crowd and are totally oblivious to the destination for which they are headed.  
 “All along the easy and popular road there should be a warning sign reading ‘Destination Destruction!’ But it is not there. This is opposite of how the broad way advertises itself. ...it is a deceitful way. ...the broad way is a suicide road. Things would change if people would just look at where they are headed. Satan doesn’t want that to happen so he tries to keep their eyes focused on the here and now, the thrill of the moment.” (Smith, p. 80)
- ☛ The travelers on the “*broad way*” are a prideful bunch! They are like the Frank Sinatra song “I did it my way.” (Even gray-haired grandmas & the seemingly meek and mild!)
- ☛ Many travelers on the “*broad way*” are religious, many are not; regardless of religion or not they have at least two things in common (despite claims otherwise!):  
 ✓ They don’t love God: Jn. 14:15

✓ They don't "know God": 1 Jn. 2:3-5

- ✦ The things Jesus has been talking about in the Sermon on the Mount don't appeal to the travelers on the "broad road", especially the character traits required of kingdom citizens in the beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-11).

(e) Destination:

- ✦ Jesus tells us the "broad way" "leadeth to destruction."
- ✦ He obviously is referring to hell, eternal damnation, eternal separation from God!  
**2 Thess. 1:7-9:** "...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"; Matt. 25:41
- ✦ The "broad way" is deceptive, because there are no warning signs along the way: "Bridge Out!" "Watch for falling rocks!"
- ✦ The "broad way" advertises itself as the way of freedom and self-fulfillment; when it reality it brings bondage in sin and eternal death!
- ✦ The "broad way" travelers think, believe and teach that pretty much everyone is going to heaven (if there is one), but Jesus says their destination is "destruction"! "So far from believing that only a few will reach heaven, the vast majority in Christendom today hold that somehow, in some way, the greater part of our fellows will get there. Hell, if there be such a place, is reserved for arch-criminals and villains, just as our prisons house only a small fraction of the population—the 'unfortunates' and 'misguided' ones." (Pink, p. 324)

(2) Narrow road: represents the way of life which leads to eternity in heaven.

(a) Gate:

- ✦ Note that v. 13 begins with: "Enter ye in..."; Jesus is telling us there is a choice to be made!
- ✦ Whether we realize it or not we will make a choice as to which road in life we will travel; no exceptions! Everyone will make the choice!
- ✦ The "narrow way" must be entered through a "strait gate." ("strait" is from the Greek word *stenos*; e.g., stenosis is a medical term for narrowing, e.g., arterial stenosis).
- ✦ A "strait gate" is very restrictive and not easily entered.
- ✦ To pass through the "strait gate" one must meet the criteria set forth by the Lord (obey the gospel; e.g., Mk. 16:16; live faithfully, e.g., Rom. 8:29).
- ✦ To pass through the "strait gate" one must be willing to leave the baggage of sin behind (Acts 17:30); not even one sin can be carried through the "strait gate"!
- ✦ To pass through the "strait gate" one must be willing to crucify self, take up their cross, and follow Jesus! Requires a total commitment; **Matt. 10:39:** "...he who loses his life for My sake will find it."
- ✦ The vast majority are not willing to make the sacrifices needed to enter the "strait gate"; most don't even want to try; some will make a token effort, but that is all it really amounts to: a token effort. Cf. Lk. 8:11-15

- ☛ People don't want to enter the gate because Jesus said: *"If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"* (Matt. 16:24)
- ☛ This is why Jesus says in Luke 13:24: *"Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."*
- ☛ To enter the "strait gate" one must "strive"; "strive" comes from the **\*\*Greek** word *agonizomai*. Paul uses this word in **1 Cor. 9:25**: *"And every man that **striveth** for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible."* He uses it in **1 Tim. 6:12**: *"**Fight** the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life,"* And, again in **2 Tim. 4:7**: *"I have **fought** a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:"*
- ☛ The "strait gate" just does not just swing open and let us pass; we must exert some effort to enter therein! Phil. 2:12

"On the entrance being a 'strait' gate: "To enter that gate the heart has to be humbled, sinful pleasures have to be relinquished, worldly companions abandoned, Christ has to be received in all His offices. And mark it well, this 'gate' is but the entrance, giving admittance to the one and only path which leadeth unto life. That path Christ described as a 'narrow way,' to intimate that it is no easier, wider or more pleasant than the gate itself. In 1 Thessalonians iii, 4, the cognate term is rendered 'suffer tribulation.' It is not on flowery beds of ease that the pilgrim is conducted to the Father's house: rather does he have to force his way through briars and thorns which cut and tear the flesh. There is not one path for the Redeemer and another for the redeemed (John x, 4). His was a path of affliction and ours cannot be otherwise if we follow the example He has left us; and if we do not we shall not join Him on high." (Pink, p. 334)

(b) Width of road:

- ☛ It is "narrow" with well-defined and limited boundaries which are defined by God and not man (Jer. 10:23).
  - ☛ Travelers thereon are confined to the boundaries set by God and do not have the freedom to use the standards of man (Prov. 14:12; Matt. 15:9)
- "And why is the way such a 'narrow' one? Because it is a single path, whereas the way of death is manifold, containing sundry avenues. Just as Truth is one, but error is a many-headed monster, so the highway of holiness is a single track in contrast with the numerous pavements in the broad road which leads to destruction." (Pink, p. 334)

(c) Way of travel:

- ☛ Jesus describes this road as a "difficult" way because its restrictive nature requires us to live within God's boundaries and we must comply with His 'travel laws' (Matt. 28:20; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11; **Deut. 30:16**: *"...walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you..."*).
- ☛ But, in other respects it is an easy way, because Jesus invites the "narrow way" travelers to set aside their burden of sin (Matt. 11:28-30; e.g., driving through Brown County State Park).
- ☛ Traveling the "difficult" road allows us to jettison our sin (requires it!) and all the heartache sin brings (1 Pet. 2:24; Col. 1:21-22; Phil. 4:7).
- ☛ The "narrow way" is carefully marked so its traveler will not run off the road or crash (explain instrument landing procedures).

“Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life.’ As this way is entered by the heart’s sincere acceptance of Christ’s holy teaching, so it is traversed by the heart and life being constantly regulated thereby. They who tread this narrow way heed not the counsel of the ungodly (Psalm I, 2), lean not unto their own understanding (Prov. iii, 5), and follow not ‘the customs of the people’ (Jer. x, 3). Rather are the believer’s thoughts formed by the Scriptures and his conduct directed by its statutes, so that God’s Word becomes to him in fact and experience, ‘a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path.’ The narrow way is strictly marked and exactly defined in the Divine Charter, and along it the Christian must go without turning aside to either the right hand or the left (Prov. iv, 27). When he meets with an enemy that enemy must be overcome, or he will be overcome by him.” (Pink, p. 334)

(d) Travelers:

- ☛ Because of its difficult and restrictive nature, the “narrow way” has very little traffic; as the KJV says “few there be that find it.” As Jesus says in **Luke 13:24**: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” (Early morning traffic in northern Michigan is almost non-existent!)
- ☛ The travelers are few on the “narrow way”; because it requires sacrifice and self-discipline (**Matt. 16:25**: “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”; Acts 24:25; 2 Pet. 1:6; 1 Cor. 9:25-27).
- ☛ It requires perseverance to stay on the “narrow road” (Jas. 5:11; 2 Pet. 1:6).
- ☛ It requires total commitment! **Phil 3:7-8**: “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ...”
- ☛ The things Jesus has been talking about in the Sermon on the Mount **do** appeal to these travelers; especially the character traits required of kingdom citizens in the beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-11).

“And why is it that so few ‘find’ it? Because so few diligently seek it. The great crowd of religious professors imagine they are already on it, and therefore they heed not that word, ‘Ask for the old paths, where there is the good way, and walk therein’ (Jer. Vi, 16). We need to *inquire* for it. Where? In God’s Word, and then *follow* it, putting into practice what we already know.” (Pink, p. 336)

(e) Destination:

- ☛ Jesus tells us the “narrow way” “leadeth unto life.”
- ☛ He obviously is referring to heaven, eternal salvation, eternal fellowship in the very presence of God! Rev. 21 & 22
- ☛ The “narrow way” is not deceptive like the “broad way,” it is filled with signs of encouragement and warning signs all along the way to keep our minds focused on the destination (2 Pet. 1:5-11; **Phil. 3:14**: “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”).
- ☛ The “broad way” falsely advertises itself as the way of freedom and complete-fulfillment; but, the “narrow way” actually delivers everything it promises! **Phil. 4:6-7**: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

"The broad way gives pleasure for the moment, but the narrow way gives pleasure for eternity! When we begin to think that serving God is irksome, we need to think of the destination (see Paul's attitude in 2 Tim. 4:7-8)." (Smith, p. 80)

**Prov. 16:17:** *"The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; he who keeps his way preserves his soul."*

**Prov. 19:16:** *"He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, but he who is careless of his ways will die."*

E. **7** We need to come to an appreciation of how jarring and remarkable these statements are!

(1) The Jews thought they were on the path to heaven simply because they were the descendants of Abraham (Jn. 8:33, 39).

"...it will be seen that the Lord Jesus was very far from teaching that the attainment of heaven is a simple matter. He insisted that right eyes have to be plucked out (cherished lusts mortified) and right hands cut off (beloved idols destroyed)—Matt. v, 29, 30. He likened the Christian unto a 'house' which has to withstand 'floods' and 'winds' beating upon it (Matt. vii, 25). He declared that in order to be His disciple a man must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Him (Matt. xvi, 24). Instead of promising His followers a smooth voyage through this world, He said, 'If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household?' (Matt. x, 25). Instead of teaching that a single and isolated act of faith was sufficient to secure heaven, He said, 'But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved' (Matt. xxiv, 13). Instead of seeking to rush men into believing, He bade them 'sit down and count the cost' (Luke xiv, 28)." (Pink, pp. 333-334)

(2) Many church members are like the Jews.

- (a) Their confidence is in the fact they are in the "right church," the church that teaches and follows the "truth."
- (b) But have they totally and completely submitted and committed themselves to Christ? Me included! 2 Cor. 13:5
- (c) \*\* Remember Leon Odom, "Ma'am, I don't even believe all of my brethren will make it to heaven!" cf. Israel in the wilderness! Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11

"And why is it that there are scarcely any left among us who really believe only the few will reach heaven? There can only be one answer: because it is now generally held that heaven can be obtained on much easier terms than those prescribed by Christ. The adulterous generation in which our lot is cast are quite sure that heaven can be reached without treading the only way which leads there, that the kingdom of God can be entered *without* passing through 'much tribulation' (Acts xiv, 22), that we may be disciples of Christ *without* denying self, taking up our cross and following Him (Matt. xvi, 24). They do not believe that if they live after the flesh they shall die, and that only if through the Spirit they mortify the deeds of the body they shall live (Romans viii, 13). They are fully persuaded that a man can serve two masters and succeed in 'making the best of two worlds.' In short, they do not believe the gate is as 'strait' nor the way as 'narrow' as Christ declared it to be." (Pink, pp. 324-325)

If the teaching of Christ was radically different from that in which the Jews of His day had been brought up, it is in equally sharp contrast with most of the concepts which now prevail in Christendom. If the Jews were completely ignorant of the high and searching requirements of God's holiness it cannot be said that our own generation is any better informed. If they plumed [prided, cvt] themselves on being the children of Abraham, a large percentage of our people complacently assume that they are members of a 'Christian nation.' If they believed that the rite of circumcision secured for them the favour of God, multitudes in our churches imagine that the sprinkling of water on the brow of an infant



obtains for it a passport to heaven. And even in those circles which are better instructed, for the most part salvation is offered on much easier terms, far more acceptable to the natural man, than those prescribed by the incarnate Son of God. The analogy may be extended still farther, for it was the religious leaders of Israel who most strenuously opposed our Lord, it is those now making the loudest claims to orthodoxy that are bitterest antagonists of the Truth.” (Pink, pp. 323-324)

- (3) **8** I believe what Jesus says here is the most stark, shocking, grim, and thought-provoking thing He ever said; the most difficult pill to swallow in the entirety of His teaching.

“But who is there today that really believes this? (i.e., few who find salvation, cvt) Where is the place in which such a truth is boldly and plainly uttered? We know of none. On the contrary, it is generally assumed, yea, said openly, that many, that ‘millions,’ that the greater part of the human race will obtain eternal felicity [bliss, cvt].” (Pink, p. 324)

- (a) **\*\*** Have you ever been to a funeral where it was NOT said of the deceased: “He/she is in a better place?” “Their suffering is over.” Etc.
- (b) **\*\*** Think! Jesus turns that notion totally onto its head! Dramatically! Permanently!
- (c) **\*\* Matt. 11:15:** “*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*”

F. **\*\* 2 Cor. 2:16:** “*...who is sufficient for these things.*”

G. **9** Which road are you on?

## STOP: End part I

### 2. **10** False teachers:

**Matt. 7:15-20:** “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. *16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.*”

A. **11** Just as we are faced with two roads of life (the “*broad way that leadeth to destruction*” and the “*narrow way that leadeth unto life*”); we are faced with two choices when it comes to teachers.

- (1) It shouldn't surprise us that Jesus brings up the subject of false teachers and false teaching on the heels of what He said in vv. 13 & 14 about the two ways.
- (2) Just as people have a difficult, if not impossible, time with the truth that the vast majority of people are traveling the road that “*leadeth to destruction*”; the vast majority also have a difficult, if not impossible, time believing there are false teachers who would lead us to travel that “*broad way that leadeth to destruction.*”

“...it also bears directly on what He had just said. ...In every age, but never more so than in our own, multitudes of gullible souls have been allured into the broad road which leads to destruction by men professing to be teachers of the Truth and ministers of Christ, yet who had not His Spirit and who were none of His: blind leaders of the blind, who with their dupes fall into the ditch.” (Pink, p. 337)

- (3) There are a host of reasons why this is so, but two are key (foundational):
- (a) **\*\* Postmodernism:** everyone is free to define their own “truth” (Except if you really do follow the truth of God's Word!). This is not really a new concept:
- Judg. 21:25:** “*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*”

**Gen. 6:5:** “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

- (b) **\*\* Ego:** Nobody likes to think they are gullible enough (or their parents, loved ones, mentors, etc.) to be led astray by error of any kind, religious or secular (Matt. 15:14).
- (4) **12** We shouldn’t be surprised, because there have been false teachers from the beginning of time!

**Gen. 3:4-5:** “Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

- (5) False teachers and false teaching are pretty much taboo in most circles, even among some brethren. However, this is one of the most prominent topics in Scripture:
  - (a) **\*\* Time of Noah:** Can you imagine the number of false teachers that must have denounced Noah as he preached and prepared the ark?! Gen. 6:3; 1 Pet. 3:19-21
  - (b) **\*\* Time of Moses:** Moses warned the Israelites: **Deut. 18:20-22:** “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ 21 And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ — 22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”
  - (c) **\*\* Old Testament prophets warned:** Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11

**Jer. 5:30-31:** “An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: 31 The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?”

**Jer. 14:14:** “And the LORD said to me, ‘The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.’”

**Jer. 23:14, 16:** “Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem: They commit adultery and walk in lies; they also strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns back from his wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to Me, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah. 16 Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD.’”

**Ezek. 22:25:** “The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured people; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst.”)

- (d) **\*\* Jesus warns: Matt. 7:15:** “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”; **Matt. 16:6:** “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.’”; **Matt. 24:11:** “Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.”; **Matt 24:24:** “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (cf. Mk. 13:22-23)
- (e) **\*\* Peter warns: 2 Pet. 2:1-2:** “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even

denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.”

- (f) **\*\* John warns: 1 Jn. 4:1:** “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (cf. Rev. 19:20)
- (g) **\*\* Jude warns: Jude 4:** “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- (h) **\*\* Paul warns: Acts 20:28-31:** “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”; **Rom. 16:17-18:** “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”; **2 Cor. 11:13-15:** “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”; **2 Tim. 3:8:** “Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith;”

- (6) There is much more in the Bible concerning false teachers and false teaching, but this should be more than satisfactory to show how prominent and important this theme is.

“No idle or needless warning is this (i.e., v. 15, cvt), but one which should be seriously taken to heart by all who have any concern for the glory of God or value their eternal interests. Our danger is real and pressing, for ‘false prophets’ are not few in number but ‘many’ (1 John iv, 1), and instead of being found only in the notoriously heretical sects, have ‘crept in’ among saints until they now dominate nearly all the centres of orthodoxy.” (Pink, p. 363)

#### B. 13 Why are false teachers and false teaching so common and so popular?

- (1) Satan uses any tactic that gives him an advantage; he has found counterfeiting the Truth is more effective than openly denying the Truth.
- (2) I firmly believe the vast majority of false teachers do not realize they are false teachers; they deceive themselves (**2 Thess. 2:10-12:** “and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”).

#### C. It is important for us to “Beware of false prophets...” (Matt. 7:15). We must be constantly on guard because

- (1) False prophets are not what they appear to be:
  - ☛ **\*\***They are described as wolves in “sheep’s clothing” (Matt. 7:15),
  - ☛ **\*\***They use “unrighteous deception” (2 Thess. 2:10),
  - ☛ **\*\***They “show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (Matt. 24:24),

- ☛ **\*\***They “secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them” (2 Pet. 2:1),
  - ☛ **\*\***They even arise from within the church (Acts 20:30).
  - ☛ **14**They are sneaky (**Jude 4**: “men crept in unawares”),
  - ☛ **\*\***They use “smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:18),
  - ☛ **\*\***They are “deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ (2 Cor. 11:13),
  - ☛ **\*\***They “transform themselves into ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:15),
- (2) **\*\*** They are slick and polished, they don’t wear a plastic name tag: “Craig Thomas, False Teacher.”
- (3) **\*\*** They are also deceptive in the sense that not everything they teach is false; there is a lot of truth in what they teach.
- (a) Their teaching is like rat poison; 99.0% inactive ingredients, 1.0% active ingredient.
  - (b) Their deceptive practices and appearance lulls people into a false sense of security; when you couple this with the fact that many people, even many Christians, are poor Bible students it makes it easier for them for them to “deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:18).
- “The subtlety of the false prophet magnifies his dangers.” (Smith, p. 80)
- (c) **15** That’s why Bible study and gaining of Bible knowledge is so important to combat them (**Eph. 4:11-15**).
- (d) That’s why John says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 Jn. 4:1).
- (e) What’s the test? **1 Jn. 4:6**: “We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” In other words, test their teaching; does it agree with the inspired word of the apostles? Jn. 16:13; Eph. 3:1-5
- “We must be watchful, vigilant, prayerful without being hypercritical and unjustifiably judgmental (Matt. 16:6; 24:4). Disciples must be armed with an increasing knowledge of God’s Word. We must know the genuine if we are to determine the counterfeit. This worked for Jesus in the wilderness, and it will work for you and me (see Matt. 4).”
- (4) **\*\*** So, how shall we guard ourselves against false teachers and combat their false teaching?
- (a) Examine the fruit of false teachers: **Matt. 7:16-20**: “You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”
  - ☛ **\*\*Examine their teaching**: 1 Jn. 4:1, 6
- “The chief identifying mark of the false prophets has ever been their saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is none (Jer. xxiii, 11; Micah iii, 5; 1 Thess. v, 3). They heal wounds of sinners slightly (Jer. viii, 11) and daub ‘with untampered mortar’ (Ezek. xiii, 14; xxii, 28). They prophesy ‘smooth things’ (Isaiah xxx, 10), inventing easy ways to heaven, pandering to corrupt nature. There is nothing in their preaching which searches the conscience and renders the empty professor uneasy, nothing which humbles and

causes their hearers to mourn before God; but rather that which puffs up, makes them pleased with themselves and to rest content in a false assurance.

The general characteristic of 'false prophets' is that they make vital godliness to be less strict and easier thing than it actually is, more agreeable to a fallen human nature, and thus they encourage the unregenerate to be satisfied with something which comes short of true grace." (Pink, p. 339)

- ☛ **\*\*Examine their manner of life:** Do they bear "good fruit" in their lives?
  - ☛ **\*\*Examine the nature of their disciples:** Do their disciples bear "good fruit" in their lives?
  - ☛ **\*\*Examine their reaction when their false teaching is challenged.** (Matt. 7:15) It has been my experience that if you hold a false teacher's feet to the fire, he/she will eventually turn on you with vengeance! E.g., *Croswell Wesleyan Church*; recall they are "ravenous wolves."
- (b) **16 Be watchful, prayerful, alert:** Matt. 7:15 (sheep need guard dogs!); 16:6; 24:4-5
- (c) **\*\* Be armed with increasing knowledge of God's Word:** Matt. 4:1-11; **Psa. 19:11:** "Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward."
- (d) **\*\* Insist on good shepherds, not hirelings:** Jn. 10:12-13; **Titus 1:9:** "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."
- "We need to surround ourselves with 'good shepherds' not hirelings (see John 10:12-13). The church needs teachers, preachers, and elders who will stand their ground without fear, defending the flock and faith. They need to be willing to reprove and rebuke the one who teaches or practices false doctrine. They need to educate the spiritually unlearned. The church needs teachers who are willing to teach the whole doctrine of Christ—the pleasant and the unpleasant (see Acts 20:20, 27)." (Smith, p. 83)
- (e) **\*\* Insist on sound preaching:** A congregation is only as strong as the preaching it is willing to receive (e.g., Westside in Indy swept away with error of 70 A.D. false doctrine!).
- ☛ Paul told the young preacher Timothy: **2 Tim. 4:2-5:** "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."; **2 Tim 2:2:** "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."
  - ☛ Paul told the young preacher Titus: **Titus 2:1:** "But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine."
  - ☛ Paul told the Ephesian elders: **Acts 20:20:** "how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house,"; **v. 27:** "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."
- (f) **\*\* Be proactive:**
- ☛ **Examine their teaching** (actively): 1 Jn. 4:1, 6 (Don't put on the blinders! Be aware they will paint a convoluted picture in an attempt to deceive. Hold their feet to the fire! Truth is simple! 1 Cor. 1:26; 1 Pet. 4:11) It won't be a pleasant task; but is necessary!
  - ☛ **Limited patience:** **Titus 3:10:** "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition,"; Remember Matt. 16:6: "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees"? Leaven needs time to work! False teachers will usually try to take advantage of our longsuffering. Don't be

strung along! Nip it in the bud! Remember Larry Hafley's statement: "When a man who is honestly mistaken hears the truth, he will either cease to be mistaken or cease to be honest."

- ☛ Rebuke them sharply: In Paul's instructions to Titus concerning "unruly and vain talkers and deceivers...whose mouths must be stopped" he was to "rebuke them sharply" (Titus 1:10-13) In other words, we cannot just let it passed without saying anything about it!
- ☛ Mark them: **Rom. 16:17-18**: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."

### III. CONCLUSION: 17

- I. We need to appreciate the seriousness of these matters!
  - A. Most people are going to be lost!
    - (1) Even many who claim to be Christians!
    - (2) Many who are members of the Lord's church! Matt. 7:13-14 (cf. Israel in the wilderness)
  - B. \*\* There are many false prophets! Their teaching will cause many to be lost!
    - (1) We cannot hide our heads in the sand! False teachers are real, numerous and here to stay!
    - (2) We cannot stand idly by and do nothing, we must take action! Expose them, rebuke them, mark them!
2. \*\* Do you appreciate the seriousness of these matters?! **2 Cor. 2:16**: "And who is sufficient for these things?"
3. Invitation (Matt. 11:28-30)

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