

Which Way Are You Traveling?

(Matthew 7:13–20)

According to the teaching of the Bible, we go through life as travelers rather than dwellers. The question is, “Which way are we traveling?” The first concern of a traveler is not speed, but destination. “Rapid progress is worse than nothing unless it be in the right direction.”¹ I have been lost all over the world. I have found myself going down a highway at the maximum speed allowed by law, making good time, only to find that I was on the wrong road. As we near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, we find Jesus’ challenge to ask ourselves which way we are traveling *spiritually*. That question can be answered by responding to two other questions.

WHICH ROAD ARE YOU TAKING? (7:13, 14)

The first consideration is which *road* you are taking. In Matthew 7:13, 14, Jesus talked about two ways, two roads:

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

In these verses, we find four contrasts.

Two Ways

Two ways are available to the traveler. One is *the broad way*. The word translated “broad” (εὐρύχωρος, *euruchoros*) means “spacious, roomy.”² There is room on this road for a wide

divergence of opinions. It has many lanes:

- There is a lane for hard-working people preoccupied with success, and a lane for the indolent obsessed with pleasure.
- There is a lane for morally good folk who are depending on their own goodness for salvation, and a lane for those who live immoral, ungodly lives.
- There is a lane for conscientious religious folk who think they will be saved by their man-made rituals, and a lane for unbelievers, skeptics, agnostics, and atheists.

There are no curbs on this road, no boundaries. You can be what you want to be, do what you want to do. The RSV has “the way is easy, that leads to destruction.”

Then there is *the narrow way*. The word translated “narrow” (a form of θλίβω, *thlibo*) means “to press”³: to be pressed together, to be “compressed.”⁴ Unlike the previous road, it is *not* spacious or roomy. The RSV has “the way is hard, that leads to life.” Jesus never depicted the road to life as an easy pathway.⁵

English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 4th ed., rev. and aug. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 326.

³W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 426.

⁴Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 61. *Thlibo* is kin to the word *thlipsis* (“tribulation”), which almost always refers to persecution.

⁵Describe a pathway that your listeners would consider “easy.” I might imagine walking along a shady, downhill path lit by soft lights, with the sound of sweet music in the air.

¹Clovis G. Chappell, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1930), 207.

²William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-*

The way to life is narrow, but not simply because Jesus said so. It is narrow because that is the nature of truth. Truth is always narrow. Two and two always make four. They do not make five or seven; they always make four. That is the narrowness of truth. The sun always rises in the east. It does not rise in the west, north, or south. It always rises in the east. That is the narrowness of truth.

As a rule, we do not like the word “narrow.” It is an insult to be called “narrow-minded.” One year, at a Christian college lectureship, one exhibitor handed out note pads six inches long, but only an inch wide. At the top were the words “Note pad for Narrow-Minded People.” Many of us at the lectureship thought it was amusing since we knew what it was like to be labeled “narrow-minded.”



Truth is always narrow.

The cry today is for tolerance. There is a time to be tolerant, but there is also a time to be intolerant. George W. Bailey wrote,

We need to be more tolerant of one another. We need to be more tolerant of opinions. But there is a sense in which intolerance is very fine and noble. When God is blasphemed, we ought to be intolerant. When God's word is questioned, we ought to be intolerant. When faith is attacked, when opinion is substituted for truth, when divine truths are mocked, we ought to be intolerant.⁶

The way to life may be narrow, but it is wide enough. It is wide enough to include “people of all generations and ages, tongues and dialects, races and nationalities”⁷—all who are willing to follow Jesus (see 1 John 1:7). It is wide enough to walk hand in hand with the Lord (see Colossians 2:6). It is, after all, His way (see John 14:6).

A broad way and a narrow way—those are our only options. The world does not like that choice. Some speak of “many roads leading to life.” Others lump all of humanity together and say there is, in reality, only one road—that all are

on the road to eternal salvation. Jesus, however, did not offer the options of which men are fond. He said there are two ways—one broad and one narrow—and every individual is on one or the other.

Two Gates

Next, Jesus said that there are two gates. There is *the wide gate*. According to our text, both gates have to be “entered,” but this gate is so wide that most are unaware when they enter it. If you could stand at this entrance, you could look far to the left and right and never see the gateposts.

It is not difficult to enter this gate, and there is no limit to the amount of “baggage” you can take with you as you enter it. You do not have to leave anything behind. You can come in with your sin and selfishness, your self-righteousness, your pride and prejudices.

Then there is *the small, narrow gate*. The KJV calls it “the strait gate.” Many of us have heard the way to eternal life referred to as “the straight and narrow.” However, the word used in the KJV is not “s-t-r-a-i-g-h-t,” but “s-t-r-a-i-t.” “Strait” is from a Latin word that means “narrow.” A common use of this word today is in referring to a narrow body of water that connects two larger bodies of water—such as the Straits of Gibraltar, where the Mediterranean Sea joins the Atlantic Ocean.

The Greek word *stenos* (στενός) in verse 13 means “narrow.”⁸ The word is translated “small” in verse 14. Since this gate is small, you cannot stroll through this one by accident. It is easy to miss; you have to look for it. It is entered by choice, not chance. Since this gate is narrow, only one person at a time can enter. The wide gate can be entered as part of a crowd, but the narrow gate is entered one by one. Also, since it is narrow, you have to get rid of a lot of personal “baggage” in order to enter.⁹ Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, *he must deny himself*, and take up his cross and follow Me”

⁸Arndt and Gingrich, 773.

⁹The rich, young ruler is an example of one unwilling to get rid of his “baggage” so that he could follow Jesus (Luke 18:18–25). Of course, in a sense, we all bring a lot of “baggage” with us when we become Christians and then have to work a lifetime trying to rid ourselves of it; but repentance demands that we start the Christian life with a new attitude toward sin and a resolve to become more like Jesus daily.

⁶George W. Bailey, “The Narrow Gate and the Straitened Way,” *The Preacher's Periodical* (now *Truth for Today*) (July 1982): 22.

⁷*Ibid.*, 36.

(Matthew 16:24; emphasis added).

Elsewhere, Jesus revealed how to enter the gate to life, how to become a Christian. Each condition of salvation involves getting rid of something from the past:

We are to *believe* in Jesus (John 8:24). The gate is too narrow for those who want to believe in some other savior.

We must *repent* of our sins (Luke 13:3). The gate is too narrow for those determined to keep their old lifestyles.

We are to *confess* His name before men (Matthew 10:32). The gate is too narrow for those reluctant to take a public stand for Jesus.

We must *be baptized* (immersed in water) in order to be saved (Mark 16:16). The gate is too narrow for those unwilling to obey Him. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

Again, I emphasize that this is the way of Christ. He said, "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved" (John 10:9a). To all who have not entered, He says, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28; emphasis added). The gate is small and narrow, but it is big enough and wide enough for any who are willing to come to the Lord.

Two Crowds

Our text also talks about two crowds, two groups of people. One is the group called the "*many*": "There are many who enter through" the wide gate, "many" who are on the broad way. The broad way is the way of the multitude, the way of the masses. The motto of this road is "Everybody's doing it." When Moses was instructing Israel, he said, "You shall not follow the masses in doing evil" (Exodus 23:2a). Why did he need to give that command? Because following the masses is a "natural" thing to do.

In contrast to the group called the "many," there is the group called the "*few*." Jesus said, "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." It has been suggested that "this is probably [Jesus'] most ignored saying."¹⁰

The term "few" is a comparative term. Long

ago I heard a poem about a man who kept narrowing down the number who would be saved. The closing lines went something like this: "That leaves me and thee. And sometimes I'm not sure about thee." We should not think that "few" means "almost nobody." In the Book of Revelation, the saved are depicted as "a great multitude which no one could count" (7:9). Nevertheless, this special group is still *relatively* few compared to the many on the broad way.

The faithful have always been in the minority. In the days of Noah, "a few, that is, eight persons" were saved (1 Peter 3:20). Six hundred thousand men of fighting age left the land of Egypt (see Exodus 12:37); of this number, only two entered the promised land: Joshua and Caleb. In both the Old and the New Testaments, it is foretold that only a "remnant" will be saved (see Isaiah 10:21, 22; Romans 11:5). Jesus concluded one parable with these words: "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). Today, God's people are still in the minority.

My brother Coy has said that the message of Matthew 7 is that "not everyone will please God."¹¹ The world does not want to believe this. A popular belief today in my part of the world is that anytime someone dies—anyone, good or bad—he "goes into the light," where loving people wait to greet him. Jesus said that is not the case. According to Him, more are headed to the realm of "outer darkness" (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) than are headed to the realm of light (Revelation 22:5).

Being one of the "few" can be discouraging. I have heard members of the church say, "But the Bible is so clear on this point. Why can't *everyone* see it?" I cannot answer that question, but the Lord said it would be so—that *not* everyone would see or understand or obey the truth. That is the way it is. The narrow way is a restricted way, and it is often a difficult way. It can even be a lonely way. "Wait a minute," someone may say, "I'm not sure that I want to be one of the few on that way!" Before you make that decision, consider the fourth contrast.

Two Destinations

The broad way "leads to *destruction*." The

¹⁰Manford George Gutzke, *Plain Talk on Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 63.

¹¹Coy Roper, "How to Please God," sermon preached at Trent church of Christ, Trent, Texas, 5 February 2006.

word translated “destruction” (from ἀπόλλυμι, *apollumi*) means “to destroy utterly”; but “. . . the idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being.”¹² In this life, one may experience a loss of character. After this life, it is the loss of the soul. Solomon wrote, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; see 16:25). The word “death” indicates “separation.” Spiritual death is separation from God (see Isaiah 59:2). “The second death” (Revelation 20:14; 21:8) is eternal separation from the presence of God (2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9). Many think of the narrow way as being difficult because of the price that has to be paid *at the beginning*, but that is nothing compared to the price that will be paid *at the end* by those on the broad way.

The broad way leads to destruction, but the narrow way “leads to life.” Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10b). If spiritual death is separation from God, then spiritual life is union with God, fellowship with Him. In Jesus’ great prayer in John 17, He said, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (v. 3). On the narrow road, fellowship with God and Christ is begun. In heaven, it is perfected.

We sometimes hear discussions on whether we should use negative motivation or positive motivation to move people to obey the Lord. Jesus used both. He pointed to the way leading to destruction and said, in effect, “You *don’t* want to be on that road.” Then He pointed to the way that leads to life, indicating, “You *do* want to be on that road.”

We have four contrasts, but only two options: One is either on the narrow way that leads to life or on the broad way that leads to destruction. John R. W. Stott wrote,

. . . there are according to Jesus only two ways, hard and easy (there is no middle way), entered by two gates, broad and narrow (there is no other gate), trodden by two crowds, large and small (there is no neutral group), ending in two destinations, destruction and life (there is no third alternative).¹³

¹²Vine, 164.

¹³John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, The Bible Speaks Today series (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 196.

WHOSE DIRECTIONS ARE YOU FOLLOWING? (7:15–20)

To answer the question “Which way are you traveling?” you first need to know which road you are traveling. There is, however, a second consideration: whose directions you are following. Jesus is not the only one giving directions. Countless voices are crying, “Go here and go there. Do this and do that.” Jesus therefore followed His teaching about two ways with a warning about those who can lead others astray.

Two Kinds of Direction-Givers

Even as there are two ways, there are two kinds of direction-givers. The passage only refers to bad direction-givers, but thereby implies that there are also *good direction-givers*.

The direction-givers are called “prophets.” “Prophet” is a transliterated Greek word (from προφήτης, *prophetes*) which means “one who speaks forth.”¹⁴ It generally refers to one who “speaks forth” for God, God’s spokesman. In the first century, these were spokesmen who received their messages directly from God; but they were replaced by teachers who receive their messages from God’s written Word.¹⁵ Thank God for teachers and preachers who heed Paul’s advice to Timothy: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2)!

Sadly, there are also *bad direction-givers*, those whom Jesus called “false prophets.” These claimed to speak for God, perhaps even claimed to be inspired by God. Regarding these, Jesus said,

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15).

The word “false” is from the Greek word for “lying” (ψευδής, *pseudes*).¹⁶ Jesus said that we need to beware of lying teachers who would deceive us.

There is no sense in putting a sign “BEWARE

¹⁴Vine, 493.

¹⁵Note 2 Peter 2:1, which equates false *prophets* with false *teachers*.

¹⁶Vine, 367. “False prophets” is from a compound word which combines the Greek word for “false” with the word for “prophet”: ψευδοπροφήτης (*pseudoprophetes*) (Vine, 493).

OF THE DOG!" on your gate if all you have is a friendly cat.¹⁷ The fact that Jesus said to beware of false prophets indicates that they existed in His day—and implies that they will always exist. When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, He may have had the scribes and the Pharisees in mind; but false teachers did not begin or end with those groups. When Jesus later spoke about what would happen before the destruction of Jerusalem, He said, "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many" (Matthew 24:11; see vv. 5, 24).¹⁸ Paul wrote of false teachers who brought "a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6–9). He named two false teachers in 2 Timothy and said that they had "gone astray from the truth," upsetting the faith of some (2:17, 18). Peter told Christians that "false prophets . . . arose among the [Jewish] people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1a).

Many false teachers are self-deceived (see 7:21–23), but some are not. Why would anyone deliberately be a false teacher? I cannot read minds or deduce motives, but several possibilities come to mind.

Pay. Some teachers and preachers are, to use a term from the KJV, just "hirelings" (see John 10:12, 13): individuals who do a job for pay. Another unfavorable KJV description comes to mind: "whose God is their belly" (Philippians 3:19).

Prestige. In the early church, apparently some wanted to be known as teachers because of the honor and prestige they thought this would bring. James gave this warning: "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment" (James 3:1).

Power. Some, like Diotrophes, love "to be first among" a congregation (3 John 9). They desire to impose their will on others.

Whether self-deceived or deliberate, whatever the motivation, our text tells us two things about false prophets. First, they are *dangerous*. Jesus called them "wolves." The church is the flock of God (Acts 20:28), and wolves are the natural enemies of sheep (John 10:12, 13). Sheep are

powerless against these blood-thirsty predators. Paul warned the elders at Ephesus, ". . . after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). Jesus called them "*ravenous* [ἄρπαξ, *harpax*] wolves": wolves hungry to the point of madness. Can you picture them in your mind: a pack of growling wolves, eyes narrowed, teeth bared, saliva dripping, ready to attack?

Not only are false teachers dangerous, but they are also *deceptive*. They often come "in sheep's clothing." Some have speculated that the sheep's clothing was a reference to the mantle of a prophet (1 Kings 19:19). However, Jesus was probably just using a proverbial expression meaning that ravenous wolves do not always look like ravenous wolves. Often they look like sheep: harmless and non-threatening. Paul said that false teachers are able to disguise themselves "as apostles of Christ" and "servants of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:13, 15).

False teachers do not announce their coming with the words "Here comes a false teacher!" They do not wear signs around their necks or badges on their chests proclaiming, "False Teacher." They generally wear the right clothes. They have a religious vocabulary. They can quote the Scriptures.¹⁹ They may seem to speak the right words.²⁰ All this makes them even more dangerous. Christians are taught to believe the best of people, and this can leave them vulnerable to false teachers. When Jude wrote of certain false teachers, he said that they "crept in unnoticed" (Jude 4). "Crept in unnoticed" is translated from παρεισδύνω (*pareisduno*), which means "to enter in by the side."²¹ Someone said that they sneak in "by the side door."²²

How to Identify False Teachers

If false teachers are so deceptive, how can we possibly identify them?²³ Jesus told us how in the next segment. Changing His analogy from the

¹⁹Even the devil is able to quote from the Scriptures (Matthew 4:6).

²⁰They often use the words in a different sense than the Scriptures do, but they know the right words to speak.

²¹Vine, 138.

²²Alan Highers, "Beware of False Teachers," *Spiritual Sword* (April 2007): 1.

²³If the terminology is familiar to your listeners, you can ask, "How can we keep these wolves in sheep's clothing from pulling the wool over our eyes?"

¹⁷Adapted from Stott, 197.

¹⁸For additional study on Matthew 24 and the destruction of Jerusalem, see David Roper, "'And He Departed' (2)," in "The Life of Christ, 10," *Truth for Today* (August 2002): 45–52.

pasture to the orchard, He said, "You will know them by their fruits" (v. 16a; see v. 20). The word translated "know," ἐπιγινώσκω (*epiginosko*), is the word for "know," γινώσκω (*ginosko*), intensified by the preposition ἐπὶ (*epi*). It means "to know fully."²⁴ In other words, the way we can *really* identify false teachers is to look at their fruit.

Jesus referred to how people use the fruit test in nature: "Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?" (v. 16b). Can you "imagine people going out to a briar patch to pick grapes, or taking their basket to a clump of thistles expecting to find figs"?²⁵

He continued,

So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit (vv. 17, 18).

"A good tree" is one that does what a fruit tree is supposed to do: produce edible fruit. "A bad tree" does not produce edible fruit.²⁶ This does not mean that a good tree *never* produces inedible fruit. A good apple tree can have a few apples with worms. Likewise, a bad tree can occasionally have a good piece of fruit hanging from its branches. Jesus had in mind the general quality of the fruit produced by each tree.

How can we apply the fruit test to those who teach us? To do so, we need to understand that there are various kinds of "fruit" and that a variety of "fruit tests" are needed. For instance, there is the *doctrine* test: what one *teaches*. To borrow a phrase from Hebrews, we need to check the fruit of his lips (see Hebrews 13:15). John wrote of some trying to deceive his readers (see 1 John 2:26) and then said, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).²⁷ Test them how? By comparing what they teach with God's inspired truth (Acts 17:11).

Today the world is flooded with false doc-

trines. It sometimes seems that each day brings a new one. I am occasionally asked, "How can we possibly deal with all these falsehoods?" My answer is this: by constantly reading, studying, and thinking on God's Word. If the truth of God's Word is ingrained into your very being, you will be able to identify error when you hear it. No test is more important than the doctrine test. If a person is not teaching the Word, he is a false teacher.

We cannot, however, always identify a false teacher by his teaching. The devil can quote Scriptures (Matthew 4:6). Sometimes the problem is not so much what a false teacher teaches as what he *fails* to teach.²⁸ Therefore, there is additional fruit we need to check.

I would next list the *conduct* test: We need to examine the fruit of a teacher's *life*. We should ask whether or not "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22, 23) is evident in what he does. According to historical documents, false prophets/teachers were a major problem in the early centuries of the church. One uninspired writing called the *Didache*,²⁹ which dates from the second or third century, contains a section on identifying false teachers.³⁰ Christians were expected to furnish housing for traveling preachers; but the document added, "He shall remain one day, and, if necessary, another day also; but if he remains three days, he is a false prophet." Traveling preachers could ask for food, but the *Didache* warned, "If he asks for money, he is a false prophet."³¹ Today, we still need to examine carefully how a teacher lives and what he does.

However, a false teacher cannot always be recognized by his life. Some false teachers live good, moral lives. How, then, can we identify such? The last test is the *results* test: What kind of fruit does his teaching *produce*? What God wants

²⁴ Adapted from Vine, 347; Robertson, 62.

²⁵ Harold Fowler, *Matthew I*, Bible Study Textbook Series (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1968), 426.

²⁶ Instead of "bad," the KJV has "corrupt" and "evil." These are not inaccurate translations; but since the text is about vegetable life, "bad" may be a better expression of the thought.

²⁷ John had in mind a specific false doctrine, but we can make general application from his words.

²⁸ In other words, a false teacher may talk about topics like love, kindness, and grace—all important topics—but never touch on less-popular topics such as "righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come" (see Acts 24:25).

²⁹ *Didache* is a Greek word meaning "teaching" or "doctrine." The *Didache* claims to be "The Teaching [Doctrine] of the Lord, through the Twelve Apostles, to the Gentiles." It was a kind of early Christian handbook on practical matters. (J. R. Michaels, "Apostolic Fathers," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979], 1:207.)

³⁰ *Didache* 11.1—12.5.

³¹ *Didache* 11.9.

is “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11). James wrote that “the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (3:18). Sadly, not all seed (teaching) produces righteousness, nor is it sown in peace. Several negative results of the wrong kind of teaching are found in 2 Timothy 2:

Ungodliness promoted: Worldly chatter can “lead to further ungodliness” (v. 16).

Faith upset: False doctrine can “spread like gangrene” and “upset the faith of some” (vv. 17, 18).

Quarrels encouraged: “Foolish and ignorant speculations . . . produce quarrels” (v. 23).

*What God wants is
“the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”*

We need to ask questions like the following: As a result of the teaching of this individual, are people closer to the Lord? Are they living more godly lives? Are they more faithful to the Word of God? Do they show more love to one another?

The third test takes time because fruit grows gradually. Since this is the case, we must not be too quick to label someone a false teacher. J. W. McGarvey wrote that “we must not judge hastily, nor by slight and trivial actions, for some specimens of bad fruit [grow] on good trees.”³² As noted earlier, even a good apple tree can have a wormy apple. Patience is therefore needed to apply this test, but we must not neglect the conduct test. It is very important.

What Difference Does It Make?

What difference does it make whether our religious guides are true or false? False teachers are in the broad way that leads to destruction (see v. 13). Jesus said,

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (v. 19; compare with 3:10).

I live in a lovely old neighborhood with tree-lined streets. These trees are primarily decorative. In Palestine, however, trees were usually not grown for decoration. They might be grown for

fuel or to provide wood to build things, but mainly they were grown for fruit. If a fruit tree did not produce edible fruit, it was draining the soil of nutrients needed by good trees. The unproductive tree was therefore cut down and used for fuel. Of course, the “bad trees” represented false prophets. Jesus made clear that false teachers will be punished in the fires of hell. When Peter wrote of the coming of “false teachers,” he said that such will bring “swift destruction upon themselves” (2 Peter 2:1).

What about those who follow false teachers? They are on the same road, headed to the same destination. Jesus said that “if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Matthew 15:14). We might adapt His saying like this: If a false prophet guides the gullible, both are headed for eternal destruction. That is why it makes a difference—an eternal difference—for us to listen to the right spiritual guides.

Each of us has the responsibility of putting to the test any and all teachers and their teachings. We are not to be like little birds with beaks open, ready to accept anything the mother bird drops into them. Luke commended those in Berea because “they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). “These things” were the teachings of Paul. They examined the Scriptures to see whether or not what Paul taught was scriptural! That is how you and I should act regarding those who teach us. Remember that John said to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1; emphasis added).

CONCLUSION

As we close, let me again ask, “Which way are you traveling?” There are two roads: a broad way that leads to destruction and a narrow way that leads to life. Which road are you traveling? There are two kinds of guides: one false and the other true. Which kind of guide are you following? There is no doubt which road Jesus wants us on or what kind of spiritual guide He wants us to hear and follow.

It has been noted that the words “enter through” in Matthew 7:13 are not just an exhortation; they are also an invitation. In our text, Jesus does not merely warn us; He also welcomes

³²J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel or A Harmony of the Four Gospels* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1914), 267.

us.³³ He is still urging all who will listen, “Enter through the narrow gate.”

Preaching and Teaching Notes

The conditions for entering the narrow way were given earlier in this lesson, but you may want to review them as you conclude. You may also want to encourage any who have left the narrow way to return to it by repentance and prayer (Acts 8:22; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9).

Regarding the fruit test to determine whether or not a teacher is a false teacher, you could refer to the *lips* test (preaching), the *life* test (conduct), and the *lasting-effect* test (long-range effect of the person’s teaching and influence).

Various approaches can be used to conclude this lesson. For instance, you could note the parallel passage in Luke 13. Someone asked Jesus, “Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?” (v. 23). Jesus answered, “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (v. 24). Jesus indicated that it was true that few would be saved; but, in effect, He said that the questioner should worry about himself, not about the many or the few. He urged him, “Strive to enter through the narrow door.” “Strive” means to put forth *effort*, and the following verses emphasize that it needs to be done *at once*. When the Master returns (at the Second Coming), it will then be too late to take advantage of the

shelter inside the narrow door (vv. 25–27).

Here is another possible conclusion and invitation: “Are you on the narrow road? You say you do not know? Then you are not, for no one enters the narrow way by accident. Further, this means that you are still on the broad way. If that is the case, I urge you today to leave the way leading to destruction and get on the road to life!”

In our text Jesus warned His listeners to “beware” of false prophets / teachers, but He did not discuss what else we should do regarding them. If this question arises, you could refer to passages such as Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10; 2 John 9–11.

Regarding the two ways, understand that an illustration can only be pressed so far. It is a temptation to picture everyone as standing before two gates—the broad gate and the narrow gate—deciding which to enter. In truth, every person enters the broad way (of sin) when he reaches “the age of accountability” (Romans 3:23). The narrow way is accessed from the broad way and is always available to those willing to repent. We should therefore not press Jesus’ figure too far. His point was simple: *There are two ways, and every responsible individual is on one or the other.*

This lesson and the one to follow (“No Substitute for Obedience”) are two separate presentations, but the two texts can be combined. You could talk about “Two Roads” (including the teaching on false guides) (7:13–20), “Two Responses” (obedience and disobedience) (7:21–28), and “Two Rewards” (a summary of the rewards, good and bad, mentioned in each section).

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³³Bailey, 21.