

Walking the Narrow Way of Christ

Matthew 7:13-14; Exodus 23:2

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How do we arrive at the truth in doctrine or worship? Do we simply count heads? Do we act like politicians and send out the pollsters to conduct surveys amongst the various churches? Of course not! Truth is not made truth by the decision of people (whether by the majority or minority), but rather a doctrine is true because it is revealed to be so by God in Scripture. Man does not determine what is faithful and true, but only affirms what is faithful and true as it is agreeable to God's infallible Word.

Does the majority have a greater claim to the truth than the minority? Jesus declares that many walk on a very wide road that leads to destruction, but few walk on a very narrow road that leads to life. Do not follow the crowd, but follow Jesus whether many or few follow Him. Our main points are: (1) The Narrowness of Truth from the Text (Matthew 7:13-14); (2) The Narrowness of Truth in History.

I. The Narrowness of Truth from the Text (Matthew 7:13-14).

A. The Context

1. Christ's Sermon on the Mount is a sermon that presents many different contrasts: the mere external righteousness of the Pharisees vs. the true righteousness that begins with a changed heart (regeneration) and faith in Jesus Christ and evidences that faith in works of obedience out of love and gratitude for God (Matthew 5:20; murder, adultery, loving enemies); alms, prayer, and fasting done in order to be seen by man vs. to be seen by God (Matthew 6:1-18); laying up treasures on earth vs. treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-23); serving money as lord vs. serving God alone as Lord (Matthew 6:24-34); judging with sinful judgment vs. judging with righteous judgment (Matthew 7:1-6); trusting in the arm of flesh to supply our needs vs. trusting in our good Father in heaven (Matthew 7:7-11); doing unto others as they do unto us vs. doing unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matthew 7:12). In weeks to come, Jesus will contrast false prophets vs. true prophets (Matthew 7:15-20); a false profession of Christ as Lord vs. a true profession (Matthew 7:21-23); and a destructible foundation vs. an indestructible foundation (Matthew 7:27). And in our text today there are these contrasts: a wide gate vs. a strait gate (Strait of Gibraltar or a straitjacket); a broad road vs. a narrow road; many that walk the wide road vs. few that walk the narrow road; and the broad road leads to destruction vs. the narrow road leads to life.

2. Why all of these contrasts? Jesus is laying before His disciples (then and now) that there is always a worldly alternative that will tempt you away from the truth. There is always a counterfeit to the truth. Every day there is a decision that you must make in walking away from the lies of the world and in walking in faithfulness to Christ and His Word. The world's option is more appealing to the flesh, flatters our pride, and has many more followers (and sadly even many in the professing church—thus the warning in Matthew 7:21-23). True believers in Christ, however, will deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Christ regardless of the cost to themselves (Luke 9:23).

B. Let us now hear the words of Jesus from our text today.

1. Jesus begins this section with a command—not a suggestion ("Enter ye in at the strait [constricted, restricted] gate"). The truth which leads to everlasting life is not found in the wide gate, in the broad way, nor in the many people (Matthew 7:13). This is the way which ultimately leads to destruction and utter ruin in Hell.

a. Many walk through the wide gate and on the broad way. Why? Because it is easier and more comfortable to the flesh. There are not the sacrifices necessary to be made when one passes

through the wide gate and walks the broad way. A mere profession of faith in Christ is sufficient and perhaps going through some of the outward motions of Christianity. A love for holiness, a love for the truth, and a love for God and the brethren are not necessary when walking this broad way. Communion with Christ daily in worship is optional. Obedience to God's commandments is considered nit-picking or legalistic. When one says that obedience to God's commandments is legalistic what is often meant is, "I don't want to obey them because they deprive me of my own pleasure." The Christian faith is not about our pleasure, but God's pleasure (Isaiah 58:13-14). But in doing God's pleasure (even when it is hard), we find the greatest pleasure, peace, delight, and contentment as an expression of our love for Him (1 John 5:3).

b. By nature we are so quick to consider the path we shall take first by the consequences that will follow. And thus the path that will keep us most comfortable and cozy and not rock the boat with our dreams, plans, pleasures, work, family, and friends is the attractive and appealing path. Moreover, we meet hardly any resistance from family or friends when walking that path because most are walking the same path of least resistance. Those who walk this way may (like the Pharisees) believe they are headed for life, but have been deceived and deluded by the sheer numbers of those who are all on the same path which leads ultimately to destruction (Exodus 23:2).

2. However, the truth from God's Word which leads to life according to Jesus is found in the strait (restricted) gate, in the narrow way, and among the few people (Matthew 7:14). This is the way which leads ultimately to eternal life and heaven (John 14:6).

a. Therein the Lord says the few walk. Why? Because it is uncomfortable and unpleasant to the lusts and desires of the flesh. The strait gate and the narrow way require a person to be willing to forsake all to follow Christ. Sacrifices in every area of life abound to such a degree that even family and friends may laugh, ridicule, oppose, and even want nothing to do with such a "fanatic." Although we do not delight in opposition and suffering as ends in themselves, we nevertheless realize that if being opposed or suffering for the cause of Christ comes our way, we gladly take up his cross and follow Him. Those who are on the narrow way buy the truth at all costs and will sell it not (Proverbs 23:23). They love holiness, truth, God, and their brethren. They are not content with an indifferent or estranged relationship with Christ, but yearn within to be near the Lord and to commune with Him (Psalm 42:1-2).

b. The Lord Himself warns us that we should ever be careful that we be not misled by a vast multitude to walk contrary to the narrow path of Christ. Because it is our natural inclination to fit in with those around us and to be carried along by the popular sentiment of the majority, we are cautioned by the Lord not to give in to such a snare.

c. Let us always carefully test by the infallible standard of God's Word what is being taught by the majority (and by the minority as well). Let us only follow those who follow Christ. Let us not be gullible and easily misled by the many or by the loudest. For to follow the crowd is simply an implicit faith—i.e. a faith that is based on the authority of man rather than a faith that is based upon the authority of God as revealed in His Word. Jesus demonstrates the foolishness and delusion of the one who argues that a doctrine or practice in worship is decided on the basis of the majority (Christmas that has no warrant in God's Word).

II. The Narrowness of Truth from Historical Examples.

A. Biblical Examples wherein God gives to the few the truth.

1. Noah (2 Peter 2:5). Noah stood alone as a "preacher of righteousness" and yet the truth of God was with him. Destruction fell upon the majority.

2. Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 13). Ten spies returned with an evil report, but two spies returned with a good report. Who was to be believed? The majority that disbelieved that God would keep His promise or the minority that trusted God and His Word? God's wrath fell upon the ten spies and those who followed them.

3. Elijah stood alone for the Lord on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18) against hundreds of false prophets. The majority were wrong; Elijah was right. The false prophets were slain; Elijah was carried to heaven.
4. Jesus Christ was even Himself in the minority (John 6:66-67). He was despised by the majority who wanted Him crucified.
5. The apostles and followers of Christ were not in the majority (Luke 12:32). Though Christ's kingdom will grow until it fills the whole earth, for the greater part of its history, it has been in the minority.
6. Remember that in the book of Revelation "all who dwell on the earth shall worship him" i.e. the beast that misleads the majority (Revelation 13:8).

B. Historical examples (after Christ and the apostles) in which the truth has been declared by a few rather than by the many.

1. Athanasius courageously contended for the truth concerning the deity of Christ against the Arians even when it appeared he was all alone. "Don't you know the whole world is against you?" To which Athanasius replied, "Then Athanasius is against the whole world."
2. Calvin noted that the truth at his time was defended by the majority when he wrote (*Concerning Scandals*, pp. 109,110),

It is an offense to a great many people that they see almost the whole world opposed to us. And indeed the patrons of a bad cause do not neglect their own advantage, using a strategem like this so as not to upset the ignorant and weak, that it is extremely absurd that almost the whole Christian world is disregarded, so that the faith is to be possessed by a few men.

3. The Protesters and Covenanters who faithfully stood by the *Solemn League and Covenant* were in the minority among the Presbyterian ministers in Scotland. The majority of these ministers also received the indulgences from the king in granting to him a lordship over the church which belongs only to Jesus as King of His Church.

C. Let me ask you, are we presently in a time of reformation of the truth in nations and churches or are we in a time of apostasy and falling away from the truth in nations and churches that have historically professed Christ? We rejoice that the gospel is being taken to parts of the world that have hated the truth, but as I look around me, I see far more willingness to compromise the truth and sell the truth out than to stand boldly for it. There are exceptions (thank God), but it is the minority that is standing for Christ and His truth on the narrow way and the majority that are falling away and choosing to walk the broad way of ecumenical spirit in compromising that which we as Protestants and as Reformed Christians and Covenanters have historically defended as true from Scripture. The papal antichrist was prophesied long ago that he would deceive and mislead many who follow his lying wonders and who follow the multitude to do evil (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

D. How do you know whether you are walking the broad road that leads to destruction or the narrow road that leads to life? You must review the truth of Christ given in this Sermon on the Mount in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 (which give the character of those who are walking on the narrow road to life)? Do you have a mere external righteousness or a righteousness that begins with a new heart of faith in Christ and love to Christ? Is your obedience done in order to be seen by man or to be seen by God? Where is your treasure—here upon the earth or in heaven? Whose kingdom do you seek first—man's or Christ's? Do you judge others sinfully or righteously? Do you follow the crowd and change your words/behavior depending upon which crowd you are with? Even when you fail the Lord, do you grieve over your sin because you have offended Him? Is your foundation your own corruptible works of righteousness or the indestructible

righteousness of Jesus Christ? Do you follow the multitude or do you follow Christ?

E. Dear ones, it is not for us to decide what is too narrow or too broad. That's Christ's decision. Our decision is by His grace and out of love for Christ to follow Him and to follow those who follow Him.

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