

¹³ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ²¹ Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" ²³ And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

Text: Matthew 7:13-23 A 7-26-26 Jer. 23:16-29 Acts 20:27-38 Ps.: 26 Resp. Ps.: 119:31ff.
Hymns: 282, 285, 292, 294

BE FAITHFUL TO JESUS AND HIS WORD

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Jesus warns us, "*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. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*" These words are part of Jesus' Sermon On The Mount. We're told in the beginning of that sermon that, although there was a huge crowd present who heard Jesus' words, Jesus was speaking to "*His disciples*" (Mt. 5:1). Jesus' words are addressed to believers. These words aren't telling unbelievers to make a decision for Christ. When Jesus tells us to enter by the narrow gate, He means that we get to heaven only by faith in Him. Just because lots of people are going along the same path, that doesn't make that path the right way. Most people are on the broad way with the wide gate that leads to hell. We need to be on the difficult road with the small gate that leads to heaven. Jesus isn't just one way to heaven, but there are many other ways as well. Jesus is the only way to heaven. Jesus says, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (Jn. 14:6). We're saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins on the cross.

Jesus says, "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.*" When we hear warnings against false teachers, we might think of strict pastors and/or strict church bodies. But Jesus, the same Jesus who loves us and died for us, warns us against false teachers. Jesus says that there are false prophets that come to us in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. We can understand a false teacher being a wolf in wolf's clothing. But Jesus warns us against false teachers who are like wolves in sheep's clothing.

If it could, why would a wolf dress up like a sheep? So it can fool the sheep and eat them. Why are there false teachers who look like innocent sheep? So we can be fooled and our faith can be

destroyed. We might think, “I’m not going to let a false teacher destroy my faith.” Jesus wouldn’t warn us to beware of false prophets if they weren’t a real threat to us.

Jesus says, *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.”* If we saw an apple tree with oranges on it, we would know that something was very wrong. A teller doesn’t have to be an expert on every kind of counterfeit money. She needs to know real money so well that she’ll recognize counterfeit money. Likewise, we need to know what the Bible says so well that we’ll recognize a false prophet.

Jesus says, *“If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth”* (Jn. 8:31-32). Jesus wants us to know what His Word says and be faithful to it. By continually hearing and studying God’s Word, even if we don’t know every fine point of doctrine, we’ll know it when someone is telling the truth from God’s Word, and someone is not.

Plenty of people think that it’s the loving thing to do to compromise God’s Word. But Jesus says, *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word”* (Jn. 14:23). Jesus says that we show our love for Him by being faithful to His Word. We are showing love for God by remaining faithful to His Word.

We read in Ephesians 4:14-15, *“We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, [speak] the truth in love.”* We are being loving to others by telling them what the Bible says.

In Acts 17:11 we’re told about the Christians in Berea, *“They received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”* They listened to what the Apostle Paul taught. Then they compared what Paul said to what the Bible says. They made sure that what Paul was saying is what God says in the Bible. A faithful pastor or teacher is glad when we compare what he’s saying to what the Bible says. A faithful pastor or teacher says what God says in the Bible, no more, and no less. As Paul says, *“I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”* (Ac. 20:27)

We’re so precious to Jesus that He sacrificed His life for us. God loves us so much that He gave us faith in Jesus and saved us. By faith in Jesus we’re on the narrow path that leads to heaven. God doesn’t want us to switch to the broad path leading to hell. God doesn’t want us to be led astray from Him by a false teacher. God loves us, and doesn’t want to lose us.

A false teacher may sincerely believe what he’s teaching. Or he may know that what he’s teaching isn’t right, and purposely try to fool us. Either way, he is teaching falsely. Romans 16:17 says, *“Note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.”* If a weak brother is saying something wrong, but is willing to be corrected by God’s Word, we’ll patiently help him. But God says that if someone is causing

divisions and offenses contrary to His Word, and won't be corrected by God's Word, we are to "*avoid*" him – stay away from him.

False teaching undermines the authority of God's Word: "I know from the Bible that this isn't right, but I'm letting it slide." Tolerating false teaching is a deadly habit to get into. Galatians 5:9 says, "*A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*" Even what may seem like a little error acts like yeast on bread dough: error keeps growing.

Who is at the bottom of false teaching? The devil. The devil doesn't want us to believe in Jesus as our Savior. That's why the devil clothes a false teacher in sheep's clothing. A false teacher may look good and sound good, at least at first, but beware! The devil tries to get us to tolerate error so we can get along better with our spouse who is in error, and/or get along better with family who are in error. The devil tries to get us to tolerate error so we can continue to go to a certain church and/or be a member of a certain church body. As much as we treasure our spouse and family, our church and our church body, God and His Word come first in everything. We see what God says in His Word about something, and, God help us, we remain faithful to God and His Word.

Jesus says, "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*" (Notice that Jesus doesn't agree with these people claiming to cast out demons and perform miracles.) These things sound good, so what is Jesus objecting to? Jesus is here condemning people who trust in what they do for God to save them. They're not trusting in Jesus and what He did to save them. Jesus will say to them, "*I never knew you; depart from Me.*"

1 Peter 1:23 says that we "[have] been born again, ... through the Word of God which lives and abides forever." Through God's Word we have come to learn about Jesus and believe in Him as our Savior, and have eternal life in Him. Be faithful to Jesus and His Word. Don't trust in yourself and anything you do for God to save you. Trust in Jesus alone, and you will be saved.

O Word of God incarnate, O Wisdom from on high,
O Truth, unchanged, unchanging, O Light of our dark sky –
We praise Thee for the radiance That from the hallowed page,
A lantern to our footsteps, Shines on from age to age.

O make Thy Church, dear Savior, A lamp of burnished gold,
To bear before the nations Thy true light as of old
O teach Thy wand'ring pilgrims By this, their path to trace,
Til, clouds and darkness ended, They see Thee face to face. Amen.