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Two Paths, Two Foundations (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this continuation of "Two Paths, Two Foundations", Steve Gregg discusses the importance of identifying false prophets and choosing the narrow gate. He stresses that following the royal law means being kind to not only the poor but also to those who are not our friends. Gregg warns listeners to be cautious of spiritual direction from misinformed or deceiving individuals. Ultimately, he emphasizes the exclusivity of truth and the importance of staying on the narrow path, despite societal temptations.

Transcript

...give welfare to people sometimes who are, who don't in any sense deserve welfare. Either they're not really in need, or they don't work, or whatever. There's a lot of things that we would not give to certain people if it was in our hand to give, and yet because the government takes it for us, permits by taxation, they give it without the kind of discrimination we would prefer to use.

Most Christians feel it'd be better for the government to get out of that business, and leave it up to churches and friends and families of people to help them out. That's essentially what had to be done before there was socialism, and it works. I mean, certainly the Old Testament law makes provision for the poor to be provided for out of various ways, but not so much by the government, but by the temple.

Anyway, yeah, there are priorities, I think, and the point is, however, that we should be very sensitive to every party we have any dealings with, what we would do, or what we'd want them to do to us if we were in a situation like their own. Now, I've just, in the last few illustrations I've given, talked mainly about things like helping the poor, but that's not the only thing. The way you speak to people, the way you speak about people behind their back, you know, the way you even think about people, the way you judge people, as the opening verses of this chapter suggest, all are to be governed by this same principle.

It's not just a matter of doing financial things for people. It's more a question of your whole relationship style in every kind of circumstance. Just be governed at all times by

the law of love.

Before you say something to someone, ask, how would I feel if this very same thing was said to me? There's a lot of joking that goes on in the church, and we have it here too. Sometimes I remember last year, or in some previous year, some students were, you know, a particular student was the brunt of quite a few jokes, and he acted like it didn't bother him. And because he seemed not to be bothered when people would make jokes about him, I kind of entered in, not to joke him about it, I didn't say any jokes about him, but I'd kind of laugh, you know, in his presence, when people would say things that were, he seemed to, you know, not mind.

And later I got to thinking, you know, he probably does mind. I mean, even if he's good natured, he probably doesn't, he'd probably like it better if people didn't say those things about him, you know. I mean, some people have enough grace to endure something and to be cheerful, but that doesn't mean they particularly prefer for that to be done.

And I thought, well, how would I feel if people were making those same statements about me? I wouldn't feel real good, you know. And so this rule that Jesus gives is really the one law. It's what James calls the royal law.

It's the law of the kingdom. Now, Jesus has just told the disciples to ask and seek and knock and try to enter in. If we are to assume that he means to enter into the kingdom, then it would suggest then that we are seeking very hard to live by the rule of the kingdom.

We want to be participants. We want to be citizens of the kingdom. And we want to conform to the demands of the kingdom, to the law of the kingdom.

I said that James calls this the royal law. I guess I better give you a verse for that. It's in James chapter 2, also prior to the verses we looked at a moment ago.

Verse 8. James 2.8 says, If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbors yourself. You do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

If you fulfill the royal law of scripture, then it tells us what it is. You shall love your neighbors yourself. Now, the royal law means it's the law of the kingdom.

It's also according to scripture. It's also from the Old Testament scriptures. It's first found in the Old Testament scriptures.

It's reiterated as the principle law of the kingdom of God by Jesus Christ. So that's the royal law. Now, I might just say this too.

In Matthew 7.12, the verse begins with the word, therefore. Which might seem strange. I

mean, if Matthew 7.12 just said, Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.

This is the whole law of the prophets. That would be profound and need no explanation. But the word therefore raises questions as to what is the therefore therefore.

It obviously harks back to something that was just said. But what is the connection between what was just said and what is said here? He's just been talking about what God does. He's been saying, listen, God is a father.

He's a good father. He's not a bad father like you guys. And even bad fathers do nice things for their children.

God, therefore, who is a good father, can be counted on to be merciful and generous and kind to you. When you ask him for things. Therefore, that's what you should be.

You should be generous and kind to others. Doing to others what you'd like them to do to you. God is your model in this.

It would appear that in verses 7-11, he is teaching about prayer. And he is in fact teaching about prayer. But in teaching about prayer, he wants us to be acquainted with God's character.

God's dealings with us. That's what encourages us to pray, is knowing God's character. But once we've been acquainted with God's character, that provides him another opportunity to say, and that's what you're supposed to be like too.

You should always imitate God's character. Earlier, in chapter 5, he said, be merciful, perfect, even as your father is. Your father causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

Therefore, you need to be kind to people who are not your friends too. Let God's behavior be a model for your own. And so, after he talks about how God gives good things to his children, he says, therefore, you do essentially the same thing.

You do good things to people. You do the things to them that everyone would want done to them. Matt, did you? Oh, OK.

Scratching the air. OK. Let's go on then to verse 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, because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Now, this is a little different than the passage in Luke 13 that we read, which also began, strive to enter in at the narrow gate.

But it didn't go on with the rest of these statements, because the way it went on from

that point was, because many are going to try to enter in there and won't be able to. Now, Jesus is making a somewhat different point here. He's not talking about people trying to enter the narrow gate and not being able to get in.

He's talking about how many people are going which ways. He said there are not very many going in right now in the narrow way, in the narrow gate. Better make sure that you be one of those few who does.

Most people are going the broad way, and they don't know where it's leading them, but it's going to lead them to death. Now, of course, one of the criticisms of Christianity by people of almost every other religion, or even people with no religion at all, is that Christians are too narrow-minded. That we just don't cut enough slack for people who are sincerely followers of other religious systems, or who are just sincerely trying to be good people.

And we tell them that Jesus is the only way, and we tell them that there's none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. And we tell them that if there's no shedding of blood, there's no remission of sins. That if they don't receive the benefit of the atonement of Christ, they're not saved, no matter how sincere they are in their other viewpoints.

And this is criticized as being too narrow-minded. Of course, it's an unrealistic criticism if a person understands exactly what is being asked here. It's not saying that everybody can't come in.

It's just that they have to come in through the right gate. If I invited you all to come to my house for a party tomorrow night, and I said, listen, everybody's invited, but please come through the front door. You know, don't go in any other way.

Don't climb through the window or whatever. Don't burrow through the wall. Just come in through the door.

I mean, it's big enough for all of you. Even John Peters can get in there. Anyone can come in if they'll just come in the way I tell them to come in.

It's not as if I'm being narrow. It's not as if I'm being unreasonable or exclusive. I'm just saying here, you can't get in.

There's not another way in. It's not that I'm trying to exclude anyone. By giving those instructions, I'm trying to tell you how to get in.

Because the broad way, or the way that has no limits, it only advertises itself as the way in, but it actually ends up somewhere else. It leads to death. Now, it's obvious that people who are on the broad road to death don't think they're on the way to death, or else they'd change roads in all likelihood.

Twice in the Proverbs, I wish I can't give you the references, because I don't know them, but there are two times in the Proverbs that says there's a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. No doubt Jesus has this in mind when he says the way that leads to death is wide. Many are going that way.

But what Proverbs tells us is that those who are on the way to death are not choosing death, not consciously so, they're on a way that seems right to them. There's a way that seems right, but the end of it is death. It's the path that leads to death.

And many go that way because it seems right to them. Which tells us that we can't just go by our instincts. We can't just, as many New Age people say, just follow your heart.

I don't know if they still say it, but when I was out on the streets in the 70s, you used to hear this all the time, well, I just follow my heart. Well, there's a way that seems right. No doubt your heart won't be able to discern whether you're on that way or not.

You've got to have information. You've got to have authoritative information. You've got to have instructions.

That's why you need to ask and seek and knock. You have to ask first. You've got to know who to ask.

You've got to get the right directions. And the right directions are from Jesus, the way. And therefore, he says, here's the directions.

Go in the narrow gate. Yes, Jenny? Okay, Proverbs 16.25 and the same statement found elsewhere in Proverbs as well, but one is enough. Thank you.

Proverbs 16.25. Thank you for that. So, essentially, he's saying you can easily get on the wrong road. And one way to know you're on the wrong road is if you've got a lot of company.

Because the one that leads through the narrow gate is sparsely populated. Now, it's hard to say how sparsely populated it is. The statement we read a moment ago in Luke 13 where he said, stride into the narrow gate, that was occasioned by the disciples asking him a question, a very interesting question.

Interesting to me, anyway. In Luke 13.23, it says, then one said to him, Lord, are there few who are saved? And that's where he said, stride to enter in through the narrow gate. For many are not going to make it through.

Now, he didn't say in this passage, you know, they said, are there few saved? Are there only a few saved? He didn't say, yes, there are only a few saved. But he said, there are many who aren't. There are many who aren't going to make it in.

The door is not going to be open to them. Make, strive to be one of the, you know,

whether it's few or many, there's a lot of them who aren't going to be there. And you strive to be in the category of those who are.

This question, Lord, are there few saved, is a very, very pregnant question. And I've asked it myself many times and sought answers for it, because it's quite obvious that Christianity is, at least some forms of Christianity, are very popular. There are mega-churches.

There are churches that have tens of thousands of members. And in Korea, there's churches with hundreds of thousands of members. Single congregations of hundreds of thousands of people in them.

And I'm not certainly in the position to make judgments about who is and who isn't saved. But when you see that, and you wonder, Jesus said, few there are that enter into the narrow gate. Now, was he just talking about his own time? Have things changed now? Are there many entering in now? But if you look very closely at these churches, very often you'll find that a narrow gate is not being presented.

The largest churches are the ones that advertise the broadest gates. Very little in the huge mega-churches, usually, impinges on people's selfishness. Very little speaks to them in strict and uncompromising terms about what Jesus said about lifestyle and standard of living and stewardship and sin and things like that.

There's a lot of things Jesus said that don't get taught in these big mega-churches a lot of the times. Now, I need to be cautious about that because I can think of one very large church, Calvary Chapel, close to Mesa, is one of the largest churches there is. And I can't really say that Chuck compromises in his teaching.

It seems like he doesn't... It seems like he preaches it as it is. I've got a few doctrinal problems with him, but they're not over issues like... I don't think they're over issues of this. No, I mean, I don't know.

All I can say is there's a lot of churches that get big by not making the way very narrow. And I suppose that while it could change, that is, things could change from the time of Jesus until now. In his day, maybe there were a few finding it, and there could be billions of people finding it now.

Yet, while the demographics might change, the size of the gate doesn't change. Okay? It may be that there'll be many who find the narrow gate in years later than Jesus' years. In his day, only a few were finding it, he said.

They were his disciples. The rest were missing it. It may be that at some time prior to the second coming of Christ, there'll be billions of people finding that narrow gate, but it'll still be the same gate, and it'll still be just as narrow.

The way in will never change. And the size of the gate is not likely to change. The numbers of people who traverse it may.

And you'll often find that the way to get many people into a congregation is by representing a less narrow gate and not, you know, speaking very directly about people's lifestyles. I told you before, I think, about my brother-in-law's church. I've never been there.

I can't say much about it except that he told me something about it. He said the preacher preaches great messages, preaches against social evils, preaches against abortion, preaches against all this stuff, but he says the church is pretty lukewarm and he doesn't understand why people's lives are not changing. And he said you still see them driving their BMWs and their Mercedes and things like that, and you know, the parking lot's full of these very, very expensive automobiles and stuff.

And he says he doesn't know why the people aren't changing. And he said, but the preacher's preaching great messages. Well, I don't deny that the preacher's messages may be great, and they may even be true.

In fact, the preacher may always preach things that I would personally agree with, but there must be a few things he's not preaching that I would preach if I were in his shoes. It may be that everything he does preach is good stuff, but I can think of some good stuff he must not be preaching, because you'd have a lot fewer of those expensive cars in the parking lot, because either people would sell them and opt for something more, a better stewardship, or else they would go to some other church that didn't preach the kind of things I'd like to preach in a church like that. You know, I think there is widespread discontent, I've found, people who go to these big, mega churches, some of them are spiritually minded people, and they wonder why it is that the sermons are falling on wet tinder.

They're not really catching fire there. And a lot of times you'll see, because although the preacher may have some things to say that are a little bit challenging, he often is not really quite as narrow-minded as Jesus is about things. Of course, there's a few things in particular that American Christians don't like to be narrow-minded about.

They like to be narrow-minded about homosexuals, they like to be narrow-minded about abortion, they like to be narrow-minded about politics and stuff, but they don't like being narrow-minded about finances and economics and standard of living, lifestyle, those kind of things. Those are the areas where perhaps more preaching needs to be done, since Jesus said in a passage not too much unlike this, that it's harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, excuse me, easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Now, if Jesus had strived to enter the narrow gate, you know, seek the kingdom of God, certainly he's talking on the same subject when he says for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God is actually harder

than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

I mean, for a camel to go through the eye of a needle is definitely the epitome of trying to get through a gate too narrow, through a hole too small. And so I think what Jesus has to say here indicates that many people don't find the narrow gate or don't take the road because it does cramp their lifestyle a great deal. It does call them away from the selfish pursuits that everybody loves, from the pursuit of what is visible and tangible and immediately gratifying to have, to the lifestyle that puts some of those things on hold until after this life.

Gratification, comfort, wealth, rewards, treasures, those things can wait if you are looking not at the things that are seen but the things that are not seen. But there's few people seeing that. Few people valuing what Jesus said to value.

And that's why so few people find the right gate. You know, truth is always narrow. It's just in the nature of things.

If I say the grass is green, that is in fact at this moment a true statement. But the truth of that statement suggests that the grass is not blue or red or purple or a great number of other colors that are not green. In affirming one thing that is true, you have automatically excluded several dozen other things as being not true.

The grass can't be green and purple at the same time unless some grass is green and some purple and they are mixed together. But the idea is it is one or the other and as soon as you identify which is true, you have with the same decision identified what's false. And there's a great deal more false than true.

There are more colors that the grass isn't than that the grass is. And as soon as you identify the truth of the matter, you've also identified all other options as errors. And truth is therefore by its nature narrow and exclusive.

The difference between a river and a swamp somebody said, is that a river has boundaries. A river has limits on its sides. It is channeled by boundaries.

Whereas a swamp has no boundaries, it just kind of spreads out and it just goes rancid. I mean it gets stagnant and so forth. But a river has power and life and purity and so forth.

But limits and perimeters and borders is really something that is a very powerful and good thing to have in your life. But it requires that you identify truth and say, I will not live or think out of accord from these limits. These are the limits of what I will accept.

What's in the Bible. These are the limits of what I will do. I will only do such things as Jesus would sanction and so forth.

And I will not allow myself to go beyond those limits. Then you narrow your experience. But you narrow your experience so that you can enjoy life in a sense eternally more.

In any pursuit of life the person who is willing to select what things he will participate in and what he will not participate in, defines how much enjoyment he is going to find eventually. And usually the person who is more selective later has something to be glad about. The person who becomes a great pianist becomes a great pianist.

So that they can just sit down and play easily and freely anything they want to play. Maybe the envy of persons who can't do that. But that person became that way by being unenviable.

In the unenviable position of practicing the piano while others were out playing baseball. Selecting one's activities. Defining what my goal is.

This is my goal. I cannot do everything but I will select the activities that are consistent with that goal and I will exclude other activities that might be enjoyable but they don't they're not consistent with my goal. The goal I'm looking for is a narrow gate.

Therefore the road that's going to go through that gate has got to be narrow to get through the narrow gate. And if I wanted to go through the broad gate, I could be you know, I could do anything I want to and the gate's broad enough. And there is such a gate.

There's an enormous broad gate. And it's available for everyone to go through. But on the other side of it is death.

Not freedom. The people who are on the broad road are seeking freedom and that's why they're there. They don't want restriction.

They don't want borders. They want total freedom. But what they end up is only such freedom as death is.

But the freedom and the life and the kingdom of God, which is righteousness, peace and joy and the Holy Ghost as well as a lot of other good things, that is only had by narrowing the path that you're willing to walk on. And while you know, the kingdom of the narrow path is narrow but it's deep. The broad path is very broad but very shallow.

I've noticed this in talking to a few unbelievers in the past week while I was in California. Just astonishing me how shallow they're willing to live their lives. Because they like to party and they like to do this and they like to do all kinds of things.

They wouldn't think of becoming Christians because it would cut into all these activities they enjoy so much. And yet to a person like you or me, looking at it, I think, how can these people live their entire life without thinking any deeper than about that deep into

their brain, about an inch. It doesn't ever occur to them that there are consequences, that they're going to get old, they're going to die someday.

Don't bother thinking about that. I'm enjoying myself now. It's a shallow, shallow way of thinking and living.

Because the narrow way is narrow, it has more depth. Anyway, there's few that find the narrow gate. There are many that find the way that leads to death.

And then he says, you know, beware of false prophets. Now, if we would consider all of this one consistent discussion, which I think is probably preferable to any other option, we could say that Jesus is starting by saying, ask, seek, knock, with specific reference to obtaining entry into the kingdom of God. Seek the kingdom of God.

Ask the right person, Jesus. Ask God. Ask the right questions.

Ask for directions. Seek him according to the directions that he gives you. Knock and he'll open the door for you.

You're welcome. Anyone's welcome if they come to the right door. It happens to be the narrow door, not the wide one, he says.

So he's the one you should ask. But there are those who, if you would ask, would give you the wrong answers. And Jesus in his own day knew of such people, false religious advice givers, who he calls false prophets here.

He says, beware of false prophets. Now, it's important to ask, but if you ask a false prophet and seek according to the instructions you get that way, then you're not going to find what you're looking for. You'll find the wide gate instead of the narrow gate.

So he says, you're going to have to watch out. If you're going to try to enter that narrow gate, you've got to watch out for advice that's bad, coming from the wrong people, from spiritual direction that is misinformed or simply, you know, perpetrated by deceivers. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves, which suggests that you're not necessarily going to tell at a glance who they are.

They don't come to you with a long black cape and a black mask and a little pointy beard and horns, you know, seen above the brim of their hats. They look just like sheep. Yes, Jeff? They come to you.

Well, that's true. That's the difference, isn't it? But the point most important, I think, is that they come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ravening wolves. Now, his disciples are sheep.

In fact, that might have even been implied back in verse 13. Enter by the narrow gate.

Well, there was a gate to each sheepfold and the sheep would enter into the safety of the sheepfold through the gate.

Jesus, of course, as I pointed out in John 10, said, I am the gate, or the door of the sheepfold. So, he may be, even from the time he was talking about gates back there a few verses earlier, talking about sheep gates, sheepfold gates. And his disciples are sheep and they need to follow the right shepherd through the right gate.

Of course, there are those who look like sheep. And sheep follow sheep, by the way. And here's someone who looks like a sheep but he's leading you through the wrong gate.

If you could look under his fleece, you might see that he's only disguised as a sheep. He's really a wolf. The Apostle Paul picked up this image when he was speaking to the elders of Ephesus in Acts chapter 20 and indicated that this even is true among church leaders, even elders.

There can be such wolves in sheep's clothing. Jesus applies it to false prophets. The Apostle Paul applies it to false elders.

In Acts 20 verse 29, he says, he's speaking to the group of elders from the church of Ephesus. He says, for I know this, that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves.

Now, that's from among the elders themselves of the church. Men will rise up speaking perverse things and draw away the disciples after themselves. Now, obviously, if they're rising from among the actual elders, they must look like Christians.

They must be disguised as sheep. Yet, Paul says, some of them will in fact be ravening wolves. So, Jesus' instructions about false prophets is not simply about people who are prophesying and saying, Thus saith the Lord, and giving prophecy, but persons who are giving spiritual direction in any sense of the word.

You need to be careful who your counselors are. You need to be careful who is dictating to you doctrine and practice. And you need to, of course, to a very large extent, seek all those things out yourself from the Scriptures.

You have access. The disciples didn't have the New Testament Scriptures yet when he spoke to them, nor did the people in the book of Acts. But we do.

And we can be quite sure that what Jesus said or what the Apostles said is the right stuff. And if they speak not according to this word, it's because they have no light in them. Says Isaiah 8, 20.

He says in verse 16 here, Matthew 7, 16, You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears

good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit, at least not consistently.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them. Now, every tree that bears bad fruit is thrown into the fire.

It's an echo of what John the Baptist had said. He said, Already the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree that does not produce fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

What about this fruit? What is this fruit? Now, I guess I'd say the strongest temptation I have, and I think most preachers like me do, is to identify this with the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, self-control, goodness, patience, those things. And it could mean that.

I don't want to deny that it does. It very well might. But I would say that, of course, the fruit of the Spirit had never been so identified.

Paul had not written Galatians 5 yet when Jesus spoke these words. There had never been a place elsewhere prior to this in the Bible that those traits were called fruit. Although justice and righteousness were called fruit in Isaiah chapter 5, verse 7. But it's possible that Jesus has something else in mind when he talks about you shall know them by their fruits than what we usually think of as the fruits of the Spirit.

I would suggest to you looking at a couple of other places to figure out what he might mean. If you look at Matthew 12, 33 through 35, there will be a very obvious similarity in the passage in Matthew 12. This one we're reading in Matthew 7. Although there's similarities, it doesn't mean they're both talking about exactly the same thing.

That's not always the case. But let's take a look. Matthew 12, 33, either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad.

For the tree is known by its fruit. That certainly sounds like what he said in Matthew 7. Just now you'll know them by their fruit. Brute of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth good things. And an evil man, out of the evil treasure, brings forth evil things. Now, he goes on to say, but I say to you that for every idle word that men speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.

For by your words you'll be justified, by your words you'll be condemned. Now, there's strong reasons in this particular passage to think that Jesus is referring to the things that a person speaks as being analogous to the fruit that a tree produces. Whereas in

Matthew 7 he says, a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit.

He says here in verse 34, how can you, being evil, speak good things? In other words, how can you, being bad trees, produce good fruit? Now, if you think about it, what Jesus says, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, is very much analogous to a tree producing fruit. A tree produces fruit, depending on what kind of life is in it, what kind of sap is in it, what kind of nature it has. It produces fruit not with effort, but just as a natural product of being, whatever it is.

An apple tree has an apple tree nature, and produces apples as a result, and you'll know that it's an apple tree when you see that it produces apples. Likewise, he says, by your words you'll be judged. People will know what's in your heart by what comes out of your mouth.

So, in this passage, which likewise, in Matthew 12, as well as Matthew 7, talks about fruit, and knowing a tree by its fruit, it would seem clear that in Matthew 12, the fruit is what a person says. Now, James picks up something a little bit like the Sermon on the Mount. Of course, I always tell you that James quotes the Sermon on the Mount, or alludes to it a great deal.

One of the places where he appears to be doing so is in James chapter 3, where he is talking about the mouth, and the tongue, what comes out. In James 3, after a lengthy discussion about the tongue, and still at the tail end of that discussion, he says in verse 10, out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives? Or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh. Now, the point I would make here is he says, a fig tree doesn't bear olives, a grapevine doesn't bear figs. Obviously, a grapevine bears grapes, a fig tree bears figs, and you know them by their fruits.

He's talking about what comes out of the heart, and it's like the nature of a thing produces a certain kind of fruit, and not another kind of fruit. So also, what comes out of your mouth, out of your tongue, is the fruit of what's in your spirit. And that's why it would seem strange for good things and bad things both to come out of the same mouth, because you only have one spirit, only one self.

Yes? Hmm. Well, that's a good point. I mean, the question is teachers who don't teach the truth in the church, are they ravenous wolves, necessarily? Or are they just mistaken? Well, I think in many cases, the latter is obviously the case.

There are many good men who haven't thought through their views yet. I'm one of them.

I hope I'm a good man, but I mean, I haven't thought through everything yet.

There are some issues I'm still sorting out, and if I am, I know a lot of other people are. Some people have sorted out fewer of them so far than I have. I mean, I've thought through some issues that I've talked to pastors, and it's clear they haven't really thought about that yet.

And so I know there's good people who are real sheep and are not wolves. But I guess the question is, if they're sheep, should they be shepherds? I mean, in a sense, I mean, you don't want a wolf leading the flock, but you don't really want a sheep leading the flock either. You want a shepherd leading the flock.

Now, I mean, we're changing metaphors a little bit here because every Christian leader is a sheep, one of Jesus' sheep, obviously. But what I'm suggesting is a sheep is a follower, one who is somewhat gullible and needs to be guided, and the leaders of the church are called shepherds. It seems that although I would not say that all men who are teaching falsehood to the public are ravenous wolves, it may be that they shouldn't be in the pulpit unless they're going to be more careful about what they say.

Certainly, James goes in the same passage earlier, in James 3, he says teachers have a stricter judgment. He doesn't suggest that all the teachers who do bad things are bad people, but he says we do have a stricter judgment, we who are teachers. And so I guess maybe what I'd say is there should be maybe fewer pastors.

A lot of people who are pastors or teachers maybe should be doing something else until they sort out things and make sure they can tell the truth. Now, I really think, however, that when we talk about truth, we have to realize some truths are non-negotiable, and some truths are negotiable. There are some truths that are far from clear in the scriptures, and if they're not clear, a man can hardly be blamed if he guessed wrong about what, you know, if he's done his best to search it out and doesn't quite see it.

It's another thing to give a different gospel or to point to a different gate, you know, and that's really what Jesus is talking about, these false prophets. Beware these false prophets. They look like sheep, and as such, they'll go through a certain gate of the sheepfold, but they're wrong.

They're wrong if they're guiding you to the wrong gate, and you'll know by what their fruits are. Now, their fruits could mean their words. What are they saying? Are they saying things similar to what Jesus said? Are they saying the same things Jesus said, or are they saying different things than what Jesus said? Where are they getting their information? Now, I will say this.

There are pastors who seem to be good-hearted, but they very clearly are not letting Jesus' words be the guide of their teaching. They're teaching whatever their seminary

taught them to teach, their denomination teaches, or whatever, and again, I'm not trying to be overly critical. I'm just saying that any observer, according to the facts, knows this is true, that some pastors never say a word that's like what Jesus said, but say everything they've been taught to say in their denomination, and that's too bad, because some of them don't point to the same gate that Jesus pointed to.

They paint a broader road for people to walk than Jesus did, and that would be an occasion for concern, I think. Now, you'll know them by their fruits would mean, if we take fruits in this case, in Matthew 7, to mean what they say, then he'd be saying that if they say the same thing I'm telling you, then they're okay. If they say something different than what I'm telling you, then they're false.

They're false teachers. They don't have it right. Jesus, in talking about the sheep and the sheepfold and himself the good shepherd in John chapter 10, said, all who came before me are thieves and robbers.

The sheep didn't listen to them because they were thieves and robbers. The sheep knew the shepherd's voice. If you are a Christian, then you know or hearken to or acknowledge the authority of Christ.

You know the shepherd's voice. And you can judge all other persons as being thieves and robbers if that's what they are by the fact that they don't speak with the same voice. They don't say the same thing.

They don't, you know, they speak contrary to what the authoritative voice of the shepherd has said to us. And therefore they identify themselves as false prophets. Now, this would be a time which is very tempting if we had a lot of time to fill, which we don't, to go into an extensive treatment on the subject of false prophets.

We talked a little bit yesterday about how the Old Testament tells us to identify false prophets. If they lead you away from God, if they make predictions that don't come true, those are some of the things. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 adds to that.

He says, no one speaking by the Spirit of God will say Jesus is accursed. No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit of God. That's what he says in, I think, verses 2 and 3, 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

Another test, you know, of prophets. But it's interesting when you read about false prophets in places like Jude and 2 Peter chapter 2, and when Paul talks about them when he writes the pastoral epistles to Timothy, he talks about false prophets and false teachers there. Very frequently, the description of them has to do not even so much with what they're saying as the way they're living.

And in this sense we could say the fruit could possibly be a reference to their life, as it were, fruit of the Spirit. Frequently, you'll find, for instance, if you in your own time want

to read 2 Peter chapter 2, a typical description of false teachers and false prophets. There is reference to their teachings.

There's reference to their damnable heresies that they teach in denying the Lord that bought them. But there's also reference to the fact that they have eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin. They have hearts exercising covetous practices.

They make merchandise of you. Essentially, the characteristics that are frequently in the Bible pointed to as characteristics of a false prophet are that they are in it for the money, and they're immoral, sexually immoral. So, a false prophet can also be known by his unsanctified life, as well as by his false teachings.

But I'm not sure that that's what Jesus is meaning to emphasize here. I think what he's pointing out is that there are a lot of guys around telling you that the wide gate is okay. Be careful.

They're telling you something different than what I'm telling you. And therefore, they're false prophets. I'm the shepherd.

They're sheep. They're wolves in sheep's clothing. And so don't follow them through the gate they're going through.

That's the wrong way. Now, we only have really very few minutes to finish this out, although we have some powerful stuff in the closing words of the Sermon on the Mount here. The thing is that these two sections that remain, verses 21 through 23, and then verses 24 through 27, these are two sections, the two sections that remain to comment on.

We have talked about them a great deal, so I'm going to take the liberty of going over them lightly here. Neither of the passages will be unfamiliar to you, because they're some of my favorite passages, and I've leaned on them quite a bit earlier in the year. So I'm not going to lean on them as heavily now, since I don't want to just be redundant, and also we're limited on our time.

But let's look at verses 21 through 23. 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? Then I will declare to them, I never knew you, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.

Now the great question that's in our minds is, who are these people? Are they Christians? I mean, they seem to be professing Christians, because they say, Lord, in your name we did these things, and his name is Jesus, and as far as I know, only people who profess to be Christians are doing things in Jesus' name, using his name. Now clearly they weren't actually acting in his name, because he said, I never knew you, I

never authorized you. I never sent you to use my name, I didn't give you my credit card.

You've been using my name wrongly, you did it, you think you did it in my name, but you didn't do it in my name, I don't even know you. You were unauthorized by me. Which shows that they had a wrong idea of what it means to act in his name.

They thought simply by using the name of Jesus, they were doing something in his name. But clearly, if they were doing these things really in his name, they would be his agents, they would be known by him, but he says, I don't know these people. They're not my agents.

Now, what did they do? They prophesied, cast out demons, and worked wonders. Now that sounds like charismatic people. Not all charismatic people, certainly, but it certainly suggests that we do not validate a prophetic ministry, or a preaching ministry, or a teaching ministry of any kind, on the basis of apparent works of power.

Since Jesus is the one who tells us in no uncertain terms, there's going to be a lot of people who did those kinds of works of power, and even did them in the name of Jesus, but they're not saved. And they're going to be surprised, because they think they are. It's not as if these are intentional deceivers.

These are people who really thought they were saved, and are not. Now that's where it gets scary. You know, if it was intentional deceivers you're talking about, I wouldn't be too afraid, because I know I'm not an intentional deceiver.

If I'm deceiving anyone, I'm not aware of it. I think I'm teaching the truth, that's what I want to teach, and therefore, if it was just intentional deceivers who are at risk, that'd be comforting. But the problem is, these are people who are not intentional deceivers, they thought they were friends of Jesus.

They acted in His name, they had what they thought was good evidence to being Christians, they're casting out demons, they're prophesying, they're doing mighty works, and yet he says, but you lack the thing that I'm looking for as evidence. What was that? Well, verse 21, He who does the will of my Father in Heaven. Now, I thought the will of the Father was to cast out demons and work in miracles.

No. It's somewhere else. But how would you know what it is then? Well, there's a parallel in Luke 6, 46 to this.

It's the parallel statement in Luke's version. Where he says, why do you call me Lord, Lord and you do not do the things that I say? Now, obviously, that's parallel to this. It's not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, enters the Kingdom of Heaven.

But the way it's phrased in Luke is helpful. Why do you call me Lord, Lord, but you don't do the things I say? Now, that is obviously parallel to doing the will of my Father, which is

in Heaven. It's not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, that enters the Kingdom of Heaven, but those who do the will of my Father, or do the things that I, Jesus, say.

So, you might know what the will of the Father is. Jesus spoke it. And therefore, living by what Jesus taught is a sure grounds for believing you're saved than any other.

Certainly more than signs and wonders. Verse 24, Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it did not fall, because it was founded on the rock.

But everyone who hears these sayings of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand, and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it fell, and great was its fall. Now, he closes his sermon with a warning to heed his words. That, obviously, is what the will of the Father is in the previous segment, to do what Jesus said.

If you do what he said, you're building a house on rock. If you don't do what he said, you're building a house on sand. And if you build your life or your house on anything other than what Jesus taught, it's not permanent.

The superstructure may be great above the ground. You may have a beautiful life, a big church. You might be admired by everybody.

You might have signs and wonders. But if you're not following what Jesus said, your house won't stand. It's on a faulty foundation.

And the Lordship of Jesus is what is at stake here. Those who submit to and embrace the Lordship of Jesus have permanence. Those who don't will not last forever.

They may backslide or they may just be surprised on the day of judgment that they won't last forever. Well, we're out of time. And so, you know, I certainly could justify speaking longer on verse 24 through 27.

But, uh, we have covered it before, I think, and therefore I won't...