

The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5–7

A Christian's Relationships – 7:1-20 (Part 2)

These verses complete the study of the brief statements by Jesus about relations between Christians and other people groups, by considering the relationships with fellow pilgrims and false prophets.

THE INESCAPABLE CHOICE (7:13-14)

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

God pronounced through Jeremiah that in life, people only have two choices: life or death ^{Jeremiah 21:8}.

In these verses recorded by Matthew, Jesus detailed several descriptive aspects of the 2 life choices.

- † **Two Ways:** In a very straight-forward manner, the first Psalm called the two ways of living: "the way of the righteous" and "the way of the wicked" ^{Psalms 1:6}. Jesus described these ways as "broad" and "narrow". The broad way implies an easy road of tolerance & permissiveness, with plenty of room for a diversity of opinions and a laxity of morals. Behaviors that fit these characteristics come naturally to fallen human beings. In contrast, the narrow way portrays a life path with ethical boundaries running counter to the sinful, selfish desires of man's flesh. And yet, Jesus promised plenty of help to anyone choosing to follow Him ^{Matthew 11:28-30}.
- † **Two Gates:** Jesus stated plainly that the broad road leads to the "wide gate". People who choose this path allow their inherent sinful, self-righteous, prideful behavior to be unchecked. Conversely, a person wishing to enter the "narrow gate" (Jesus ^{John 10:7,9}) must be willing to deny himself ^{Mark 8:34} and leave every instinctive behavior behind ^{John 12:25}. Some will try to enter the narrow gate on their own merit, but they will be denied entry ^{Matthew 7:21-23, Luke 13:24}.
- † **Two Destinations:** Psalm 1 stated that those people going the righteous way would "prosper" and those going the wicked way would "perish". Moses described the end result of the two choices as "life"/"prosperity"/"blessings" and "death"/"destruction"/"curses" ^{Deuteronomy 30:15,19} and encouraged the Jews to "choose life" ^{Deuteronomy 30:19}. Here, Jesus used two of Moses' terms: "life" (*zōē*: the life principle in spirit and soul) and "destruction" (*apōleia*: the state after death when exclusion from salvation is a realized fact) to indicate God's narrow way will lead to heaven (Biblically, the term life often referred specifically to eternal life) and the broad way will lead to hell (the permanent destruction and waste of the lives of God's human creations - creatures made in His image ^{Genesis 1:26-27}).
- † **Two Crowds:** Jesus made it clear that those people who travel along the easy road through the wide gate are "many". The broad path is a busy thoroughfare, filled with pedestrians of every kind travelling to their destruction. However, He said that there are only a "few" who are on the hard way leading through the narrow gate. And, while Jesus explains here that the road to life is relatively deserted, other parts of Scripture make it plain that over the course of time, there will be a "great multitude" who "find" the path to God and heaven ^{Revelation 7:9}.

Many people today think the best way to live is to remain neutral and uncommitted when it comes to the big questions of life. This philosophy is not new and dates back to at least the time of Aristotle who taught his “golden mean” (the *via media*). However, Jesus stated multiple times that everyone must choose one of two paths: life or death. This was made most clear in His question to His apostles two thousand years ago: **Who do you say that I am?** ^{Mark 8:29a}. Each person’s answer to the same question determines which life path they choose. And, unless the answer to His question is a positive affirmation, as Peter’s was ^{Mark 8:29b}, Jesus considers both attempted neutrality and fervent negativity ^{John 19:7} as rejections ^{Luke 11:23}, placing that person on the broad path through the wide gate on to their eternal destruction.

ATTITUDE TOWARD FALSE PROPHETS (7:15-20)

- 7:15 Jesus exhorted His followers to “**watch out**” for false prophets (and deceiving teachers ^{James 3:1}). The best ways Christians can test (judge) whether a prophet/teacher is from God or not are by listening to whether they acknowledge that Jesus Christ is from God or not ^{1 John 4:1-3}, what type of doctrine they teach ^{2 Peter 2:1-3} and whether they teach false hopes and unrealistic messages of peace ^{Jeremiah 23:16-17}. As the end times approach, the numbers of false prophets/teachers will increase ^{Matthew 24:10-13}, leading to the ultimate false prophet ^{Revelation 16:13, 19:20, 20:10} who will embody all of the characteristics as the third member of the Satanic trinity in the Tribulation ^{Revelation 13:11-17}. False prophets/teachers are both outside & inside the church and are always ferocious ^{Acts 20:28-31}.
- 7:16 The phrase “**By their fruit you will recognize them.**” bookends this section ^{v.16 and 20}, illustrating that what someone does (their fruit) is vital in determining what they truly believe – good or bad.
- 7:17-18 “**Good**” (*kalos*: beauty as a harmonious completeness) and “**bad**” [*poneros*: wicked, malicious] fruit reflect the only type of tree they can be produced by ^{Matthew 12:33, Luke 6:43-44, James 3:12}. Jesus used His audience’s familiarity with fruit trees to illustrate an analogy for people, who may be able to deceive some others with words, but what they actually think & feel will be exposed by their actions ^{John 3:19}. Believers are encouraged to develop (and to help others develop ^{Hebrew 10:24}) deep faith/convictions so that their talk and walk will be in parallel with each other and with the Word of God ^{1 John 3:18}. John the Baptist urged followers to “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” ^{Luke 3:8} and James made it clear Godly actions (deeds) were necessary to indicate a deep Christian faith ^{James 2:14-26}.
- 7:19 Jesus echoed the decree made earlier by John the Baptist ^{Matthew 3:10} that whoever connects themselves to a wrong tree (way of life) will be discovered by their deeds (fruit) and will be judged (“**cut down**”) ^{John 15:2} and destroyed (i.e., “**thrown into the fire**” of hell) ^{Revelation 20:11-15}.
- 7:20 The second of the bookend statements is the closing reminder that false prophets ^{Romans 7:5} (as well as genuine Christians ^{Romans 7:4}) can be recognized by what they do (their fruit).

Other verses also use fruit as a symbol of works ^{Matthew 21:43, John 15:5, 8 16a, Galatians 5:22-23, Colossians 1:6, 10}.

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