

October 6, 2002 by Steve Brandon



# The Teaching of Jesus Christ - Stay on the Narrow Way

## Matthew 7:15-23

- 1. False prophets look good.**
  - 2. False prophets are bad.**
  - 3. False prophets will be destroyed.**
- Don't believe them!**

Two weeks ago we began closing of our study of the Sermon on the Mount. We looked at the two ways that people travel in this life. People either enter by way of the wide gate and travel upon the broad path to destruction. Or, they enter by way of the small gate and travel upon the narrow path to life. For those who have chosen the broad path, their life will be characterized by ease as they face little resistance regarding their life's choices. For those who have chosen the narrow path, their life will be characterized by the pursuit of the holiness and purity that Jesus requires of us in the Sermon on the Mount.

Those who are on the narrow way will encounter trials and tribulations and difficulties along the way. And beginning in verse 15, Jesus will speak about one of those difficulties along the way. Jesus says that false prophets will be all along the way, seeking to draw people off of the narrow path, by persuading them to travel another way. In effect, they will say, "Come over here, where it is easier. You don't have to go the narrow way. Come with us." Jesus instructs us in verse 15 to beware of such false prophets and to avoid them. Sure, they might look good. They might show you attractive things. But beware, church family, for their end is destruction.

Two weeks ago, I entitled my sermon, "Enter by the Narrow Way." This morning, I have entitled my sermon, "Stay on the Narrow Way." You will be tempted by your flesh to get off of the narrow way. You will be tempted by the world to get off of the narrow way. This morning, we will see that you will be tempted by false prophets, who will seek to persuade you in every way possible to get off of the narrow way.

Last year, our family was reading through the Proverbs together in family worship. When we read chapter 1, we read, "My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. If they say, 'Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood, Let us ambush the innocent without cause; Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit; We shall find all [kinds] of precious wealth, We shall fill our houses with spoil; Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse,' My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path."

In an effort to impress the truth upon our children, we used an object lesson. I remember taking the pillows of our couch and forming a little path with them. We told our children to walk along this path of pillows. So, they did this a few times, and really enjoyed the process (perhaps because they were actually permitted to walk on our couch pillows with full parental consent). Then, we said, "Whatever you do, you must stay along this path of pillows." We then instructed them according to the words of Proverbs, "If sinners entice you, do not consent" (Prov. 1:10). "Now," we said, "dad is going to try to entice you to get off the path, but you must stay on the path." So, they walked up and down the path, minding their own business as I said, "Carissa, come here! SR, come here! Hanna, come here!" Low and behold, they did pretty good in their obedience (or, disobedience, depending upon your perspective). They stayed right on the path. It was quite encouraging. As they continued on their hike, I went into the kitchen and found a cookie. I began to eat it in front of them and told them how delicious it was and how much I was enjoying eating it. Then, I said, "Come here, get the cookie! I'll give you some!" As I remembered, two of them stayed right on the pillow path, but one of them came running, wanting the cookie. Two of them had passed the test, but one of them didn't.

We sought to instruct them that as they got older, similar things would happen. People would try to tempt you to turn aside from the path of life that they were following to follow their sinful path. In our passage of Scripture this morning, we see Jesus describing a similar situation of those people, who will seek to derail you in your Christian life. Listen now to Jesus' warning, ...

### Matthew 7:15-23

(15) Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (16) You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn [bushes,] nor figs from thistles, are they? (17) Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. (18) A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. (19) Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) So then, you will know them by their fruits. (21) Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" (23) And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS."

False prophets, false teachers, and false shepherds have always been around. Moses warned against them in Deuteronomy 13. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all warn of their presence on numerous occasions in their writings. In fact, Jeremiah warns against them in more than 50 instances. The minor prophets are filled, as well, with references to these deceivers. Paul speaks repeatedly of them, as do Peter and

John and Jude as well. So when Jesus warns us, in our passage this morning, of the false prophets who will come, we ought not to be surprised at this. These are those who will try to get you off of the narrow way. But as I sought to instruct my children to stay on the path of pillows, I now turn and instruct you, church family, "stay on the narrow way -- If sinners entice you, do not consent." If anyone seeks to persuade you away from the narrow way with their enticing words, don't listen to them. Stay along the narrow way that leads to life, which, as you recall, is the way of faith in Jesus alone, which will result in a life described by the Sermon on the Mount.

This morning, I would like to make three observations about these false prophets and end with an exhortation.

## 1. False prophets look good.

In verse 15, Jesus says, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing." Jesus describes the false prophets as having "sheep's clothing." In other words, they come, looking like an innocent lamb. Yet, in reality, false prophets are wolves in camouflage, attempting not to be detected. Jesus says, "but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

At the end of a day in the field with his sheep, the shepherd would often lead his sheep home into the protection of the sheep pen. The shepherd would stand by the door and call in his sheep, and watch as they pass before his eyes as they enter in. Jesus says that a false prophet is like a wolf, who has covered himself with the skin of a lamb, so that he might pass by the shepherd into the pen unnoticed. They camouflage themselves to look like their surroundings, like those in the army do, before they go out for combat.

Jesus said, "They come to you in sheep's clothing." They look like any other good Christian. They look like any other church member. Their leadership skills look promising and they ascend to leadership in the church. Then, they begin to display their true character. Paul told the Ephesian elders, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). Notice that Paul used the exact same imagery as our Lord. He described those who will "come in among you." Presumably, these are those that start off looking like any other Christian. They ascend to leadership -- to the board of elders. Paul put it this way, "from among your own selves men will arise" (verse 29). They come "up from within" the church. At some point, they begin to shed their sheep skin and show their bloody fangs, which have begun to devour the sheep in the flock as they "speak perverse things" and "draw away the disciples after them."

False prophets look good (at first any way). Jude says that these are those who "have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation" (verse 4). Paul wrote that the false apostles disguised themselves "as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds" (1 Cor. 11:13-15).

People like to follow these false prophets, because their message is pleasant and their words are smooth. False prophets tell the people what the people want to hear. Remember when Paul warned Timothy, "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Last Wednesday night (during the Ladies' Bible Study), I spent with Dan Scott (and his dog, Cadet). Hanna, my three year old, came with me. Cadet is a ninety pound German Shepherd, who scared my daughter simply because of his size. We spent some of the night attempting to get Hanna to be comfortable around Cadet. Slowly, she began to warm up to him, as she rolled a ball toward him and even pet him a little bit. There was one point when Dan said, "Hanna, do you want to rub his belly?" When Cadet heard this, he knew what was coming, so he sprawled out on the floor with his belly in full exposure to all of us. Cadet has learned that he loves to have his belly tickled. In the same way, people today love to have their ears tickled. False prophets stand as a ready tickler.

There are many Biblical examples of this. Recently, we have been reading through 2 Chronicles in our family worship. When we arrived in chapter 18, we read about Ahab, King of Israel, who was thinking about attacking Ramoth-gilead. (Much like President Bush today, as he is seeking wisdom and permission to fight with Iraq). In this instance, Ahab really wanted to attack Ramoth-gilead. So, he called upon Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, to make an alliance with him. (Much like President Bush today, as he is seeking an alliance with Tony Blair in England). Before Jehoshaphat would form an alliance with Ahab, he wanted to seek the approval of the LORD's prophets first. So, Ahab "assembled the prophets, four hundred men, and said to them, 'Shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?'" (2 Chron. 18:5). And they said (as we would naturally expect from false prophets, who readily are prepared to tickle ears), ... "Go up, for God will give it into the hand of the king." (verse 5). One of them, named Zedekiah, sought to convince the kings by dramatically acting out the situation. He made some horns of iron for himself (like those Hagar the Horrible wears) and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'With these you shall gore the Arameans, until they are consumed'" (verse 10). All of these prophets were united. With one voice they said, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and succeed, for the LORD will give it into the hand of the king" (verse 11). These prophets were telling the king exactly what the king wanted to hear! Their words are pleasant and they look good.

Jehoshaphat, however, said, "Is there not yet a prophet of the LORD here that we may inquire of him?" (verse 6). Ahab replied, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me but always evil. He is Micaiah, son of Imla." (verse 7). Sure enough, when Micaiah was brought into the kings, he spoke against Ahab as he spoke the truth. He said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep which have no shepherd; and the LORD said, 'These have no master. Let each of them return to his house in peace'" (verse 16). Essentially, Micaiah said that the king, Ahab, was going to be killed when he went up to fight against Ramoth-gilead.

Do you remember what Ahab did? He followed the prophets who told him exactly what he wanted to hear! Do you remember what happened to Micaiah, the prophet? He was thrown in prison and fed sparingly with bread and water (verse 26), until Ahab returned from battle. Do you remember what happened to Ahab? He died in battle (verse 34).

Now I ask you, which of these prophets were true? The four hundred prophets, who looked good and tickled Ahab's ears by telling him what

he wanted to hear and proclaimed victory? Or, the one, who told the truth, regardless of how well it was received?

False prophets tell the people what it is that they want to hear. They tickle the ears and look real nice. Let's face it, there are many people in the world (and in the church), who don't want to hear the truth. Rather, they want to feel better about the difficulties in their life.

They want to hear, "It's OK to be angry with other people. You need to let out your pent-up anger, lest you explode within yourself." They don't want to hear the words of Jesus, "everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell" (Matt. 5:22). Your anger shouldn't be pent up within you, rather it should be dissipated at the cross of Christ.

They want to hear, "It's OK for you to watch those movies, with violence and nudity." They don't want to hear, "Everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28).

They want to hear, "You have to stand up for your rights. If you don't, who will?" They don't want to hear, "do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you" (Matt. 5:29-42).

For the most part, people simply don't want to hear this sort of counsel. They don't want to be confronted with the words of Jesus. Rather, they would prefer to be encouraged in their sinful ways. There will always be false prophets out there who will tell the people what they want to hear, to ease their conscience from the conviction of the truth of their sinful ways.

This week, beginning tomorrow, the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors ([www.nanc.org](http://www.nanc.org)) will meet for their annual conference. This year it will be in Rolling Meadows. In some sense (though I am not entirely familiar with the history), NANC has been established in an effort to bring back a Biblical perspective to Christian counseling. The direction of much counseling today has been to take the world's model and cover it with Christian garb. For instance, there are Christian seminaries today that will encourage using the Rogerian counseling method. This method advocates acting like a big mirror to allow people to see themselves and diagnose their own problems in their life. This model of counseling is based upon the assumption that we are basically good people and simply don't see the error of our ways, but when we see them, we will willingly change them. Yet, the Bible clearly teaches that we are evil and want to go our own way and do our own thing. Additionally, there are seminaries that would also encourage using behavioral approaches, such as B. F. Skinner popularized. This model encourages rewarding the good behavior and punishing the bad behavior. Behaviorism has a tendency to create Pharisees, who look good on the outside, but are still rotten on the inside. I believe that NANC is attempting to bring the world of Christian counseling back to a Biblical perspective.

Recently, I was speaking with a pastor friend of mine, who has faced some recent frustrations in his counseling of others away from their sinful behavior. He has boiled down his counseling to three simple principles, which he will willingly share with those with whom he counsels. He says, ...

1. I will help you see your sin (from the Bible), which is creating your problems.
2. I will show you (from the Bible), how Christ is sufficient to help you in dealing with these problems.
3. I will pray with you, that Jesus Christ might change you.

I think that these principles are good. Admittedly, however, great care needs to be taken in the application of these principles when dealing with those who are seeking counseling. Jesus taught us to be kind and compassionate toward others, especially when a believer is struggling with their sin. Yet, people don't often want to hear about their sinful behavior. (This was the frustration of my pastoral friend).

No place is this hatred of hearing our own sin demonstrated more than in Isaiah 30, when the rebellious people of Israel refused to listen to the instruction of the LORD. They sought to instruct the prophets by saying, "You must not prophesy to us what is right, speak to us pleasant words, prophesy illusions. Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 30:9-11). Much of our seeker movement today comes dangerously close to this mentality. Think about it. Today, we have churches that listen to the counsel of those in the world, who say, "speak to us pleasant words, prophesy illusions." So, a church is established based upon what the people would like and want, rather than what the Holy One of Israel would say to them. It's no wonder why these churches are often packed!

Jeremiah was almost killed by the other prophets of his day for prophesying the truth about the coming threat of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon (Jer. 26:8). It was only a court order which prevented it (Jer. 26: 16). At one point, he was thrown into the bottom of a well, where he sank into the mud, with no water or food to sustain him (Jeremiah 28:6). All of this happened, because he didn't speak good and pleasant things for Judah. The people of Jeremiah's day said, "peace, peace," when there was no peace (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). Jeremiah would have nothing to do with it and the people hated him for it.

False prophets look good. Look at verse 22, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'" False prophets often do amazing things. They prophesy in the name of Jesus. They cast out demons in the name of Jesus. They perform many miracles in the name of Jesus. People look to these types of people and say, "Aren't they wonderful?" Look at the things that they can do?

I want to warn you, church family, not everything is as good as it appears. Remember, the magicians of Moses' day were able to duplicate some of the plagues that the LORD brought (Ex. 7:11, 22; 8:7). Moses warned of the prophets who will give "a sign or a wonder," which

comes true (Deut. 13:2), and will say, "Let us go after other gods." In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus will say that "false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24). I believe that much of what is on Christian television today is of this variety. Today, we are like the Jews of Jesus' day, who seek for signs (1 Cor. 1:22). Anyone who can put on a show of miracles and healings, will find a ready and willing people to follow after them.

While false prophets may look good on the surface, when you investigate the matter a little bit, you will find that they are actually rotten to the core. Jesus called the Pharisees, "white-washed tombs." On the outside they "appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27). Though false prophets look good on the outside, they are bad on the inside. This leads us to our second observation this morning, ....

## **2. False prophets are bad.**

This observation is somewhat obvious. This is what the name "false" implies. Jesus said in verse 15, "but inwardly are ravenous wolves." The church is often described as a flock of sheep (Ps. 23; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:3, 4; John 21:15-17). One of the greatest enemies to a flock of sheep are wild animals, such as wolves, which want to order lamb for dinner. Jesus says here that "inwardly" (i.e. their true character, not the façade that they put up on the outside) is that of an enemy (i.e. a wolf).

Wolves will ravage the flock. Wolves will scatter the flock. Wolves will cause dissensions in the church. Wolves will cause churches to split. This is because wolves aren't in it for the sheep, they are in it for themselves. A wolf in the pen will not help the sheep, but will devour the sheep. Jesus illustrated this when speaking about the contrast between the good shepherd and the hireling, who is in it for his own benefit. Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep" (John 10:10-15).

Peter said it this way, "False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. ... speaking arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption" (2 Peter 2:1-3, 18-19). As Jesus said, "inwardly they are ravenous wolves."

Though they may appear to look good on the outside, you can detect whether they are good or bad, by looking carefully at them. Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits" (verse 16). Again, in verse 20, Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits."

Now, in your Bible study, whenever you come across a phrase that is repeated twice, remember, it is often repeated for emphasis. In this case, Jesus begins his discussion of good fruit and bad fruit by saying, "you will know them by their fruits" (verse 16) and Jesus ends his discussion of good fruit and bad fruit by saying, "you will know them by their fruits" (verse 20). Jesus forms a sandwich of sorts around his illustration. The two ends of the sandwich are obviously, the key to discerning false prophets and teachers.

Now, a good question to ask here, is this, "What sort of fruit is Jesus talking about?" Before I answer this question, let's first look at Jesus' illustration. Jesus says, "Grapes are not gathered from thorn [bushes,] nor figs from thistles, are they? Even 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. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (verses 16-19).

The illustration is clear enough. In verse 16, Jesus tells us that you don't get fruit from plants which bear no fruit. You don't expect to get beans from velvet weed. Neither do you don't expect to get strawberries from wild grass. In the same way, false prophets are the types of plants that produce fruit. Rather, they produce thorns and thistles, which nobody needs.

In verses 17 and 18, Jesus tells us that a good tree will produce good fruit and a bad tree will produce bad fruit. You can't have it any other way. In fact, it is the fruit that defines the goodness (or the badness) of the tree. If you have an apple tree in your back yard and all it produces is shriveled up apples, you call the tree a bad apple tree. However, if you have an apple tree that produces luscious Macintosh apples that are very sweet to the taste, you call the tree a good apple tree.

What happens to the tree that doesn't produce good fruit? It "is cut down and thrown into the fire" (verse 19). We had a great picture of this at our house. We moved in a little over a year ago and had this tree that had leaves on about half of its branches. This summer, there were leaves on less than a tenth of the branches. It wasn't a fruit-bearing tree, but it was a dying tree. What did we do? We were planning on cutting it down. But when we went on vacation this summer, one of you from church came and helped us out by cutting down the tree for us. It was a bad tree, so down it came.

Let's get back at our question, "What sort of fruit is Jesus talking about?" Jesus' illustration teaches us that fruit is used to describe whatever a tree or a plant produces. In the case of anyone claiming to lead the church, you can look at everything they produce and then, you can see whether or not it is good or bad. Furthermore, you ought to examine everything that this man is producing. You ought to inspect his ...

### **1. Behavior (i.e. character)**

Perhaps this is the first thing you think of when you think of fruit. You think of one's behavior. After all, Paul spoke about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, which describes one's attitudes in dealing with others. In the life of every Christian, there ought to be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This especially goes for Christian leaders. Or, you think about the

qualifications given for an elder in the church (in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). Every Christian leader, ought to be above reproach, a one-woman man, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money, managing his household well (his children included), nor a new convert. A false prophet will often fail in these types of categories.

Another thing that a Christian leader produces is ...

## **2. Teaching**

Every leader has some type of teaching. You ought to determine whether or not it lines up with Scripture. If he teaches that Jesus wasn't God, then you obviously know that his teaching is bad fruit. If he predicts something in the future, and it doesn't come true, you know that his teaching is bad fruit. We are all about teaching the Bible, here at Rock Valley Bible Church. You hang around here for some time, and you will learn the Bible and will be able discern the teachings of others.

Another thing that a Christian leader produces is ...

## **3. Disciples (i.e. followers)**

You see what sort of people are following this individual. We know from Jesus' words that a disciple, fully trained, will be like his teacher (Matt. 10:25). One thing about disciples is that they will pick up on the emphasis of their leader and often will magnify it.

Last Friday (two days ago), Richard Reid, (alias, the Shoe-Bomber), pleaded guilty to charges that he tried to blow up American Airlines Flight 63 as it flew from Paris to Miami with explosives stuffed in his shoes. Speaking to a judge in the United States, he said, "I'm a disciple of Osama bin Laden. I'm an enemy of your country." Richard Reid's activities demonstrate exactly what sort of individual Osama bin Laden really is. This is a good example of examining one's followers to understand what the leader is like.

### **A Christian leader produces behavior (or character), teaching, and disciples (or followers).**

Do you see a problem in our American Christianity? We have voices all around us bombarding us with Christian teaching and Christian books and Christian tapes and Christian television programs. Yet, of the vast majority of people who are teaching us (on the radio and on our tapes and in our book), we don't know them personally, so we cannot discern what their behavior is like. Furthermore, we aren't involved in their ministry, so we don't know what their followers are like. Fortunately, we do know what their teaching is like, which is good, but we are often prohibited from seeing the full picture.

At this point, we could over-react and say that we ought never to listen to anybody with whom we can't verify their fruit. Stop listening to the radio. Stop reading the books. Listen only to me, or to others whom you personally know. If you go this far, you pretty much have to eliminate all of the books that were written in previous centuries. I don't believe that the solution to our dilemma is to abandon all teaching where we don't personally know the one teaching or leading us, though I have heard of other churches that teach this.

At this point, I would simply instruct you to be careful to whom you listen. Furthermore, you ought to be interested in the lives of those whom you listen to on the radio or on cassette tapes. Because, wolves are out there. I remember asking a well-known theologian about his family. He sort of balked at the question saying, "we preach Christ, not ourselves." I appreciated this man's heart in the matter in his answer to the question, but the lives of Christian leaders ought to be open and transparent for all to be able to see the type of fruit which they are producing. Personally, I love going to other churches and hearing (and watching) other men preach in their own context of the churches they lead, because you can really get a flavor of the fruit of their life, which you then can trust.

I remember one spring travelling with my wife to hear a well known Christian leader at his church. We were very much encouraged by our visit there, especially as we met several of the people in the church. We went out to lunch with a family from the church, who encouraged us, "whenever you come back into this area, give us a call if you need anything." My trust for this man's ministry sky-rocketed that day, because I saw the good fruit that was being produced in the ministry he was leading.

At this point, let me say, that it is very important for you all to know the leaders of Rock Valley Bible Church. The sheep need to know the shepherd(s) and the shepherd needs to know the sheep. In our case today, you need to know the sort of life that I lead. You need to see the way I manage my household. You need to see the fruit that God is working in my life. Paul told Timothy, the young pastor in Ephesus, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:12). Timothy was to be an example to his congregation that they might see and know what sort of life his teaching is producing. How can I be an example to you if you don't see me and know me? A few verses later, Timothy was told to "take pains [in the things of the ministry] and to be absorbed [in the things of the ministry], that your progress may be evident to all" (1 Tim. 4:15). How can this progress be known to all, but that all know Timothy.

I look across all of you, and I believe that we have had most of you in home for dinner at some point over this past year. If we haven't, it is probably because you are new to the church (like in the last month or so), or because we simply haven't put our schedules together. It hasn't happened by accident. It hasn't happened without a purpose in mind. Yvonne and I are firmly convinced that ministry is one-on-one. It is family-on-family. What we do on Sundays is great when we gather together. But we know that our real impact will be done on a personal level. It is our desire and our plan that our service to you all and our love for you would be multiplied, as you minister to others.

It hasn't been an accident that we have gathered every third Sunday in our home for our "Sup-n-Sings." It is at this time that we open our homes for you to join us in our lives. Sure, we enjoy our light dinner and our singing together, but another benefit is that you see us in our environment and see how we live.

You want to look at my teaching? Check the internet. Every sermon I have preached at Rock Valley Bible Church in the last year and a half are posted there. I'm not hiding everything. You want to look at my behavior (my character)? I've been around. I have willingly invited you to be around me as well, inviting you to be with me in my house. You want to look at my followers? Look around. (Now, I'm not taking credit for

everything that God has done in your lives). But, I do believe that the flavor of the ministry here, in some way reflects upon me.

It isn't just about me, either. At Rock Valley Bible Church, we need other qualified men, who will lead the church in a godly direction. **The greatest defense against false teaching within the church is the appointing of godly elders, whom you know and trust.** My desire is for other men to join with me in the leadership of Rock Valley Bible Church in a formal manner as "elder" or "deacon." Perhaps there are some of you men, who aspire to lead the church (either as an elder or as a deacon), please come to me and approach me, and say, "Steve, I want to begin pursuing being an elder or a deacon. I believe that God has been qualifying me to lead the church, because of the heart that I have for his word and the integrity of my family. I want to do this. I am burdened by this. I can do no other than serve in this way." We need this.

### 3. False prophets will be destroyed.

This is first hinted in verse 19, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." In verses 21-23 it is implied as well, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'"

The thrust of these verses is clear. In the judgement, there will be these Christian leaders, who stand before Jesus and expect to be allowed to enter into the kingdom of heaven, but will be denied entrance. From the context, it appears as if they had every intention of entering in. It appears as if they try to argue their case with these familiar words, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" The implication seems to be that since they did these things they were expecting to get into the kingdom. But, alas, Jesus will turn them away (verse 23), "I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS."

If you try to enter into a show without a ticket, you will be stopped by the authorities. They will say to you, "Hold on a minute. Where do you think that you are going? Where's your ticket?" If you cannot produce a ticket, you will not be able to enter into the show. What's the problem here with these people? Apparently, they didn't have the ticket required to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus told them, "I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS." There are two things wrong with their attempted entrance.

**1. Christ didn't know them.** They were not of His sheep.

**2. They practiced lawlessness,** rather than following the shepherd.

I am reminded of Jesus' words in John 10, when he told the unbelieving Jews around Him, "You do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:26-27). The problem with these false prophets is that they weren't Jesus' sheep and they demonstrated that in their practice of lawlessness, which results in not following Jesus.

Though they had great things going for them (i.e. prophesying, exorcism, miracles, good words, ...), but they missed the main thing: knowing Jesus Christ and following Him. Jesus once said, "This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent" (John 17:3). Those who know God are known by God and will follow God (John 10:27) and will enter the kingdom of heaven. It's not conceivable that those who know God will walk in any other way than the way laid out for us in this sermon we have been looking at, pursuing holiness in thought, word, and deed.

An almost parallel account of these verses is given for us in Matthew 25:1-12 in Jesus' parable about the ten virgins, who "took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom" (verse 1), who is obviously Jesus. In this parable, Jesus described how five of them were foolish and five of them were wise. The wise ones had brought oil with them and the foolish ones had left without any oil. And it came about that late into the night, the foolish ones went to purchase oil for their lamps. It was at that time that the bridegroom returned. Jesus says, "and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'" (Matt. 25:10-12). The issue here is that Jesus didn't know them.

These verses here (Matthew 7:21-23) are perhaps some of the most terrifying verses in all of the Bible. Verses that speak about hell are terrifying in and of themselves. Listen to the descriptions of hell, which appear in the Bible...

- outer darkness (Mat. 8:12)
- weeping, gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 25:30)
- fiery furnace (Matt. 13:41-42, 50)
- darkness (Matt. 25:30)
- eternal fire (Matt. 25:41)
- cursed (Matt 25:41)
- eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46)
- hot, agonizing flame (Luke 16:24)
- conscious regret (Luke 16:27-31)
- wrath of God (John 3:36)
- wrath, fury, distress (Rom. 2:3-9)
- no escape (1 Thess. 5:3)
- separated from God's presence (2 Thess. 1:9)
- prison (1 Pet. 3:19)
- blackest darkness (2 Peter 2:17)
- torment (Rev. 14:10-11)
- no rest (Rev. 14:11)
- fiery lake of burning sulfur (Rev. 21:8)

- second death (Rev. 21:8)

(Taken from a list generated by Les Lofquist, Voice Magazine, September/October 2001, p 8).

In verse 23, when Jesus says, "depart from Me," He picks up from verse 19 ("cut down and thrown into the fire,") and implies that these individuals are going to hell. The reason why these verses terrifying is that these people didn't think that they were on the road to destruction. After all, they had done mighty things for God. As a result of their demonstration of righteousness in one area of their life, they convinced themselves that they were on the road to life. In other words, they were convinced that they were Christians. They never doubted it. They thought to themselves, "look at the wonderful things that I have done. Certainly, I am a Christian!" These people, certainly never thought that they would be in hell forever.

The curious thing about the doctrine of hell is that those who hear of it convince themselves that they will not go there. Jonathan Edwards once said, "Almost every natural man that hears of hell, flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own security, he flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do; every one lays out matters in his own mind how he shall avoid damnation, and flatters himself that he contrives well for himself, and that his schemes will not fail. They hear indeed that there are but few saved, and that the bigger part of men that have died heretofore are gone to hell; but each one imagines that he lays out matters better for his own escape than others have done: he does not intend to come to that place of torment; he says within himself, that he intends to take care that shall be effectual, and to order matters so for himself as not to fail" (in his famous sermon, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God).

Yet, the brutal reality of eternal life is that not everyone who thinks that they are a Christian are actually a follower of Jesus Christ. There are many people (in fact, I would argue, the majority of people) in the churches today, who believe that they are Christians, though, they themselves are not known by Jesus Christ. The fruit they produce demonstrates that they are not known by Christ. Jesus said, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). This is the issue with these false prophets. They did not do as Christ had said. Rather, they "practiced lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23). Sure, they may have looked good by the things that they did, but upon closer examination, it was evident the lives of these people were actually filled with wickedness.

The Bible clearly teaches that the life one leads will demonstrate the authenticity of one's profession of faith in Christ. Speaking of the evil teachers, Paul said that "They profess to know God (with their mouths), but by their deeds (i.e. their fruit) they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed" (Titus 1:16). It is their behavior that gives them away. Paul warned us that there are those who hold "to a form of godliness (they look good), although they have denied its power" (2 Tim. 3:5). There is this external camouflage about them, but pretty soon, you will discover that all you need to do is lift up their outer sheepskin garment and you will discover that they are, in actuality, a wolf, not a sheep. Paul adds that we are to "avoid such men as these" (2 Tim. 3:5).

My final exhortation to you this morning, is this, ...

### **Don't believe them!**

Or, to use Paul's terminology, "avoid such men as these" (2 Tim. 3:5). If you will follow them, you will find yourself in the same situation as they did. You will find yourself, professing, "Lord, Lord," only to be denied entrance to the kingdom. This is perhaps the most tragic thing that can ever come upon an individual: thinking he is on the narrow path, but finding out that he is on the wide path. There are many who are deceived into following them along this path.

I want to finish by giving a testimony of the Lord's usage of these words in my life. No other passage of scripture has affected me as much as these verses. I rarely share my testimony without mentioning the impact that these verses have had upon my life. You can look at our web site and see them posted prominently in my testimony that is out there.

See, I grew up in a church where nobody was challenged in their faith. All who came to church were accepted as Christians. Never were there warnings that you might be deceived into thinking that you are a Christian because of all of the good things that you are doing: attending church, giving to the church, and generally having a good attitude. If these things are present, all must be OK. Verses like these we have studied this morning were never mentioned in church. Nobody's salvation was ever brought into question.

So, when I heard the truth expounded from this passage 13 years ago, I was stirred in my soul to know Jesus Christ and make sure that I wouldn't stand before Him, expecting to get into heaven, only to be turned away, because Christ never knew me. It is the reason why I went to Seminary. It is why the reason I stand before you today. Do what Peter said, "make certain about His calling and choosing you" (2 Peter 1:10). I don't want you to be deluded. I want you to see the marvelous truths in all of the Bible for what they are and embrace them and not be deceived about things.

We saw in Men's Equippers yesterday that God calls us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And when you see the marvels of His grace, He will strengthen you to put the Sermon on the Mount in practice. He will keep you on the narrow way, thereby, you will know that you have eternal life. Whether distresses or tribulations or difficulties or temptations or yes, even false prophets, would come upon you, He will strengthen you to stay on the narrow way. **This is my prayer for you: May you stay on the narrow way.**

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 6, 2002 by Steve Brandon.  
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