

# The Sermon on the Mount: A Reformed Exposition

## Chapter 33: The Narrow Gate

[Brian Schwertley](#)

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Mt. 7:13-14).

After completing the main body of His sermon, Jesus turns His attention toward applying what He has said to His audience. No more ethical teaching will be given for, from this point on, Christ will be warning His hearers about the absolute necessity of embracing Him and living the life of discipleship. The Sermon on the Mount is not meant simply to be admired, but obeyed. In essence, our Lord is saying, “Now that you know the true character of the kingdom I am bringing into this world; the differences between what God requires you to believe and be, versus the corrupt, unbiblical, popular religion of today and the strict requirements of discipleship for My true followers, come to Me at once, embrace what I have said, separate yourself from the crowd and follow the narrow path of discipleship and genuine sanctification.” There is a sense in which this is the most important imperative of the whole sermon, for if the narrow gate is not entered, all is lost. People’s entire lives would be full of vanity, foolishness, wickedness and lies, lived on a highway to hell.

By way of introduction there are a number of things to note regarding this passage.

First, the imperative of verse 13, “*enter* by the narrow gate,” is the central proposition or main point of this whole final section. All the warnings which follow are designed to reinforce this command. There is the warning of the wide gate and broad way which leads to destruction. There is a warning about false profession. There are people who claim to be Christians that are antinomian. They are also on the broad path, but do not know it; they will be excluded from heaven by Christ Himself. Then, finally, there is a parable about two builders. The one heeded our Lord’s words and thus he could withstand the storms of life. He persevered on the narrow road and was victorious. The other man’s building or life was destroyed because he listened but did not obey. He didn’t enter the narrow gate or live on the narrow way. One cannot help but notice the brilliance of Christ’s preaching; His application is penetrating and multi-faceted. The Sermon on the Mount demands decisive action on the part of every listener. “Enter by the narrow gate.”

Second, note that Jesus only speaks of two gates, two ways, two kinds of travelers and two final destinations. There are many people who view these two alternatives as descriptive of two paths with one containing all sincere, devout, religious people—whether Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, etc.—and the other containing only gross, irreligious, debauched sinners. That is, people who are leading a very lawless, disgusting lifestyle (e.g., whores, drunks, drug addicts, child molesters, murderers, etc.). This is a false and dangerous perversion of this passage. We need to keep in mind that our Lord is preaching to a large multitude of religious Jews. Many Jews were very devout and very sincere about their beliefs, yet rejected Jesus Christ and attempted to establish their own righteousness before God by keeping the law. These people

were proud and self-sufficient. Our Lord includes these people along with the scribes and Pharisees on the broad path that leads to destruction. It is important that we recognize that the broad gate and wide way contains all people, no matter what race or religion, who have not embraced Christ as Savior and Lord and who are not following Him as faithful disciples. Therefore, the Savior is plainly teaching that ultimately there are only two kinds of religions or philosophies in this world: the true or false. Consequently, if we profess Christ we need to examine ourselves in light of our Lord's teaching in order to see if we have really entered the narrow gate and are truly walking in the narrow way. Those who are not followers of the Redeemer must recognize the terrible horrifying place they are in and thus "strive to enter through the narrow gate" (Lk. 13:24).

Third, one thing that is striking about these verses is the fact that they are so completely contrary to the common modern evangelical method of presenting the gospel. The typical pastor today will say things such as: "Simply accept Jesus as your personal Savior"; or, "Just walk the aisle, pray the prayer and know that you are saved. Don't ever doubt it"; or, "Becoming a Christian is the easiest thing in the world and being a Christian will solve all your problems. Isn't it time to enter a life of prosperity and blessing?" Under the degrading, poisonous influence of heretical Arminian doctrine and semi-Pelagian "revivalism," gospel preaching has often been transformed into a slick sales pitch where everything is easy, positive and exciting. Christ, however, goes out of His way to present the complete picture of the Christian life and at the outset tells men to count the cost of discipleship. This is because our Lord does not simply focus on the one act of believing, but also on the whole life of struggle, tribulation and self-sacrifice that living a faithful Christian life entails. The Redeemer does not appeal to men's flesh or attempt to draw men who are proud, thoughtless and selfish. He does not want a church full of hypocrites. Indeed, the whole sermon has been directed against hypocrisy, pride and a complacent spirit. Rather, He is appealing to those who have been convicted by the Holy Spirit, are poor in spirit and mourn over their sins (Mt. 5:3-4).

While it is certainly true that we are justified solely by the sacrificial death of Christ and the imputation of His righteousness (Ac. 13:39; Rom. 3:20-24, 28; 4:3-8; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:8-9; Eph. 2:8-9) which is apprehended by faith alone; nevertheless, we are called to a life of self-denial in which we must take up our cross and continually follow Jesus (Mt. 16:24). In His presentation of what is necessary for Christian discipleship, He sets before our eyes the lifelong warfare involved in progressive sanctification. This involves plucking out the right eye and cutting off the right hand if necessary (Mt. 5:30). It means that we must "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). As Paul says, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Ac. 14:22). Jesus is discussing salvation in the broad sense which involves a faith that perseveres down the long, narrow, thorny road toward heaven. There is nothing of easy-believism or the idea of carnal Christians living in licentiousness in His message. We cannot serve two masters (Mt. 6:24). We cannot enter the narrow gate with the baggage of our old, unconverted life. Paul put it this way, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:13). When we look at the Christian life we see that it is hard, difficult and trying, but it is the only alternative if we are going to persevere and enter the kingdom of heaven.

## The Narrow Gate

The first thing that Jesus does in this section is command us to “enter by the narrow gate.” The imperative “enter” is an aorist because entering a gate only takes a moment. There is a starting point to the Christian life—the moment we first believe in Christ and repent of our sins. The verb tense indicates that everyone must take decisive action to enter the narrow gate. This point is brought out in an exhortation that parallels our passage found in Luke 13:24. After the disciples ask the Savior, “Are there few who are saved?” (v. 23), our Lord responds: “Strive to enter through the narrow gate.” “The Greek word rendered ‘strive,’ is that from which we take our English word ‘agonize.’ It implies great exertion and conflict. It is elsewhere translated, ‘labour fervently,’ and ‘fight.’ [see Col. 4:12; 1 Tim. 6:12].”<sup>1</sup> The matter of embracing the Redeemer and entering upon the narrow path of being a disciple of Christ is not one to be taken lightly. By birth we are already on the broad path that leads to destruction. By nature we are already part of the crowd that relishes sin, wants to be loved by this world and suppresses the truth of God at every moment. If we have not entered this narrow gate, then the wrath of God is upon us and the agony of hell is before us. We are on thin ice and, at any moment, we could die and be lost forever. Consequently, we must strive to enter this gate with every fiber of our being. Urgently, immediately enter the narrow gate. It doesn’t matter what your family, friends and acquaintances think; by God’s grace go through that narrow gate. Apart from Christ you are like the man in a submarine that is taking on water. Before you lay a small portal to life and safety; in such a situation you would rush to that portal and use of all of your energy to get through it before it was too late. Christ is the only way for you to escape the destruction of the broad path. Flee to Him at once and enter His salvation!

There are a number of things about Jesus’ statement that merit our attention. First, what is the narrow gate? The narrow gate is not defined by Jesus in the immediate context. However, it is not hard to determine from Scripture what this gate refers to. The narrow gate is Christ Himself who, in John’s gospel, calls Himself the door: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved” (Jn. 10:9). The narrow gate is the Savior and we enter this gate when we are converted to Christ. We have access to the Father and all the blessings of grace through Him. “[He] is the gate of heaven, through which we have boldness to enter into the holiest of all by faith and hope now; as there will be hereafter an abundant entrance into the kingdom and glory of God, through his blood and righteousness.”<sup>2</sup>

This explains why the narrow gate precedes the narrow way. The path of Christian discipleship always begins with the new birth (Jn. 3:3, 5), faith in the person and work of Christ (Rom. 3:20-24, 28; Eph. 2:8-9) and repentance toward God (Ac. 20:21). Such teaching is radically different from the Jewish doctrine taught at that time; that the Jews—the children of Abraham—were already in the kingdom by virtue of their lineage and circumcision. John concurs when he writes, “He came to His own, and his own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn. 1:11-12). “Only those are accounted the true children of Abraham who have his faith (Romans iv, 16), who do his works (John viii, 39), and who are vitally united to Christ (Gal. iii, 29).”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, 2:135.

<sup>2</sup> John Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament*, 1:70.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 323.

Second, why is the gate described as narrow? There are a variety of reasons.

(1) The kingdom that our Redeemer established is exclusive. There is only *one* door and *one* path to heaven—Jesus Christ. The idea that is very common in our day that all religions are basically true and generally teach the same thing is emphatically rejected by the Savior. The teaching that all paths lead to God is a lie of the devil designed to keep people on the broad path that leads to destruction. Christ said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (Jn. 7:37). “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12). “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.... I have come that they [My sheep] may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.... I give them [My sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (Jn. 10:9, 10, 28). “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (Jn. 11:25). “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.... He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (Jn. 12:46, 48). “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6).

Unlike various religious teachers throughout history who purport to point men to the true way, Jesus says that He Himself is the way. He is the only One who saves men and takes them to the Father. Unlike modern ecumenical false teachers, Christ compares people who attempt to get to heaven without coming to Him to thieves and robbers (Jn. 10:1). He told the Jews, who at that time were much more religious and devout than most people today, “I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He [i.e. the Messiah—the Son of God], you will die in your sins” (Jn. 8:24). When Peter (who was filled with the Holy Spirit) confronted the Sanhedrin after the first persecution he said, “Nor is there salvation in any other name, for there is no other name in heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Ac. 4:12). God has authorized only one way of salvation and Christ is the cornerstone of it. No other person, or system, or philosophy or religion has God’s authority or truth behind it. The Word of God could not be clearer on this matter. As Paul says, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus who gave Himself a ransom for all” (2 Tim. 2:5-6).

All men seek to manufacture a ladder of their own to heaven. Religions are full of “good” deeds, techniques, prayers and penances whereby men attempt to climb up to God. All these systems have one thing in common. They are based on some system of works-salvation. But the narrow gate is the way of grace alone, faith alone and Christ alone. It is simply impossible for depraved, polluted, sinful creatures to impress an infinitely holy God and gain entrance to heaven. The way of works seems right to men, but it is the way of death (Pr. 14:12). It is Satan’s goal to keep all deluded sinners on the broad path, the self-imposed so-called journey to God. What men need to grasp with the hand of faith is the glorious truth that Jesus has come all the way to sinners. God has come unto men because sinners could never come up to God. The gate is exceedingly narrow because it has nothing to do with human autonomy or achievement. You need to understand that the narrow gate is the only gate to heaven. Christ is your only hope of eternal life.

(2) The gate is narrow because the gospel and Christ (as defined by Scripture) are hated by the world and rejected by the vast majority of men (i.e. all unregenerate men). As Jesus says, “There are few who find it” (Mt. 7:14). Ever since the fall of Adam men—apart from a work of sovereign grace—are groping around in the darkness of sin, evil, error and ignorance. “The way

of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble” (Pr. 4:19). “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil” (Jn. 3:19). “There is none who understands or seeks after God” (Rom. 3:11). All unbelievers suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). Consequently, their foolish hearts have been darkened (Rom. 1:21). The broad gate encompasses the whole world of unsaved men. It is so wide that the blind walk through it. It takes no effort at all to enter this gate because the natural man enters it by birth. “Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph. 4:18).

(3) The gate is narrow because it is impossible to enter it without a work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. Our Lord said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mt. 19:24). After the disciples were “greatly astonished” by this statement they asked, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26). Christ said to Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:3, 5). The new birth makes one a new person, for that which is of the Spirit is spiritual or Spirit-directed (cf. Jn. 3:6). As Paul says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Consequently, believers “have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col. 3:9-10). This verse points to the radical extent of our change. We are not simply given a new tongue or a new hand, but a new heart. The principle of new life extends to every aspect of our being. Thus, entrance into the narrow gate begins with a supernatural work of God. It requires a spiritual resurrection from the dead (Eph. 2:1), a new creation (Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10), a work of sovereign grace (Eph. 1:4, 19).

(4) The gate is narrow because genuine conversion involves both faith in Christ and repentance toward God. No one can enter the narrow gate without believing in the person and work of Christ. Faith is the hand, instrument or vessel which receives the perfect salvation achieved by Jesus. We must believe that the Savior Himself, in our name and on our behalf, met all of our obligations before the heavenly bar of eternal justice. The Redeemer’s sacrificial death eliminates our sin, guilt and liability to punishment and His perfect, righteous life is imputed to our account. Thus, heaven is ours solely because of Christ. The object of our faith is Christ and the written word of God which tells us what to believe and how to live. Saving faith is rare because it only comes through supernatural grace (Eph. 2:8) and by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Although the Bible describes it as an activity of man (i.e. we must believe, God does not believe for us), yet we must not forget that it is a direct result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit upon man’s heart. Jesus is the gate and the Holy Spirit enables us to see this gate and lovingly draws us through it. The Holy Spirit uses the knowledge of the Word of God to convict a person of his sins, to convince a person of the truth of Scripture—in particular the gospel—and to place his trust in Christ. “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

When a person comes to Christ, he also repents of his sins. It is a great error to think that we can bring our old life of sin, worldliness and rebellion through the narrow gate. Saving faith is always accompanied by a change of mind concerning sin and a forsaking of iniquity. This is because by faith we lay hold of the *whole* Redeemer. We believe in Him not simply as Savior,

but also as Lord. We trust in Him not only as Prophet and Priest, but also as King. Consequently, we lay aside our weapons of warfare against His throne, bow the knee and fully surrender ourselves to Him. Anything that offends our King; that is contrary to His kingdom; that violates His teaching, must be cast aside.

The common teaching today that says a man can be saved simply by accepting Jesus while refusing to forsake a life of sin is totally unbiblical and exceedingly dangerous. It is a demonic doctrine, for it results in shallow, counterfeit conversions. It fills churches with unregenerate professors of Christ who do not manifest grace in their lives. There is no mourning over sin, poverty of spirit or thirsting after righteousness in such churches. It turns churches into clubs full of entertainment, programs, self-esteem, laughing and clapping. Jesus is turned into a resource for the betterment of man. He is the gateway to self-esteem, material prosperity and a happy, fulfilled life. He has come so that we can have a wonderful emotional experience and feel good about ourselves. Is such teaching consistent with what our Lord said about the need to count the cost of discipleship and repentance? No. There is no resemblance whatsoever. Our Lord said, "I tell you...unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Lk. 13:3). Matthew characterizes Christ's central message after He began His ministry as, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 4:17).

Preachers who do not set forth the full gospel message are cruel, for their preaching results in destruction and eternal death. They fail to point people toward the narrow gate and toward the narrow path that leads to life. They give their flock a false sense of security, while leaving them on the broad path of sin, which leads to eternal damnation. They attract people with itching ears that like the biblical teaching about a Savior, but emphatically reject the Lordship of Christ. Given this tragic fact we understand why the imperative regarding the narrow gate is followed by a warning against antinomian/heretical false prophets and the deluded fools who follow them (cf. Mt. 7:15-23). True preachers call sinners to both faith and repentance. Faithful pastors do not fail to warn people of the absolute necessity of repentance. Preachers should be ministers of the Word, not apologists for a lifestyle of sin and human autonomy.

Those who reject the necessity of repentance often argue that if repentance is required, then salvation is not wholly of grace. They say that it contradicts the biblical teaching that we are saved by faith in Christ alone. This view is a serious misunderstanding of the doctrine of repentance. Repentance is not a prerequisite of faith, but always accompanies it. Genuine faith is always accompanied by all the other saving graces. Our change of life and good works do not save us or contribute anything to our salvation; but, they flow from a heart changed and regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are the fruit of saving faith. It is simply impossible that those who are united to Christ by faith will not seek to obey Him and bring forth fruits of thankfulness. "You and your sins must separate, or you and your God will never come together. No one sin may you keep. They must all be given up: they must be brought out like the Canaanitish kings from the cave and hanged up before the sun. You must forsake them, abhor them, and ask the Lord to overcome them."<sup>4</sup>

James says that faith that does not lead to good works is dead, worthless and counterfeit (Jas. 2:20). Paul teaches that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). The fact that we are His workmanship proves that salvation is of the LORD. He made us what we are. The reality that we are created in Christ for good works demonstrates that redemption results in holiness. Consequently, those who live in habitual sin are not the subjects of redemption. There is no such

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<sup>4</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, as quoted in Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 327.

thing as a justification that exists without works. If we possess Christ and His saving benefits, then we are partakers of His sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30), for Jesus cannot be divided. Did not our Lord say that only “the pure in heart will see God” (Mt. 5:8)?

Given the fact that the command to enter the narrow gate is given right after the climax of the sermon about how a disciple of Jesus must live his life, we could say that repentance is being emphasized in this imperative. At the very beginning of the Christian life there must be a radical break with one’s non-Christian past. To break with the past life of sin requires a number of things. a) There must be a biblical understanding of what sin is. This involves knowledge of God’s holy law. “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 Jn. 3:4). After our Lord’s brilliant and searching exposition of Christian ethics He essentially says, “Now that you know what discipleship involves, *repent* and follow Me.” b) There must be an acknowledgement that we are guilty of sin. If a person does not see that he is guilty and stands under condemnation, he will not repent. When David confessed his sins and turned away from them he prayed, “I acknowledge my transgressions, and sin is always before me” (Ps. 51:3). c) There must be loathing of our sins. We hate the fact that we have offended God and have a deep regret and sorrow over our past evil course of life. “Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Cor. 7:10). d) There must be a turning from sin and a forsaking of it. “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin” (Ez. 18:30). It is not enough to intellectually acknowledge that we are sinners or have been living a life of scandalous sins. We must dedicate ourselves to Christ, become His slaves and eliminate any known sins from our lives. A sincere repentance must be an entire repentance. We simply cannot go through the narrow gate and come unto God while we cling to our idols. e) There must be a turning from sin to the living and true God. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7; cf. 2 Chr. 7:14; Jon. 3:10). When Paul described the gospel message that he first preached to the Jews and then to the Gentiles he said, “...that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” (Ac. 26:30). Earlier he said that he testified to “Jews and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ac. 20:21). “Both Jews and Gentiles had to repent of their sins and both had to express their faith in Jesus.... Indeed, ‘repentance and faith are tied together in an unbreakable connection’ [John Calvin].<sup>5</sup>

There are some things to note about repentance that each believer must to apply to himself. First, repentance involves leaving behind the way of the world and joining oneself to the people of God. This step is radical because it involves leaving anything (and anyone) behind that does not help you follow Christ. Your old unsaved friends that like to party, fornicate and use filthy speech will tempt you to commit sin and revert back to your old lifestyle. Perhaps, when you are more mature in the faith, you can witness to your old friends; but, now that you are a Christian you have nothing in common with them. If you associate with them you will either devolve to their level or witness to them and they will hate you unless they believe. Repentance involves a willingness to be unpopular, to be hated by the crowd, to be maligned and persecuted for your faith. Most young professing Christians who apostatize do so because they do not separate themselves from ungodly influences.

It also means that close relationships with unsaved relatives must be avoided. A repentant life means that we must not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). While we are still required to respect our parents, we must not allow their heathen influences to tempt us. Jesus

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<sup>5</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 726.

made this point clear when He said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it” (Mt.10:34-39). You must always keep in mind that unsaved relatives will call you back to the evil world system. Figuratively speaking, they are Canaanites and do not understand what it means to be Christian. Things like covenant headship, homeschooling, sabbatarianism, the rejection of pagan-papal holy days, and family worship are completely foreign and strange to them.

Entering the narrow gate and traveling the narrow path involves a radical break with the past. You must count the cost and understand what your new life involves. You are joining yourself to a tiny remnant in a post-Christian culture. Your views will be seen as antiquated, extremely bizarre and even harsh and unloving. You are in a culture where there is intense pressure to fit in and conform to accepted societal norms. You must be willing to regard all of the things that our culture desires as dung compared to owning Christ and you must realize that if you hang on to any of this worldliness you cannot enter the narrow gate.

Second, repentance involves abandoning syncretism with the world. Much of what passes as Christianity in our day is little more than baptized secular humanism. Many people profess Christ and think that their lives have changed, but they are still filled with the spirit of worldliness. They go to church and even use Christian terminology, but most things in their lives are done in full accord with the world spirit. Their houses are run by feminist philosophy. Their children are raised by the Molech state school. Their Sabbaths are given over to restaurants and the National Football League, after a brief church experience of course. Their businesses use the same unethical tactics as their heathen competitors. They refuse to turn the other cheek. They do not mourn over their sins. They do not go the extra mile and they do not love their enemies. In other words, they have really stayed in the broad gate and wide way in order to compromise with this evil world. They do not realize it, but they really want one foot in the kingdom of God and the other planted squarely in this world. Tragically, they are living in self-deception. We cannot take the world’s philosophy, ethic and worldview through the narrow gate; we must abandon it or all is lost. If we live the way of the world yet dress it up with Christian terminology or follow the world system yet do so in a church setting, we are only deceiving ourselves. Everything that pleases this evil world system must be left outside the gate if we are to walk the narrow path. This truth cannot be avoided.

Third, genuine repentance involves leaving behind our most cherished sins forever. There are many professing Christians who say to themselves, “Well, I’m willing to give this or that up, but there is this area over here that I simply cannot part with. I love it too much. I cannot live without it.” Such repentance is only partial and, thus, is phony. While repentance is never perfect this side of heaven because of the indwelling sin that remains with us, nevertheless all known sins must be forsaken. The prayer of a genuinely repentant heart is, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). If you love your sin more than you love Christ, then you have not passed through the narrow gate. You must give up your whole soul to Jesus to be His forever and ever. You must renounce the most cherished sins of your heart and continually strive to keep them out of your life. “True repentance must be perpetual. It is not my turning to God during today that will prove that I am a true convert; it is forsaking my sins

throughout the whole course of my life, until I sleep in the grave. You must not fancy that to live upright for a week will be a proof that you are saved, it is a perpetual abhorrence of evil. You may go home and pretend to pray, you may today be serious, tomorrow honest, and the next day you may pretend to be devout; but yet, if you return—as Scripture has it, like the dog to its vomit and like the sow to its wallowing in the mire—your repentance shall but sink you deeper into hell, instead of being a proof of Divine grace in your heart” (Charles H. Spurgeon on Ps. 7:12).

## Other Applications and Implications

There are a few important things to consider before we turn our attention to Christ’s reason for entering the narrow gate. First, what is the significance of the narrow gate preceding the narrow way? Jesus says that the narrow gate is first because regeneration, faith, repentance and justification precede progressive sanctification. In other words, we are saved the moment we believe and do not have to go through a long process to be justified. While it is true that one can speak of salvation in the broad sense which encompasses the new birth, justification, sanctification and glorification; nevertheless someone with true saving faith possesses eternal life the very moment he believes. “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (Jn. 5:24). The fact that the narrow gate precedes the narrow way refutes a number of dangerous errors.

It disproves the teaching on justification of the Roman Catholic Church. The papal church views the gate as coming at the *end of life* or even, for most Catholics, after a very long painful period in *purgatory*. They believe that God will only accept men after they become personally holy. Romanists teach that salvation is a *long process*; that men are only saved by faith plus the *good works that flow from faith*. They believe that very few actually enter the narrow gate during life and these few they call saints (a term that Paul applies to all Christians). Romanism combines the merits of Christ (which they implicitly teach are insufficient to save) with the inward holiness or *subjective righteousness* of men. They believe that justification is a cooperative effort between God and man. This doctrine is very similar to the old heresy of the Judaizers that Paul refutes in the book of Galatians. Christ rejects all of this teaching when he says that the long narrow road *follows* the narrow gate. It does not precede it. The long, narrow, thorny road of struggle is the life of one who *is already justified*. It is the path of the true Christian.

It disproves the Auburn Avenue or Federal Vision heresy. The Auburn Avenue theologians also place the narrow gate at the end and not the beginning of the Christian life. They teach that men are ultimately justified by faith and faithfulness to the covenant; by belief and personal obedience; by trust and perseverance in personal righteousness. They say that on the day of judgment, God will evaluate the works of believers and, if believers have been faithful enough to the covenant, they will receive final justification. This teaching is a deadly heresy. Our Lord says of all those who do not lead holy lives and walk the narrow path of godliness: “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Mt. 7:23). Everyone who is cast into the outer darkness on the day of judgment because he or she lived a life of habitual unrighteousness, *never* had a saving relationship with Christ to begin with. They had never entered the narrow gate. One cannot be on the narrow path without first coming through the narrow gate. Justification always precedes sanctification. Although no one is saved by personal holiness or faithfulness to the covenant, no one is truly saved who *after* professing Christ does

not practice these things. Personal righteousness is a fruit and evidence of justification and not a ground or cause of it.

It disproves all forms of sacramentalism. There is a sense in which sacramentalists teach that there are two gates in the Christian life. There is a very broad gate that one enters by baptism. Sacramentalists teach that everyone who is baptized is regenerated and therefore a Christian; but they also hold to a narrow gate at the end of life because most baptized people (they argue) are not faithful and lose their salvation. Jesus, however, rejects this view. There is only one narrow gate and it can only be entered by having a saving faith in Christ. (Saving faith receives and rests upon Jesus without exceptions or equivocations. It lays hold of the Savior in all His offices—as Prophet, Priest, and King. It receives all the Redeemer’s teachings [including the moral law] and all the challenges, pains and sufferings of the Christian life. It also looks to Christ for the sanctification that purifies the heart and life.) Moreover, we are assured in many places in Scripture that, once the narrow gate of salvation is entered, the Holy Spirit will not let true Christians abandon Christ and apostatize (Ps. 37:28; 121:3, 7-8; Jer. 32:40; Jn. 6:39; 10:27-29; 17:11; 24; 2 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 1:4-5; Jude 1, 24; etc.). Christians can fall into sin and backslide, but the Holy Spirit will not let them go back to the broad path.

Second, the gate to heaven is so narrow that sinners can only enter it one person at a time. Although as we have noted salvation is a work of sovereign grace, you personally are still responsible to repent and believe in Jesus. No one can believe or repent for you. Being part of a Christian family or becoming a member of a church does not get you in the gate. Every soul must choose between life and death, heaven and hell. Since we are born on the broad path, we really only have one choice. Are we going to remain with the world, the crowd, the mass of blind and deaf humanity or are we going to repent and follow the Savior? Ask yourself these all important questions. Do I believe in Jesus Christ? Have I really forsaken my most cherished sins and taken up the Savior’s cross? Do I confess Christ as my Savior and Lord before the world? Have I committed my whole life to following *everything* that the Lord requires of me? Does the Word of God dominate my life or am I still following the crowd? There can be no neutrality when it comes to Jesus. He demands a decision. He calls upon you to repent and follow Him the rest of your life. “This of course, involves a very definite act of the will. It calls upon me to say: ‘Recognizing this as God’s truth and as the call of Christ, I am going to give myself to it, come what may. I am not going to consider the consequences. I believe it, I will act upon it; this henceforth is going to be my life.’”<sup>6</sup> Right now, as you still have breath, you need to receive Jesus as the only means of life, as the only way and the only name given under heaven for salvation. You must not look for salvation in any other person or thing but Christ. You must cast yourself on the Redeemer alone. You must cling to the Savior no matter what the cost. You are choosing Jesus and you are choosing the narrow road. You embrace heaven and also embrace the burden of Christ: the cross, the persecution and the self-denial. You must be willing to take the whole Savior. “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Urgently, immediately, with utmost diligence enter the narrow gate. Heed the biblical wisdom of Richard Baxter:

If you mean indeed to turn and live, do it speedily, without delay. If you be not willing to turn today, you are not willing to do it at all. Remember, you are all this while in your blood, under the guilt of many thousand sins, and under God’s wrath, and you stand at the very brink

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<sup>6</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2:230.

of hell; this is not a case for a man that is well in his wits to be quiet in. Up therefore presently, and fly as for your lives, as you would be gone out of your house if it were all on fire over your head. O, if you did but know in what continual danger you live, and what daily unspeakable loss you sustain, and what a safer and sweeter life you might live, you would not stand trifling, but presently turn. Multitudes miscarry that willfully delay when they are convinced that it must be done. Your lives are short and uncertain; and what a case are you in if you die before you thoroughly turn! Ye have staid too long already, and wronged God too long. Sin getteth strength while you delay. Your conversion will grow more hard and doubtful. You have much to do, and therefore put not all off to the last, lest God forsake you, and give you up to yourselves, and then you are undone for ever.<sup>7</sup>

Third, our Lord's teaching about the narrow gate and the narrow way tells us something very important about personal evangelism. When presenting the gospel to others, we must never completely divorce receiving the forgiveness of sins from what God requires of believers after they are justified by faith alone. True biblical evangelism is concerned not merely with the one initial act of believing, but also with the whole life of discipleship which follows. When Jesus gave His disciples their marching orders after the resurrection He did not say, "Go into all nations and try to get people to make a decision for Christ." Instead He commanded them to "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19-20). If we witness to someone and they make a profession of faith, then our job is not completed until they are baptized and join themselves to a solid, Bible-believing, Reformed church. If people are to walk the narrow road of discipleship, then they must submit themselves to pastors and elders who are able and willing to teach the whole counsel of God (cf. Heb. 10:24-25; 13:7, 17). After Peter preached on the day of Pentecost and three thousand souls received the word, were baptized and added to the church (Ac. 2:41), "they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers" (Ac. 2:42). We come to Christ all by ourselves, but after we embrace Him we must join the church and place ourselves under all the *corporate* means of grace in order to walk on the narrow path. If someone confesses Christ but refuses to join themselves to the church, their profession is counterfeit.

### Christ's Reason for Entering the Narrow Gate: The Broad Path

After Jesus commands the assembled multitude to enter in by the narrow gate, He gives a strong and terrifying reason why it is the only viable, wise, biblical choice. The only alternative to the narrow gate is the broad gate and way which leads to eternal destruction. "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" (Mt. 7:13). There are two possibilities before all mankind. There is the narrow gate and way which involves a life-long commitment to Christ and there is the broad gate and way which leads to hell and eternal damnation. Our Lord essentially says, "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15). "Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death" (Jer. 21:8).

The Greek word translated "broad" is *eurychoros*. It is a compound word containing *eurys*, which means "broad," and *chora*, which means "country." Thus, this word does not simply refer to a wide road such as a four lane highway; but, refers to a path that encompasses

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 132-133.

the whole countryside. Tens of millions of people can walk this road side by side because it is so spacious. Indeed, in a sense, this road has no boundaries at all except one. The people on it cannot come near to the kingdom of heaven.

There are certain questions that most people would like answered, such as why are we here and where are we going. Here Jesus answers the second question with terrifying clarity. Everyone's life can be compared to a journey. There is the beloved spacious, roomy, comfortable road that is very easy and popular. This road is so broad, comfortable and approved that it seems like the logical place to be. But there is a major problem with this road—it leads to a deadly precipice where every single person on it falls into a terrifying abyss of death, suffering and destruction. People on this road go about their lives as if everything was fine, as if the end of the road was quite pleasant. They pretend that the road leads to paradise or they simply refuse to even contemplate such a question. If people in America were asked where they are going when they die, most would immediately respond that they are going to heaven. The passage before us, however, says something quite different and terrifying. Most people are on the broad path that leads to destruction. Christ tells us about the two roads and two possible destinations so that we would get off the broad road and make sure we are the narrow path that leads to heaven. There are a number of things to note about this broad road.

First, the broad road is the way of the flesh. It is exceedingly broad because everyone is born into it by nature. When Adam fell, the whole human race fell in him. Thus, everyone is tainted with hereditary sin and is by nature inclined toward evil. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (Jn. 3:6). "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born" (Ps. 58:3; 51:5; cf. Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Mt. 15:19; Rom. 5:12). Thus, no matter what philosophy or religion men invent out of their own minds, the path is always away from the true and living God of the Bible. The broad road is the way of human autonomy. Anything is accepted on this road as long as it doesn't include Jesus Christ, as defined by Scripture, or biblical Christianity.

Everyone who does not believe in Christ proceeds along this path of the flesh, autonomy and sin. Within the broad path there are different religions and worldviews that cater to different paths of autonomy. There are exceptionally religious people who act devoutly. There are murderers, thieves, rapists and professional criminals. One can find bishops and Satanists, nuns and prostitutes. "The covetous and the spendthrift, the profligate and the hypocrite, the Antinomian and the Pharisees, the sons and daughters of pleasure and the grave designing politicians and proud philosophers, decent moralists and infamous debauchees, have their several paths and their select companies; they mutually despise and condemn each other, yet they all keep one another in countenance by agreeing to oppose the holy ways of the Lord."<sup>8</sup> They are all at war with God and they all reject the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, the path is broad because it is the easy path. It is the road of tolerance, pluralism, diversity, permissiveness and moral laxity. It does not take any effort to go down this road at all. It holds the philosophy, "whatever feels good do it," or "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." There are really no curbs or boundaries on this road, for there are no ethical absolutes. Every opinion is equally true and equally false. The only absolute is that Jesus cannot be acknowledged or obeyed. Every man does what is right in his own eyes (Jdg. 17:6; 21:25). It does not take any effort or sacrifice to follow our own sinful inclinations. There is no need to strive to learn to follow one's own lusts; this all comes so naturally. One does not need to be diligent or work at being selfish, hypocritical, or pleasure-oriented. All of this evil flows freely

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Scott as quoted in Arthur Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 331.

from our wicked hearts (Mt. 15:19). People do not really need to repent or examine themselves if their religious life is external, mechanical and humanistic. The broad path is the way of everyone who is spiritually dead. Their dead hearts follow this evil world system as naturally as a feather floats on the wind. Consequently, they all follow the satanic philosophy: “Do whatever you want.” “The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts” (Ps. 10:4). “The transition from sin to sin, from occasional transgressions to habitual indulgences, is easy, and in this way you will be in no want of company. The old and the young, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned walk there. It is ‘the course of the world,’ in which all men naturally walk, ‘fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, and of the mind.’”<sup>9</sup>

The broad path was the way set before Eve by Satan when he accused God of lying and told her to become her own god determining for herself both what is good and what is evil. It is the path that rejects trust in God, hates the truth and breaks free of God’s moral requirements. It says, “I will not have Christ to rule over me.” Therefore, God is not sought. The Word of God is not diligently searched and the commandments of God are seen as antiquated and enslaving. It is very easy because the cross is not taken up, discipleship is not embraced and self-denial is not tolerated. “A dead fish can float with the stream, but only a living one can swim against it: so the unregenerate mechanically follow this road, for there is nothing in them to resist the law of gravity. The going is smooth and easy because it is all *downhill!*”<sup>10</sup>

The broad path is the path of custom and habit. It is the way that is celebrated by the media and praised by the crowd. It is the way that is rewarded by our Christ-denying society. It is easy to do what others like. It is easy to try and be popular. It does not take any effort to follow the trends, styles, and opinions of the pagan masses that modify their views as the world spirit evolves and changes. Unbelievers are like pigs at the garbage dump happily moving from trash heap to trash heap eating the scraps of a Christ-hating culture.

Third, the broad path is crowded. Jesus said, “There are many who go in by it” (Mt. 7:13). Throughout history the vast majority of people have taken no interest in Christ whatsoever. People today are too busy with pleasures and entertainments to give any time to God. When people get on a bus or plane, they first insist on knowing where the trip will lead them, but most people go through life on the broad road without any concern for their final destination. This incredible negligence can only be attributed to spiritual blindness. It is because the carnal mind is enmity against God (Rom. 8:7). “There is none who seeks after God” (Rom. 3:11). All men who have not embraced Christ are loyal to the devil—the god of darkness—because they love darkness rather than light. Men have been taken captive by Satan to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26). The fact that the majority is drifting along on the broad path toward hell without concern, effort or thought should cause us to think about our own life. Are we drifting with the crowd having no concern for our final destination or have we entered the narrow gate that is so unattractive to the masses? If you are not on the narrow path, are you willing to fight your way through the thoughtless, blind, contented crowd to go through the narrow gate? Are you willing to make a decisive break with your unconverted past to become a disciple of the Savior? Let us obey God who says, “You shall not follow a crowd to do evil” (Ex. 23:2).

Fourth, Christ warns us that the broad road leads to misery and destruction. Our Lord wants us to contemplate this all important decision. If you take the narrow road and follow Jesus, you will have to make sacrifices. You will have to take up the cross and deny yourself. You must die to self and live unto Christ. Your life is no longer your own, for you were brought with a

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<sup>9</sup> John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord*, 1:316.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 328.

price. The kingdom of God takes priority over our own wants and desires. This narrow way of tribulation and difficulties, however, leads to eternal life. There are unfathomable rewards for the Savior's disciples.

By contrast, the broad road is easy. It takes no effort. It is the way of pleasure, self-indulgence, fun and popularity. There are no sacrifices involved in following our own lusts and running with the crowd. But our Lord says the broad, easy way has a tragic end: destruction. We find this truth throughout Scripture. "The soul that sins will die" (Ez. 18:4). "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Those who do not enter the narrow gate and follow the narrow path will be cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). Everyone who does not follow the Lamb of God will be cast into the lake of fire and the smoke of their torment will ascend forever and ever (Rev. 14:11). Those who ran with the crowd and followed their lusts will lose everything on the final day. They will be cast into the ethical garbage dump of all human history where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched (Mk. 9:44, 48).

Those on the broad path are sowing seeds of lawlessness and must answer to God for a whole lifetime of sin and rebellion against His throne. As Paul says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Gal. 6:7-8). Those who tended to the desires of the present life and indulged the lusts of the flesh without any regard for the future life will reap what they have sown. On the great harvest day of history at the final judgment they will reap "everlasting destruction" (2 Thess. 1:9). But those who submit to Christ, walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) and are led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18) will be given the everlasting life that Jesus merited for them. On the final day those who have lived for self and rejected Jesus and the narrow path will endure shame and everlasting contempt (Dan. 12:2). They will be excluded from paradise and will be placed in the terrifying pit of the abyss (Rev. 20:3). But those who obeyed Christ will have God's shining countenance upon them. Their hardships will be replaced by eternal joy.

The Redeemer's argument is terrifying and extremely powerful. In essence, Jesus is saying that the proper way to count the cost and analyze one's decision about the two gates and ways is to view them from the perspective of eternity. Once we do this, we see how vain and stupid the broad path really is. Who in their right mind would choose a brief season of pleasures when the reward for such a life is an eternity of suffering, agony, despair and remorse? You need to know the bad news if you are going to embrace the good news. The gospel, or the narrow gate, is your only hope of deliverance from the bad news. You have been born and have continued to lead your life on the broad road leading to destruction. The good news is that Christ can save you from it. But if you do not believe that you are currently on the way to hell, how can you be interested in the good news of deliverance from it? Christ's logic is impeccable. His warning is terrifying, yet merciful. He spoke more about hell and warned people of it more than all the prophets and apostles combined because of His infinite love for His sheep.

Think about this warning. Meditate upon it. You know that someday every single human being must die. You know that after death you must stand naked before the great white judgment seat of Christ (Rev. 20:11). You know that the clock is ticking on our brief span of earthly existence. The grave awaits your body. Your flesh will rot and our soul will immediately be cast into hell if you do not repent and flee to Christ. If you do not embrace the Savior, but decide to stay on the broad easy path, then think of yourself on your death bed contemplating a life without Christ; a life of selfishness and sin. You know that you are about to take that final step into

eternity. You know that because you chose to stay on the broad path you have nothing to look forward to except fear, agony, horror, despair, torment and eternal suffering. Do you not see the great need to strive to enter the narrow gate while you still have breath; before it is too late? Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28). That body that you dressed in fine clothes and pampered on the broad road of pleasures will be resurrected unto everlasting pain, suffering and torment in hell. What is the brief span of your life compared to eternity? Is it not time to cast off temporal fleshly lusts in order to receive Christ and the assurance of everlasting life? Is not your soul worth more to you than the childish, vain trinkets of this world which is passing away? Repent or perish!

Our Lord's teaching about the final destination of everyone on the broad path tells us that God has made only *two* places for the final abode of men after death and the resurrection. There is heaven and there is hell. Also, the Bible is very clear that no one can ever escape from hell (cf. Lk. 16:26) and hell lasts forever (see 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 14:10; 20:10). There is no third estate called purgatory where people can burn off their "venial" sins. There are no second chances; there is no such thing as reincarnation. Moreover, the doctrine of annihilationism is unscriptural. People on the broad path cling to unfounded theories and lies about the afterlife in the vain hope that hell does not exist. Because of their unwillingness to go through the narrow gate, they cling to myths and human traditions about the afterlife. They listen to the lies of the false teachers who say that a God of love would never send people to eternal torment. These pseudo-preachers tell the flock, "Do not be afraid of going to hell. Do not fear the wrath of God. There is no such thing as the terror of the Lord." These wicked liars ignore the fact that the Word of God speaks of the Lord's infinite holiness far more than about His love. They not only ignore the dozens of passages of hell, but also the fact that according to the Bible God hates all the workers of iniquity (Ps. 5:5); that He is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11). Yes, the true and living God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29) that cannot tolerate or overlook sin. If your sins are not removed by the blood of Christ, then God has no choice. His nature requires that you go the hell for your sins.

People embrace the lies of false prophets because the thought of death makes them very uneasy. The thought of eternal damnation brings them to a panic. They try to convince themselves that there is a third way, a more moderate alternative. But Christ will have none of this humanistic rationalizing. He tells us the shocking truth in plain, sobering language. If you do not believe in Christ and become His disciple and live on the narrow road, then you have chosen to go to hell forever. Jesus tells this multitude to count the cost of discipleship and He also tells them to count the cost of not becoming a disciple. Your sole alternative to a life of servitude to Christ and heaven is darkness, slavery to the devil and the lake of fire. Choose this day who you will serve!

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