

L E A D E R G U I D E

SERMON

ON THE

MOUNT

PART THREE





GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS STUDY

We don't want this curriculum to be just another study that you do, we want it to positively impact your life and your walk with Christ. The goal is that you finish this study a different person than when you began. To that end, you'll find three sections in this book:

SERMON NOTES: The sermons each week will serve as your introduction to each topic, therefore faithfully and actively listening to the sermons is vitally important. Use this space to write down any notes that will help you remember the material covered. Jot down any quotes or thoughts that were meaningful to you and any questions that may come up during the sermon.

PERSONAL STUDY: You need to be in the Word yourself outside of your group time. To help you do this, we've provided space for you to record H.E.A.R. journals. The H.E.A.R. journaling method is a way to read the Bible with a life-transforming purpose. The acronym H.E.A.R. stands for Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond. We'll walk through the H.E.A.R. method in detail on the following page.

GROUP STUDY: The group study is where you will take a closer look at the week's passage from a different perspective. This is the time to share any insights you gleaned from the sermon and the time you spent in personal study completing the H.E.A.R. journal. It is recommended that you listen to the sermon and complete the H.E.A.R. journal before you attend the group discussion so that you will be most equipped to contribute to the discussion, which will provide the most benefit for everyone.

Above and beyond all the advice given here, the most important thing that you can do to maximize the effect of this study in your life is to pray for God to enlighten you to the teachings of Jesus and to give you the wisdom and strength to be faithful and obedient to everything you learn. Rely upon the Holy Spirit to make this study relevant and powerful in your life and you will undoubtedly be changed.

H.E.A.R.

HIGHLIGHT - After reading the passage of Scripture, highlight each verse that speaks to you by copying it in the space provided. Write out the passage along with the name of the book and the chapter and verse numbers. If you want to, give the passage a short title to describe it.

EXPLAIN - At this stage you will explain what the text means. By asking some simple questions, with the help of God's Spirit, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse.

Why was this written?

To whom was it originally written?

How does it fit with the verses before and after it?

Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?

What is He intending to communicate through this text?

APPLY - This application is the heart of the process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this heading. As you have done before, answer a series of questions to uncover the significance of these verses to you personally, questions like:

How can this help me?

What does this mean today?

What would the application of this verse look like in my life?

What does this mean to me?

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND - Your response to the passage may take on many forms. You may write a call to action. You may describe how you will be different because of what God has said to you through His Word. You may indicate what you are going to do because of what you have learned. You may respond by writing out a prayer to God. For example, you may ask God to help you to be more loving, or to give you a desire to be more generous in your giving. Keep in mind that this is your response to what you have just read.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you."

[Matthew 7:7]

SERMON

ON THE

MOUNT

- ONE.** Judging Others
- TWO.** Ask and It Will Be Given
- THREE.** The Golden Rule
- FOUR.** A Tree and It's Fruit
- FIVE.** I Never Knew You
- SIX.** Build Your House

ONE

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is a log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."

[MATTHEW 7:1-6]

PERSONAL

STUDY

[MATTHEW 7:1-6]

HIGHLIGHT. _____

EXPLAIN. _____

APPLY. _____

RESPOND. _____

GROUP

STUDY

BOTTOM LINE: A sinful judgmental attitude arises from a heart that doesn't fully understand the Gospel.



Spend a few moments as a group sharing any insights you may have gleaned from the H.E.A.R. journals.



What is your understanding of judgmentalism? Do you believe this is a problem in the world? In the church? In your own life?

Everything leading up to this point in the Sermon on the Mount makes it easy to understand why Jesus would address the issue of judging others. But what exactly is the kind of judgment that Jesus is referring to? Jesus has laid some very heavy demands upon His followers and there is not a single person who can say they have adequately fulfilled them all. So, the judgment that Jesus is referring to is probably not stemming from an idea of moral superiority--the kind of judgment that says, "You should listen to me because I'm better than you." That certain kind of critical spirit is wrong as Jesus has squashed any idea of moral superiority that any of His listeners may have had. So what kind of judgment is Jesus referring to? It may help us to look first at what Jesus is not saying. We can examine what else Scripture has to say about judging to help us understand. We'll start in the immediate context:



Read **MATTHEW 7:6**. Do you see any kind of judgment taking place here? Is this right or wrong judgment?

Jesus' command to refrain from passing judgment on others cannot possibly mean that we are not to try and discern someone's character. Here in this verse, Jesus refers to certain people as "pigs" and "dogs." It's safe to say that there was a bit of negative judgment here! Being free from judgmentalism does not mean that we can't hold opinions of what is right and wrong. The entire New Testament speaks against that idea. We read a bit later in v. 15 that Jesus tells His followers to "beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Both verses show us that we are to try and determine who the dogs, pigs, and false teachers are. We can't do this if we turn a blind eye to everyone's actions for fear of being judgmental.

Read 1 CORINTHIANS 5:9-13. What is the purpose of judging those inside the church?

Likewise, when Jesus says we shouldn't judge others, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't hold other Christians accountable for their sin. We must hold people to the standard that they claim for themselves. If we see what appears to be a good tree, then we must examine it to see if it bears good fruit. If it bears bad fruit, then it is safe to make the judgment that the tree is bad instead of good. Are they submitted to the Lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture? Does their life reflect a life lived in holiness and communion with God? If not, the church is to make a fair judgment about them that they are not truly living on behalf of the Lord.

The illustration Jesus gives in verses 3-5 help support this. Notice that the goal of removing the plank from our own eyes is so that the speck can be removed from the other person's eye. We pursue holiness ourselves so that we can push others toward holiness. The joy and purity of everyone is the goal here. Sin is deceitful and robs us of true joy. If we truly believe this, then to ignore blatant patterns of sin in the lives of those we love is not loving them like we should. So for the sake of the church as a whole, we examine ourselves honestly and rightly, removing any flagrant sin from our lives, that way when and if the time comes that we must confront others about their sin, we can do so from a position of blamelessness, not hypocrisy, because we are well aware of our own weaknesses. "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

Do you notice any planks that need to be removed from your eyes?

Read **JOHN 7:14-24**. How can we make a right judgment?

In this passage, Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath and the crowd passed judgment on Him saying that He was possessed by a demon. Jesus responds by saying that they too do works on the Sabbath because sometimes the day of circumcision for male babies falls on the Sabbath. This led Jesus to say that they should “not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment,” meaning that they should look at the heart of the person and their actions rather than what it appears they are doing.

Read **JOHN 7:18**.

The Jews were sincere in their hearts whenever they circumcised a baby on the Sabbath, they believed they were glorifying God by doing so, even though it was considered a work. So also, Jesus was sincere in His healing of the man on the Sabbath, since He was not seeking His own glory, but the glory of the one who sent Him. Jesus doesn't tell them not to judge, but only to judge rightly.

What then does Jesus mean in **MATTHEW 7:1** when He says, “judge not?”

Fundamentally, Jesus is addressing our attitudes here. He is saying not to have judgmental spirits. We can either be caring people who have the discernment to pass fair judgment on others when the situation calls for it, or we can be judgmental people who are hypercritical of our peers, lacking care and mercy. The latter attitude is what Jesus is condemning. We've seen already that we are to be prudent in our determination of others motives and teachings, and to not do so is unwise. But passing judgment should be something that the other person gives us cause to do, it shouldn't be our first response to them. If our attitude is right, God has made provision for how we should confront another person with their faults (see Matthew 18:15-17). A loving heart will give people the benefit of the doubt and only resort to judging when all other options have been exhausted, but a hypercritical person is only and always looking for something to be judgmental about.

Read **MATTHEW 7:1** again. Jesus says we shouldn't judge so that we won't be judged. Judged by whom?

The typical response to this question is to say that we shouldn't be judgmental to others so that they won't be judgmental towards us. But this kind of interpretation is in opposition to the theme of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, as Jesus's entire message is built around how a person should act considering their relationship to God and citizenship in His Kingdom. The point of these two verses is that we should not embrace a judgmental attitude because that may be proof that we are still under the judgment of God. Don Carson says, "a judgmental attitude excludes us from God's pardon, because it betrays an unbroken spirit." A constantly judgmental heart is not the heart of someone who has been born-again.

Read **MATTHEW 7:2** Think of the standard that you hold others to. Do you want the standard of God's justice to be applied to you in the same way that you apply it to others?

If that answer was no, what is it in your heart that causes you to be so judgmental? Could it be that you don't quite understand the Gospel?

What is it about the Gospel that prevents us from being overly critical and judgmental?

To come to Christ, you must recognize your need for Him. Throughout this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has made plain that in some way or another, we are all guilty of breaking God's law and are all liable to punishment. We need the righteousness that only Christ can provide. The Gospel shows us that because of the universality of sin, none of us have any kind of moral superiority over another. To immediately default to judging others means that we don't quite understand either the depth of our own sin, the depth of mercy and grace extended towards us, or both. And if we don't understand those things about ourselves, we don't understand the Gospel.



So then, what we need to prevent us from having a sinful judgmental attitude is to be constantly reminded of and dwelling upon the reality of the Gospel. How can you remind yourself of the Gospel day-to-day?

TWO

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks received, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"

[MATTHEW 7:7-11]

PERSONAL

STUDY

[MATTHEW 7:7-11]

HIGHLIGHT. _____

EXPLAIN. _____

APPLY. _____

RESPOND. _____

GROUP

STUDY

BOTTOM LINE: We will never be faithful citizens of the Kingdom if we are not devoted to fervent and diligent prayer.



Spend a few moments as a group sharing any insights you may have gleaned from the H.E.A.R. journals.



Considering everything that we've learned so far in the Sermon on the Mount, how well do you measure up to the character of a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven? Where do you excel? Where do you fall short?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shows us what is expected of citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. We should be poor in spirit, mournful over our sin, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and rejoicing amidst persecution. We are to be salt and light in the world, displaying the heart and glory of God to a lost world, and trusting in Christ for our righteousness. We are called to forsake anger, lest we be guilty as murderers; to forsake lust, lest we be guilty as adulterers. Kingdom citizens honor their oaths and covenants made with God and one another, especially marriage, which is a lifelong commitment and divorce is not an option. We do not retaliate when we are insulted or attacked, instead we bless and love those who are our enemies. We give generously to the needy, we devote ourselves to prayer, and we commit to fasting, all secretly and privately before the Lord, without seeking the applause of man. Kingdom citizens have their hearts and eyes set on heaven and the treasure that is awaiting them there, we care not for the riches of this world. We know the King who provides for us, and so we live free from anxiety, content with whatever we have, even when we are lacking. And we also know the King who judges justly, so we refrain from passing judgment upon others, trusting that God will render a fair verdict.

What effect does this description have upon you?

The effect of these requirements and demands is to show us our overwhelming need for grace. Is there anyone in the Kingdom that has been faithful to every single command of the Lord? How can we possibly live up to this standard? The Sermon on the Mount has been a burdensome sermon so far. Jesus' listeners, and us today, at this point are feeling the weight of what is required of them and perhaps despair is setting in. What are we to do? The answer is this: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."



Read again the beatitudes in **MATTHEW 5:3-12**. Are you experiencing these blessings?

It is difficult at times to believe that these promises can come true for us. Most Christians have lived their entire lives in a stagnant, mediocre, powerless form of religion. We've grown accustomed to our routines and have not truly witnessed much of the faithfulness of God in our lives when it comes to promises like what we find in the beatitudes. But God does not expect us to settle for humdrum Christianity. God has provided solutions to our problems: for our spiritual poverty, He gives us the Kingdom of heaven; for our despairing souls, He gives us comfort; for our meekness and humility, He gives us the earth; for our hunger and thirst, He satisfies us with righteousness; for our persecutions, He gives us a greater portion of the Kingdom. And yet despite these promises, it may seem at times that we are not finding their fulfillment in our lives. The problem is not God, the problem is us. We are the ones who are not keeping our end of the deal. Have you been truly poor in spirit? Have you truly mourned over your sin? Do you sincerely hunger and thirst for righteousness? If the condition is not met on our end, then God has no obligation to give us the promised reward for that condition. It is for these—poverty of spirit, meekness, purity of heart—that we must "ask," "seek," and "knock."

What does the language of "ask," "seek," and "knock" convey to you? Is there a pattern here? What is Jesus trying to emphasize?

There are many ways that this has been interpreted, and there are many ways to look at this that are helpful. First look at the progression: "ask...seek...knock." One almost gets the sense that this person is diligently searching for someone. They ask about them, seek them out, and knock, taking the initiative to contact them. There is diligence in this person's search.

Others see a progression in the intensity of the actions performed. Asking is simple and doesn't require much of a commitment. Seeking is taking action, but is easily given up if the search takes too long. But knocking is full-fledged devotion, you are committed to facing whatever is on the other side of the door.

However you look at it, it's clear just from a plain reading of what Jesus is saying that we are to show persistence and perseverance in our pursuit of the virtues of Kingdom citizens. If we ask but don't seek, we were never really committed to begin with. If we ask and seek, but do not knock, we've flaked out at the last moment. But if we ask, seek, and knock, we've shown commitment, desire, and persistence. This persistence is what the Father rewards.

Read **LUKE 18:1-8**. Why did Jesus tell this parable?

Luke says that the point of this parable is that we should "always pray and not lose heart" (v. 1). Jesus makes a comparison to reveal to us the heart of God. If even an unrighteous judge will eventually grant the desires of the widow, how much more will God come to the aid of those who call out to Him? This is the same kind of comparison that Jesus makes in Matthew 7:11: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" Because God is good, because He is our Father, He desires for us to be persistent in prayer.

Is there a reason why God desires for us to be persistent in prayer rather than just immediately granting our requests?

Soren Kierkegaard famously said that "prayer does not change God, but it changes the one who prays." Without laboring in prayer, we don't develop the attributes of patience, persistence, and faith that are so crucial to faithfully living the Christian life. If God granted every request of ours without delay, then like the spoiled child who immediately receives anything he wants, we would be too easily tempted to be unappreciative of what we receive. Even worse, we may even be tempted to consider the Giver Himself as subject to our every whim. It makes sense why God would not act in such a way as to diminish our reverence of Him. God calls us to be persistent in prayer because it is what produces the most joy in us and the most glory for Him. It is no coincidence that the demands of Kingdom citizens as described in the Sermon on the Mount are everything that we are not, but they are everything that God is. He alone is the source of these virtues and it is from Him that we should expect to find what we desire.



Survey again the qualities of the Christian described so far in the Sermon on the Mount. Which quality do you lack the most? Pick one and share it with the group.

Why do you desire this quality?

Will you make a commitment to diligently and fervently pray every day this week for God to grant you this virtue? How will you supplement your prayer with action?

"He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as He hears it, He answers you." [Isaiah 30:18-19]

"You do not have because you do not ask..." [James 4:2]

THREE

*"So, whatever you wish that others would do to you,
do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.
Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the
way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter
by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard
that leads to life, and those who find it are few."*

[MATTHEW 7:12-14]

SERMON

ON THE

MOUNT

SERMON NOTES

[WEEK THREE]

PASSAGE _____ SPEAKER _____

PERSONAL

STUDY

[MATTHEW 7:12-14]

HIGHLIGHT. _____

EXPLAIN. _____

APPLY. _____

RESPOND. _____

GROUP

STUDY

BOTTOM LINE: A sinful judgmental attitude arises from a heart that doesn't fully understand the Gospel.



Spend a few moments as a group sharing any insights you may have gleaned from the H.E.A.R. journals.

Verse 12 in this passage contains what is probably the most famous and widespread of Jesus' teaching. We've come to know it as "the Golden Rule." All over the world, this principle of doing unto others what we would have them do unto us is revered as timeless wisdom and is taught as such in one way or another. There is virtually no one in their right mind who would try and argue that the Golden Rule is insensible or unreasonable. This teaching resonates within each one of us as something that is true and honorable. But just because the truthfulness of the teaching is easy to defend does not mean that the teaching is easy to live.



Do you find the Golden Rule an easy standard to live by? What is so hard about being completely faithful to this teaching?

It would be much easier if Jesus were to reverse the emphasis of this teaching and say something to the effect of, "do NOT do unto others what you would NOT have them do unto you." If this were the case, obedience to Jesus' command would be simple, straightforward, and not requiring much effort on our part. I do not want to be murdered, so I will not murder. I do not want to be stolen from, so I will not steal from others. I do not want to be insulted, so I will not insult others. In a lot of ways, refraining from doing ill to others is a simple matter. But Jesus' emphasis here is positive, not negative. We must DO unto others what we would have them do unto us. Jesus' teaching requires action, not inaction. He is telling us to engage, not restrain. The nature of this kind of living naturally implies that there will be sacrifice on our part. We will have to give of our time, resources, and energy to ensure that others are treated according to this rule. This is why the Golden Rule is so hard to live by: if carried out consistently, it will absolutely exhaust you.

How does the Golden Rule help rid us of selfishness?

In many ways, the Golden Rule places several uncomfortable demands upon the Christian. In one sense, the Golden Rule prevents us from withdrawing from the church and society and living a life where although we do no harm, we accomplish no good either. The impetus here is to actually do something. If we are not actively doing good to others—that is, seeking out and consciously looking for ways to in which to fulfill this command—then we are being disobedient. The New Testament does not allow for someone to claim that they are saved by grace, but then refuse to show that grace to others. We cannot live the Christian life alone precisely because the call on the Christian's life necessitates that he or she be in a constant state of service to others.

Another way that the Golden Rule confronts our selfishness is the realization that Jesus makes no provision for this rule to be of any benefit to us. Jesus does not say that we should do unto others what we would like them to do to us in order that they will then do it to us. Our motive to be obedient to the Golden Rule is not to secure our own like treatment, instead Jesus gives us a greater motive than that.

Why does Jesus say we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us?

Jesus explains the source of the Golden Rule: “for this is the Law and the Prophets.” In other words, such behavior meets all the requirements of the kingdom of God. Jesus has been setting out in this Sermon on the Mount to show us how Kingdom citizens are to live their lives. This rule provides somewhat of a litmus test to help us determine if we are fulfilling our duty as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Are we actively doing unto others what we would have them do unto us? If not, we have cause to be concerned about the legitimacy of our heavenly citizenship.

What is one specific way that the Golden Rule can work itself out in your life? Will you be obedient to fulfill this obligation? Can we hold you accountable to this next time we meet together?

Bottom Line: The Christian life isn't easy, but nothing that's worth it is.

We will now shift the discussion to verses 13 and 14. The entire Sermon on the Mount so far has been Jesus describing for us the qualities of a truly born-again citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus has given us several examples of how a Kingdom citizen interacts with the world and has placed several demands upon those who consider themselves loyal to Jesus. There is not a single person who can consider themselves as having fulfilled every command that Christ has given us. The overwhelming distance between these commands and our own behavior reinforces the theme of spiritual bankruptcy that has been constant throughout this sermon, which leads Jesus to discuss this difficulty in verses 13 and 14.



Read **MATTHEW 7:13-14**. What are your initial thoughts about what Jesus says? If this is true, what does this mean about most of the world?

If we take what Jesus says seriously (and we should) then we understand that most of the world is walking on the wide, easy road and are on their way to destruction. You only need to take a casual glance around you to see that this is the case. And unfortunately, it's the case for the church as well. Jesus has shown us how hard this road is in all of the previous Sermon. The beatitudes do not become common place in our life without much effort. Praying, giving, and fasting are hard and require much discipline. Loving our enemies, keeping our oaths, remaining faithful for a lifetime in marriage; all the demands placed upon Kingdom citizens are almost too much to bear. But nevertheless, it is what we are called to.

In the Southern Baptist Convention, the convention that our church is a part of, there are a reported 15 million members. 15 million. The running joke is that not even the FBI could find half of them. Too many in the church have taken the wide, easy road. It's easy to walk an aisle and join a church, but it's hard to be faithful to God's church.

How can we reduce the number of uncommitted Christians in our churches?

For those that are faithful to attend, it's hard to be involved. For those that are involved, it's hard to give sacrificially. For those that give sacrificially, it's hard to serve others in a humbling way. In one way or another, there is a ceiling that we all tend to hit when it comes to our faithfulness and obedience to Jesus. In light of what Jesus says about the road to life being hard, it may cause some of us to be concerned about which road we are on. But the solution to this problem is simple: we must be born-again. The reason the church has so many more professors of the faith than exhibitors of the faith is because our churches are full of people who have not truly been born again. For a long time the gospel has been made too easy; salvation has been reduced to repeating a prayer, but not much has been said of the ongoing, continual, sacrificial, repentant, and obedient lifestyle that is required of all those who follow Jesus. This has been a noted problem for the last 50 years and the solution is Jesus. When we surrender our lives to Jesus and receive His righteousness by faith, then all of the demands of the Sermon on the Mount are met for us, we are given the Holy Spirit, and He makes our actual lives line up with our profession. What you will then find is that the narrow path, although hard and trying, is the most joyful and satisfying, while the wide path, easy as it may be, is continually unfulfilling.

What you don't need to think is that obeying the Golden Rule will get you on the narrow path that leads to life. The only thing that gets you on the narrow path is repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ. But our obedience to the Golden Rule acts as evidence that we are already on the narrow path and on our way to life. This is not the ONLY assurance that we have of our salvation, however, it is only a part of a greater whole. Are you trusting in Christ? Do you have a relationship with Him? Have you repented of your sin and placed your faith in the Son of God? Does your heart sincerely long for Him and more of His righteousness? Are you bearing fruit in keeping with repentance? Does the Spirit testify with your spirit that you are a child of God? If so, you can rest assured of your destination.



Which path do you find yourself on the most? Is your Christian life easy?

Who do you know that is on the wide, easy path; that is not saved? What will you do to encourage them to walk the hard, narrow path; to repent?

FOUR

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits."

[MATTHEW 7:15-20]

PERSONAL

STUDY

[MATTHEW 7:15-20]

HIGHLIGHT. _____

EXPLAIN. _____

APPLY. _____

RESPOND. _____

GROUP

STUDY

BOTTOM LINE: We must be committed to the truth of God's Word so that we can easily spot those who desire to manipulate it.



Spend a few moments as a group sharing any insights you may have gleaned from the H.E.A.R. journals.



What are some characteristics of false prophets/false teachers?

False prophets are easy to spot if you know your Bible and are acquainted with basic biblical doctrine. The oft-recited illustration of counterfeit money is useful here. Bank tellers don't study different variants of counterfeit bills, they study the real thing, that way it's more obvious when they see a fake.

The same is true for detecting false teachers. When you know the real thing, the fakes are easy to spot.

What does it mean that these false prophets come in sheep's clothing?

How does this make it harder for us to spot them?

On the outside, these false teachers may appear to be genuine and sincere believers that we would be tempted to welcome into the church. In fact, they may be completely sincere in what they are teaching, although what they are teaching is just wrong.



Looking at the immediate context of this passage, there are at least two ways that we can discern who is a false teacher: they will not preach the narrow way and they will produce bad fruit.

1) The false teacher will not preach the “narrow way” that Jesus described previously, which means that they are not preaching the true Gospel. Because he does not preach the truth, he does not lead others to life, which means by default, he is leading people down the wide, easy path. At this point it is wise to note that false teachers may not necessarily preach anything that is wildly heretical (although staunch heresy is certainly a characteristic of some false teachers). Instead, and this is the subtle way by which we can be deceived by such teachers, their false teaching is characterized by what they DON'T say. It's very easy and has been the strategy of most modern false teachers to preach only the “positive” and “easy” portions of Scripture. By leaving out any difficult or hard truths, these teachers can develop quite a following. After all, the wide road is easy and is the path that the majority travels.

Read **JEREMIAH 6:13-15**. What are your thoughts on this passage? In what ways does it describe the works of false teachers today?

False teachers today may “heal [our] wounds slightly,” meaning there may be some semblance of truth in what they say, but their overall message is false (“peace where there is no peace”) and because it does not foster poverty of spirit, a mourning over sin, and a meekness of heart, it does not save. For example, there are a slew of teachers today whose preaching consists only of declaring the love of God, but they are conspicuously silent regarding God's hatred of sin and His wrath. They have slightly healed the wounds of the people they preach to by sharing with them real truth about who God is, but they've given a false assurance of peace where there is no peace because their hearers have not heard the truth about sin and their need for salvation.

Keep in mind that there are some false teachers who DO preach a narrow way. They DO teach the “hard truths” of Scripture and do not shrink back from declaring the whole counsel of God. For these false teachers, their error often lies in an improper balance in what they teach, as they often overly emphasize specific teachings in a way that the Bible does not. Take for instance the Westboro Baptist Church, whose entire ministry is almost completely devoted to picketing the funerals of homosexuals and members of our military and spreading a message of hate. They are certainly not appealing to the majority or preaching a wide and easy path, but they are still false teachers nevertheless.

2) The second way that Jesus says we can recognize false teachers is “by their fruits” (v. 16). This can be taken in two senses. First, in Jesus' day there was a thornbush that produced berries that were easily confused for grapes. And there was also a thistle whose flowers resembled figs. These fruits appeared to be useful, but as soon as you attempted to make wine from the “grapes” or to eat the “figs” for dinner, you knew that you had been duped.

The same is true of the false teachers teaching. On the surface, false teachers may appear to be teaching something that is useful and inspiring, but when you begin to apply their doctrine to everyday life, you quickly find that it is insufficient to handle the majority of life's problems.

Second is the more obvious meaning of what Jesus is saying. The "fruit" refers to the actions of the false prophet. Just as the false prophet does not advocate the "narrow way" of Jesus, he also fails to live it. Sooner or later, just like the berries of the thornbush and flowers of the thistle, the false teacher will be seen for what he truly is. Don Carson says, "if they are not immediately recognized by their doctrine, then sooner or later they may be recognized by their lives; for what a man believes must sooner or later manifest itself in what he does."

Thinking back on the qualities of the Kingdom citizen described in the Sermon on the Mount, what should we expect of a genuine teacher?

Here we mustn't forget the criteria that Jesus has already given for those who would call themselves citizens of the Kingdom. The same principles apply to teachers as well. In fact, they apply to teacher more strictly than non-teachers (James 3:1). The acceptable fruit of a true prophet/teacher, given what the rest of the Sermon on the Mount has taught us, is righteousness, humility, purity, prayerfulness, generosity, sincerity, and obedience. Are these traits and fruits present in the teacher's life? Are they increasing and growing? If none of these characteristics are present, or if the number of traits that are absent far outnumber the traits that are present, there may be cause for concern.

Likewise, what are some ways that we should NOT assess a teacher's validity?

We tend to adopt secular criteria by which to judge teachers: success, eloquence, popularity, etc. Or sometimes we assume the truthfulness of someone's teaching based on how "spiritual" they seem: how much Scripture they have memorized, how many books they've read, how outspoken they are about their faith, etc. But these standards, although they are true of many good, solid teachers, should not be the only criteria by which we judge the usefulness of their teaching. The wide, easy road that leads to destruction is proof that we can't rely on the majority opinion.

Given what we've learned here, what are some ways that false teaching is present in our world today?

The most prominent form of false teaching today is what is commonly known as the "prosperity gospel." This kind of teaching says that God's desire is for all of His people to be healthy, wealthy, and successful and that any sickness, financial trouble, or failure is solely the work of the enemy and not at all part of God's plan for our lives. This is the primary ministry of many televangelists who promise God's blessing upon those who donate money to their ministries.

This teaching falls apart not only biblically but practically as well. Biblically, because one needs only to look at the lives of Jesus, the apostles, and the martyrs of the early church to see that God's will for us certainly includes suffering (Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 3:12). And practically because as soon as hardship does come, none of this teaching provides a foundation that allows many people to endure. The prosperity gospel is nothing more than a fig-shaped flower plucked from a thistle.

There are other false doctrines and teachings that are prevalent today.

Discuss your understanding of the following:

Universalism, which says that all people will be saved no matter if they accept Christ or not. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; nobody comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6; cf. Acts 4:12; 3:19). This teaching is typically coupled with the idea that there is no hell, which directly contradicts the teaching of Jesus Himself (Matthew 10:28; 25:46).

Antinomianism, or "easy-believism", which presents the grace of God as a license to sin. This teaching says that if you're saved, then you can live your life however you want, even if it is a life of constant sinfulness. The Bible addresses this exact teaching: "Shall we sin so that grace may abound? Absolutely not!" (Romans 6:1). The life of the Christian is marked by repentance and righteousness, not sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Works-based salvation is any doctrine that requires any kind of "work" to be done on our part in order to be saved and is false teaching. The bible is clear that we are saved by grace apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 11:6). Instead of saving us, our good works are now the evidence that we have been saved (Ephesians 2:10-11).



What are some ways that you can protect yourself from being deceived by false teachers? What are some measures that we can take as a group to help ensure nobody is deceived by false teaching?

(Study the bible yourself so you can know when error is taught [see Acts 17:11]; hold leaders and each other accountable to Scriptural faithfulness)

At FBCnl, we have Discipleship Groups that are designed to help us grow in our understanding of the Bible and our mission of making disciples. Is this something that you feel God may be calling you to consider?

FIVE

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

[MATTHEW 7:21-23]

PERSONAL

STUDY

[MATTHEW 7:21-23]

HIGHLIGHT. _____

EXPLAIN. _____

APPLY. _____

RESPOND. _____

GROUP

STUDY

BOTTOM LINE: The faith that works is the faith that works.



Spend a few moments as a group sharing any insights you may have gleaned from the H.E.A.R. journals.



How would you explain to someone else what they need to do to be saved?

Titus 2 speaks of those who “profess to know Him, but deny Him by their works.” What is the relationship between our profession and our actions? Why is it important that they line up?

Where in your life has your profession not lined up with your actions? When have you not had the proper motivations for your actions? When have you not had the proper motivations for your profession?



Summary:

Verse 21 shows us that we cannot base the assurance of our salvation solely upon a correct belief. Not everyone who merely acknowledges that Jesus is Lord is actually saved. We must be careful to be specific here: everyone who is a Christian confesses Jesus as Lord, but not everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord is a Christian. The people that Jesus is referring to have all the correct doctrine about Christ and say all the right things, but they are missing something—they do not do “the will of the Father who is in heaven.” There is no action behind what they say. They do not live out what they say they believe. They talk the talk, but fail to walk the walk. James, just like Jesus here, says that this kind of “faith without works is dead” and cannot save you (James 2:16-17). You cannot rely solely upon your profession of faith to save you. Even “the demons believe, and tremble (James 2:19). Your faith must be lived out, not merely professed.

But lest we swing the pendulum too far and begin to rely solely upon our works, Jesus warns us against that as well. In verses 22 and 23, Jesus says that many people who prophesy, cast out demons, and do many mighty works, even all in the name of Jesus, will not enter the kingdom of heaven. There are at least two points that we can make here. One, we must not confuse appearance with reality. Someone may very well be doing incredible things in the name of Jesus and not truly have a saving faith in Him. Oswald Chambers helps us understand this passage in a concise way, saying, “God honors His word no matter who preaches it [Philippians 1:15]. Those whom Jesus Christ refers to in verse 21 were instruments, but an instrument is not a servant.” Two, notice that these people, when trying to justify why they should be accepted into the kingdom, only provide a list of the things they had done. They are relying upon their works and not the work of Christ. None of them confess Christ’s righteousness as their reason for admission, they are trying to get in on their own.

Jesus says to these, “I never knew you.” We can say and do all the right things, but if we haven’t come to the Lord Jesus Himself, if we haven’t knelt before Him and plead for mercy, if we haven’t entered into a personal relationship with Him, then it is all for naught.



In what ways have you seen people's actions not line up with their profession?

In what ways do your actions not line up with your profession?

- Do you assert forgiveness (profession) but lack true repentance (action)?
- Do you boast of church membership (profession) but don't submit or serve (action)?
- Do you claim to be a disciple (profession) but don't strive to be obedient or experience any growth (action)?
- Do you claim to have joy (profession) but do not have righteousness (action)?

What do you need to do to bring your profession and your actions in closer alignment?

How can you do this and maintain the proper motivation for doing so?

SIX

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

[MATTHEW 7:24-27]

PERSONAL

STUDY

[MATTHEW 7:24-27]

HIGHLIGHT. _____

EXPLAIN. _____

APPLY. _____

RESPOND. _____

GROUP

STUDY

BOTTOM LINE: Obedience does not lead to salvation, it leads to assurance of salvation.



Spend a few moments as a group sharing any insights you may have gleaned from the H.E.A.R. journals.



Summary:

Just like the previous illustrations He has given, Jesus' main concern here is the obedience of His hearers to what He has spoken. The clear intention is to convey the idea that the two houses discussed are near identical from the outside, but there is a fundamental difference between the two that is made apparent only in extreme circumstances. The first house built by the wise man is the house that is built on a firm foundation of solid rock. We naturally want to interpret the foundation mentioned here as being Jesus Christ Himself, but Jesus defines the foundation for us by saying that the firm foundation is symbolic of the "one who hears these words of mine and does them." Whereas the second house built by the fool on top of sand is likened to "the one who hears these words of mine and does not do them." The emphasis Jesus is making is on obedience. The wise man hears Jesus' words, is obedient to them, and is building for himself a firm foundation that allows him to weather and withstand the sufferings of this world. The foolish man hears Jesus' words, but does not put them into practice, and even though he may seem as "spiritual" and "mature" as the wise man, persecution and suffering quickly make him change his tune.

Throughout Bible, the foolish person is frequently described as someone who is hasty. The foolish person cuts corners, looks for shortcuts, and expects quick results without much effort. How is the foolish man's haste seen in this illustration and how does it affect him? What spiritual implications does this have for us? In what ways are you spiritually hasty?

The man does not take enough time to ensure that he is building his house upon a solid foundation. In the same way, if we are ignoring the commands of Jesus, then we are not building our faith upon sound doctrine or experience. We may be ignoring the commands of Jesus because we don't take the time to understand how they apply to us. We may rush through our bible study just to say that we've completed it, rather than sit and put in the time to fully understand what the Lord is saying to us.

How does obeying Jesus' commands provide a strong foundation for us to base our assurance and spiritual safety upon?

Our assurance of salvation is ultimately based upon our belief that God is faithful to keep His word. "He who began a good work in [us] will see it through to completion" (Philippians 1:6). "He is faithful even when we are faithless, because He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). Whenever we hear the commands of Jesus and obey them, we are trusting that He is faithful to keep His word to us when He promised that by keeping his commands "our joy may be complete" (John 15:11). The more we hear and obey, the more Jesus proves His faithfulness to us; and the more Jesus proves His faithfulness to us, the more we trust Him and rely upon Him; and the more we trust and rely upon Him, the more strength we have to face whatever life throws our way, knowing that ultimately it is for our good (Romans 8:28).

The foolish man did not take the time to think ahead and consider what dangers he may come across that could harm him. When the storm came, everything he had built crumbled because he did not prepare for it. What dangers could you possibly face in the future and how can you safeguard yourself against them?

It's easy to fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to others. We may look at someone else's "house" and think we are doing okay compared to them. Are you deriving any kind of assurance by comparing your "house" to the "houses" of others? What does this kind of comparing look like? Is this safe to do? Why or why not?

Jesus pronounces blessing on those who obey "these words of MINE." Whose words can we sometimes fall into the trap of obeying rather than Jesus'? How is this dangerous?

It's sometimes easy to prioritize the words of our favorite authors, pastors, or relatives over the words of Jesus. This is dangerous because it undermines the authority that Christ has in our lives and is a subtle way of saying that Christ's word is not sufficient for us.

Jesus is ending his sermon by appealing to his followers to submit to the virtues of the Kingdom of God for His glory and their joy. He has covered a lot of ground: He has discussed the attitudes that lead to true blessing. He has explained our role as salt and light in the world. He has demonstrated His authority by His obedience to fulfill the whole will of God. He has taught us concerning anger, lust, divorce, oaths, and retaliation. He has commanded us to love our enemies, to give to the needy, to pray fervently and consistently, and to fast. He has shown us the futility of storing up treasures on earth and the foolishness of allowing anxiety to overwhelm us. Jesus has warned us of the hypocrisy of judgmentalism and of relying upon our works for salvation; and He ends here by encouraging us to build our faith upon the proper foundation of committed obedience to His commands.



Is there an area where you have not obeyed? How does your disobedience weaken your foundation? Are you willing to do what it takes to strengthen your foundation? Why or why not? What specifically will you do to preserve the integrity of your foundation?

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to **make disciples** who **change the world**.



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