

The Old Hickory

Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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OBSTACLES TO THE WAY

In a discourse of the kingdom of God and its salvation, Jesus Christ declared, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matt. 7:13-14). Eternal life that is promised and that is possessed by God's kingdom citizens must be sought out. It is not hard to find, but men must seek it until they find it. Most will not because they prefer to walk in the "way" that is "broad." In this section of Scripture, Jesus describes three obstacles to the "way ... that leads to life."

1. False Prophets (Deceivers). The warning in this context is clear: "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (Matt. 7:15). The warning includes a key characteristic of "false prophets:" they will appear to be as harmless as sheep; they will outwardly look as if they are dedicated to God and His Way; they will preach some truth. But the truth-revealing characteristic is what is found on the inside, under the cloak of deception: they are wolves. They are secretly filled with wrong purposes, like wolves in a sheepfold. The false prophet changes the message of the gospel (Gal. 1:6-10). The result of their influence is the tragic leading astray and

obstructing the path of disciples who are seeking the narrow way that leads to life. The result is spiritual death to the souls of men and women. John warned that, “many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1).

2. Self-Deception. Another clear warning in this context is the obstacle of causing ourselves to be false when we should be true. One can certainly be his own worst enemy spiritually. We must avoid dealing with our own hearts in a way that is not candid, frank, and honest, with partial or distorted estimates of our own character, supposing that we are walking the narrow way. The self-deceived described here will protest a negative verdict on Judgment Day: “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” (Matt. 7:22). This passage could describe people who have been deceived and led astray by false teachers. They have obviously been very zealous religious people, but Jesus says of them: “I never knew you; *depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.*” (Matt. 7:23). Here (cf. Matt. 7:21) Jesus very powerfully contrasts *doing* the will of God (acting under law) and lawlessness (acting without law, without authority, regardless of intentions). The condition of the self-deceived person is *without law*, either because he is ignorant of it, or because he is violating it. Jesus’ knowledge of self-deceived people will not be favorable knowledge; He will not approve of them. They are overwhelmed in human assessment of what is good rather than what God’s Word declares to be good, and following their humanly devised, subjective “think so,” they become their own obstacle to the narrow way that leads to life.

3. Indifference. An additional clear warning of obstacle to life is to hear the Word of God when taught, but generate no compulsion to embrace and live according to its teaching. Jesus said, “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.” (Matt. 7:26). There are very many people who know very well what the words of Jesus teach them to do, but because of indifference, they do not act on them, they do not obey. “Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” (Jas. 4:17).

False prophets, self-deception and indifference are obstacles that must be avoided by all who would enter the narrow way that leads to life. Friend, let us together walk that way. May we help you find and walk in life?

-GFS

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- > We lose the benefit of what we read for want of meditation.
 - > Reading things and singing things is not the same as considering things.
 - > We never live as long as we think we are going to.
 - > Trouble will not avoid those we care for just because we love them.
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SUNDAY'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"Do Not Fall?"* (text: Jer. 17:5-10);
Sunday evening: Jesus Christ: A Closer Look – *Traditions Attacked!* (Mark 7:1-23).