

False Prophets and False Professions

Matt. 7:15-23

If you choose to go through the narrow gate, you do so as one who comes to the conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Acts chapter two describes the Day of Pentecost that followed by 10 days the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Jesus had told the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father which they knew was the coming of the Holy Spirit. They were gathered in the upper room when a mighty wind filled the whole house and flames of fire sat upon each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and went throughout the city speaking in other languages so that the Jews who had come for the feast from throughout the empire heard them speak of Christ in their own languages. The people gathered at the temple from all over the city and Peter stood to speak to the people. He started with the prophecy of Joel who spoke of the coming of the Spirit and then spoke of David who had prophesied the resurrection. Peter spoke plainly, and accused his listeners of crucifying the promised Messiah, the Son of God, sent to them by God. (When Stephen later preached in a similar way, the Jerusalem crowd stoned him to death) Here, Peter had a response from a people who were transfixed by the clear conviction that they were guilty of all that Peter said. They answered him, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." Here is another metaphor of salvation. Repenting of your sin does not mean trying to be a better person. It means taking personal responsibility for the cross. Jesus died for our sins. It was not just Jewish sin or Roman sin but all sin. Therefore, all sinners are responsible for the cross. When the Jerusalem crowd came to "see" their responsibility, they were distressed. They were alarmed. They were guilty. What would be the sentence? Could there be any way to avoid the judgment they deserved?

Peter's answer, "Repent!" and be baptized here and now to demonstrate that you have sinned and that you seek God's cleansing and forgiveness. Many who had

cried "Crucify Him" were now ashamed and filled with remorse. They could not undo their sin but they could renounce it. They declared to all of the city that they were no longer doubters and destroyers. They had encountered the Spirit filled disciples and they knew now that Jesus had risen from the dead and that He is God. Now they belonged to Jesus.

3000 souls crowded through the narrow gate that day. They started a journey down the narrow path but soon they were to discover that even after entering the gate, the evil one still has a plan to work against the disciples of our Lord. He strives by any

means possible to get the disciples who journey down the narrow path to turn back or to leave the path for any reason whatsoever.

In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian, the pilgrim encountered the Valley of Humiliation (encountered after he had seen the delectable Mountains) where he fought the great dragon, Apollyon. He passed through the Valley of the Shadow of death. He rejected the silver mines and the wooing of Money-love. He passed through Vanity Fair and had to escape from the Giant Despair. These were all encountered after Christian had passed through the wicket gate, the narrow gate of Bunyan's story. Throughout the journey, Christian encountered a variety of characters we could call False Teachers and False Professors. They were constantly trying to talk Christian into decisions that would take him out of the way.

Here Jesus warns of these two sources of misinformation, confusion and delusion. False Prophets dress up like sheep but inwardly they are ravening wolves. In other words they present themselves as if they were genuine believers but they do not have the benefit of the Spirit's work in their hearts. Consequently, they will not give evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control will not be less and less in evidence the more that you get to know them. Their sheep's clothing may include a knowledge of the word, powerful leadership, clever arguments, healing gifts, among other attractions but if you get to know them you will find a bitter spirit, anger and malice. You will find jealousies, lies, and manipulations. You will

find lust, the love of money and a thirst for personal power. By their fruit you will know them.

Jesus described the false professors as those who say, Lord, Lord, representing a familiarity with Him but as those who have not done the will of the Father. They will profess to have prophesied in Jesus name, cast out demons in Jesus' name and done many wonders in Jesus' name and yet, Jesus, said that He would declare to them that He never knew them and that He would declare, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

Notice the suggestiveness of Jesus' description. Saying, "Lord, Lord" is a way of making a claim. It presumes that the relationship exists and that it can be taken advantage of. The implication is that a service has been rendered and that payment is due. Everything that is professed here is outward. The claim of familiarity is language for show, prophesying, casting out demons and doing wonders imply an inner life that is not necessarily the case, thus there is deception. Finally, Jesus' verdict is "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." Put together the accusation that they do not do the will of the Father with the conclusion that they practice lawlessness. They do

not accept the authority of the Father. They apparently make up their own rules. Lawlessness should be understood as a rejection of God's rules rather than the absence of any rule. Would the Scribes and Pharisees, and the chief priests have fit into this description of false professors? They kept lots of rules but rejected the person and authority of Jesus Christ.

In the context of the sermon, Is the one who loves his enemies and who does good to the one who hates him, doing the will of the Father? What about the one who lays up treasure in heaven rather than here on earth? And, what about the one who practices the disciplines of alms-giving, prayer and fasting secretly in order to please the Father rather than publicly in order to generate the praise of men, is that person doing the will of the Father? Is it fair to conclude that the sermon gives us a fair sample of what doing the will of the Father looks like?

Again, think of this in terms of what it means to enter by the narrow gate and by what it means to walk the narrow way. Entering by the gate does not mean that

you will stay on the narrow path. Doing the will of the Father is how you stay on the narrow way.

Bunyan had Christian engage in deep conversations with his companions with the intent to determine the veracity of their spiritual claims. When something missing was identified, the characters either defended themselves or repented. Christian was as vulnerable to error as any. He starved and was tormented for days in the Giant Despair's dungeon when he had the key to the door and could have left at any time.

Do not be fooled by False Prophets. Do not become a False Professor. Stay on the narrow path.