

Understanding The Two Gates and Paths
Matthew 7:13-14
Gerry Andersen
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five extensive messages delivered by Christ in the Gospel of Matthew, covering chapters 5-7. The sermon corrects the teaching of the religious leaders (chapter 5) and the practice of the religious leaders (chapter 6). The first half of chapter 7 guides our ministry to others and the second half of the chapter involves the most important aspect of life, our eternal destiny.

In Matthew 7:13-27, we see a repetition of the contrasts. Each contrast regards the eternal destinies of mankind. Specifically, there is a progression that moves from path to life to the characteristics of those on the path to life.

- The two gates and paths (Matthew 7:13-14)
- The two trees and fruit (Matthew 7:15-20)
- The two claims and practices (7:21-23)
- The two houses and foundations (Matthew 7:24-27)

Matthew 7:13 begins with a command to “*enter by the narrow gate.*” It is followed by corresponding and contrasting statements to support this command. The reason why we must enter through the narrow gate is because it leads to life as opposed to destruction.

The imagery of the gate includes a parallel imagery of the path that gate leads to. The gate is where we enter and the path is the route beyond the gate. There is a clear correspondence between the gate and the path as both are described by their size.

The first gate described is not the narrow gate that we are commanded to enter through but the alternative gate, the “wide” gate. The path that proceeds from that wide gate is “broad” (NASB, NIV, KJV) or “easy” (ESV). The term for the path that is “broad” or “easy” (EURUCHOROS) is a compound word for “broad” and “place.” It connotes wide, spacious and roomy. Broad is a good translation since that includes plenty of room. The term “easy” is clearly an extrapolation from the meaning to what one would experience from such a broad path.

This description of the broad path is found in the phrase “*there are many who enter through it.*” The point of the path being broad is not that it is easy versus hard but that it is wide versus narrow. This is why many can enter by way of it.

The second gate is described in 7:14 as “small” (NASB, NIV) or “narrow” (ESV) and is the same word describing the narrow gate in 7:13 (STENOS). This word for narrow in 7:13 and 7:14 is where the word “stenography” is derived (“narrow writing”).

The path that proceeds from the second gate is called “narrow” (NASB, NIV) or “hard” (ESV). The word in 7:14 that describes the way (THLIBO) literally means “to press.” In the other nine usages of this word in the New Testament it means either “distress” or “afflicted.” It implies that the gate is so small and narrow that one would need to press their way through it.

This idea that the gate is small and narrow is not provided to describe the effort that must be made to enter. Rather it is in reference to the inability for a large number of people to enter through it. The point of Matthew 7:13-14 is not hard versus easy but rather few versus many. The ESV’s inclusion of the translations easy and hard is unfortunate because it unnecessarily implies an effort is required to travel the narrow way.

The Lord commands us to enter by the narrow gate because the way is wide that leads to destruction and the gate is small that leads to life. If anything, it is those who seek to enter through their own effort that results in destruction, not life. Those who enter by faith, not works are entering by the small gate for it is the few that find it (cf. Matthew 22:14). Clearly, the reference to life and to destruction is meaning eternal life and eternal destruction. “*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*” (Matthew 25:46).

The obvious point of the two gates and two paths is that there are only two alternatives for our eternal destiny. This counters universalism, that teaching that all souls will be ultimately reconciled to God in eternity.

Not only does one path lead to destruction but that path is broad. Many will enter the wide gate of destruction. This should orient our conclusions on the success of the gospel message. Regardless of our strategy or our efforts, many will take the broad way and few will take the narrow way. This is not limited to a historical point in time but is a universal truth statement.

God chose the few out of the fallen world to enter eternal life.

“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

This also opposes the eschatological view of postmillennialism.

“Postmillennialism expects the proclaiming of the Spirit-blessed gospel of Jesus Christ to win the vast majority of human beings to salvation in the present age. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history [which they identify with the “millennium”] prior to Christ’s return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of people and of nations. After an extensive era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and in great glory, ending history with the general resurrection and the great judgment of all humankind. Hence, our system is *postmillennial* in that the Lord’s glorious return occurs *after* an era of ‘millennial’ condition” (“Postmillennialism” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, pp. 13-14).

Postmillennialists view the role of the church as not limited to the proclamation of the gospel of Christ but as an instrumentality to establishing righteous conduct in society. This perspective arises from their failure to see a clear distinction between the Church of Jesus Christ in the New Testament and the Nation of Israel in the Old Testament.

If we can expect only a “few” to enter by the narrow gate, then this glorious time of progressive spiritual success is pure fantasy. 1 Timothy 3:1 provides a clearer perspective of the church age, *“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.”*

Matthew 7:13-14 also helps us understand our ministry in the world. We are clearly called to go into all the world and make disciples (Matthew 28:19), but beyond the ministry of the gospel to the unsaved, what role should we have in shaping the society for good? Galatians 6:10 instructs us to do good to the unsaved, *“So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”*

Matthew 7:13-14 helps us avoid the error of “Christian Nationalism.” Christian Nationalism is a school of thought that believes we must advocate for our country to return to Christianity as the center of our civic life. Their ideal is that America is a Christian nation with values that ought to align with Christianity throughout our public policy.

One false premise in Christian Nationalism is that America was founded upon Christianity. While most of those involved in the creation of the United States of America aligned themselves with Christianity, used religious terminology, and adopted a moralist set of laws, there was no uniform intention to create a Christian nation but rather a pluralistic society that allowed for the free practice of religion.

If the goal is to return our county to its religious heritage, this will only happen with the support of the people. Since most people today, tomorrow and yesterday (like the founding fathers of America) are not committed to practicing the Christian faith, this will be a difficult end to achieve. The history of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution that prohibited the manufacture, sale and transportation of alcohol confirms that any moral code is ineffective without a true plurality of support.

Beyond the United States we can look to the original establishment of Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in the early fourth century. This gave rise to the Roman Catholic Church, the Holy Roman Empire, poor theology, religious wars, religious persecution, the compromise of the gospel and evangelism, etc. The legacy of state sponsored faith is dismal.

History shows that Christian Nationalism is not new. Repeatedly, people have sought to bring Christianity to all people through the government, albeit from different Christian traditions. Catholics and various Protestants have aligned themselves with the secular government to advance their ideals.

Postmillennialism naturally lends itself to Christian Nationalism as viewing the society as being positively changed to prepare for the coming of Christ.

“The distinctive postmillennial view of Christianity’s progressive victory, in time and history, into *all of human life and culture*, is postmillennialism’s application of the doctrine of Christ’s definitively completed salvation” (“*Whose Victory in History?*” in Gary North, ed., *Theonomy: An Informed Response*[Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991], 21.

One prominent theological persuasion exists among Postmillennial and Reformed Christians to bring government under religious control is Dominion Theology. Dominion Theology seeks to institute biblical law as an application of Genesis 1:28, "*God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'*" The application of biblical law can be general morality or specific codes based upon the Old Testament Law.

The version of Dominion Theology that advocates adherence to the Old Testament is called Theonomy. Under Theonomy, society is brought under the lordship of Christ by the establishment of judicial laws that include Old Testament punishments for violations. Those advocating for Theonomy in the United States are known as Reconstructionists and are of a Postmillennial eschatological perspective. As Reformed Postmillennialists, they confuse the nature and role of the Church and seek to work in society to bring about righteousness through governmental means in the same way the Old Testament instructs Israel.

Even many who hold to the biblical perspective of Premillennialism can become advocates of versions of Christian Nationalism through the desire to see righteous living abound. Many who actually do not advocate for Christian Nationalism are still moved to look to the political process to bring about a return to a more moral society. Some who have historically been less political have more recently endorsed political candidates and opposed government regulations.

Matthew 7:13-14 informs us regarding what to expect from society. Since many are on the path to destruction there should not be any hope that the majority of people will be supportive of a biblical worldview. In a pluralistic society such as ours, it is difficult to anticipate an enduring support by the populace of adherence to a biblically based moral code. Simply put, the few on the narrow path will be hopelessly outnumbered.

The empirical recognition of the challenge to gain political leverage for a moralistic governance has led many to collaborate with those of divergent faith practices. Notably, the opposition to abortion has led many to join together with conservative Catholic clergy to advance the cause of establishing prohibitions. In recent times, the Mormon faith has been welcome to join with Christians in political causes. While this partnership can certainly assist the agenda to bring moral values to society through legislation and enforcement, it must come at the expense of the full teaching of biblical truth and the gospel as a whole.

The practical significance of the numerical difference between those on the narrow path to life and those on the broad path to destruction is more than just being outnumbered in society. It is an awareness of what being in the minority brings to us. Since the narrow path brings the blessing of eternal life, we must be grateful that God has allowed us to be delivered from the broad and wide path that leads to destruction. *“I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand”* (John 10:28).

Also, God had chosen those in the weaker position so that no one can boast before Him. We should rejoice that we are less powerful in the world because it is for a purpose that glorifies the Lord.

“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD” (1 Corinthians 1:26-30).

Another blessing is this knowledge brings perseverance in ministry. We know that the many will not flock to faith in Christ. Lack of dramatic response to the gospel will only confirm that the way is narrow that leads to life. Therefore, we can endure in our service to the Lord since we will know that many are on the broad path that leads to destruction.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Finally we know that at least a few will enter by the narrow gate. While it may be few, it certainly is some. We then know that there will be some who will be responsive. This should motivate us to help others enter it because it leads to life. *“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture”* (John 10:9).