

The Wide and Narrow Ways

What's the difference?



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. *Matthew 7:13-14*

OVERVIEW:

The "wide and narrow ways" is the first of four related "warning" parables in Matthew ch.7. This parable teaches that there are two ways we might live our lives. One way leads to life, the other leads to destruction. Jesus says there are few who find the way that leads to life. Answering the following questions should help us understand and apply this parable:

1. What does Jesus mean by "way" (or path)?
2. To whom does He address this warning parable?
3. What distinguishes the people on the narrow way from those on the wide way?
4. How does one find the narrow way? Why is it hard to find?
5. What does it mean to walk in the narrow way?
6. What are the characteristics of a walk on the wide path?
7. What are some hindrances to walking the narrow path?
8. How are we to understand the terms "life" and "destruction"?

When we properly understand the parable we can meaningfully apply it to ourselves, and then to others who we wish to direct to the path that leads to life.

1. What does Jesus mean by "the way"?

a) The terms walked, walk, path, paths, or way, are very common and often refer to the spiritual dimension of how someone lives their life. Here are a few examples:
   1. Joshua 22:5 Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and *walk* in all His *ways* and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."
   2. Psalms 23:3 He restores my soul; He guides me in the *paths* of righteousness for His name's sake.
   3. 2 Corinthians 5:7 for we *walk* by faith, not by sight—
   4. Galatians 5:16 But I say, *walk* by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.
   5. 2 Peter 2:21 For it would be better for them not to have known the *way* of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

b) The "way" refers to the general practice of our life. How we live. What we do.
   1. The term "general practice of our life" may sound too vague. One might ask "How consistently do you have to walk in this 'way' to be considered on the narrow path?" I would answer, "Consider 1 John 3:10". "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not *practice righteousness* is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." This verse does not tell us how consistently we must live to be "practicing righteousness", but it should be "obvious" if you are practicing righteousness. See 1 John 3:7. We do not understand the verse to teach that if you ever do one unrighteous deed that you are not of God. See also 1 John.1:9.

2. To whom does this warning parable apply?

a) Generally, it applies to all who are seeking salvation through Jesus Christ - as opposed to those who have no interest at all in salvation, e.g. atheists, heathen, agnostics, unbelievers.
b) To those who are in the process of deciding to follow Christ, and want to know which gate opens on the true way as opposed to the false way of which Jesus warned.
c) To those who have been in the Church for years but don't realize that they have been walking the wide path that leads to destruction.
d) To those teachers or evangelists who are instructing others in the way of salvation.
e) To those who walk the narrow path, that they might be encouraged to not stray onto the wide path.

Question: Why can't we say that Christians are on the narrow path, and everyone else is on the wide path? Ans: In Matthew 7:21 Jesus gives the application of this parable "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." Here, in the application as in the parable, we have two classes of people with two different outcomes. One group was admitted. The other was not. But those who were denied entrance to the kingdom were *expecting* to be admitted. They had done mighty works in Jesus name. They called Jesus "Lord". This does not describe people who have no interest in, or knowledge of salvation. It very well describes people who may think they are Christians but are not.

3. What distinguishes the people on the narrow path from those on the wide path?
First, what they have in common:

a) Both groups of people are seeking salvation. See Mt.7:21-23.
b) Both groups believe that they are on the narrow path.
c) Both groups would call Jesus Lord.
d) Both groups would likely have done remarkable deeds in Jesus' name.
e) Both groups expect to be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven.

Now, how they differ:

f) The narrow path group "do the will of the Father", the wide path group do not. Mt.7:21
g) The wide path group "practice lawlessness". Mt.7:23.
h) The narrow path group "hear Jesus' words and act upon them". Mt.7:24
i) The wide path group "hear Jesus' words but do not act upon them". Mt.7:26

4. How does one find the narrow path? Why is it hard to find?

a) It takes some searching. Jesus said that there are few who *find* it.
b) Listen closely to Jesus' teachings and heed them.
c) Exercise appropriate caution. Jesus warns that we can be deceived.
d) Seek the wisdom from above.

Why is it hard to find? Short answer – deception.

e) People are looking for an easier way. They don't *want* to find the narrow way.
f) If there is an engraved lintel over the narrow path gate, it might say, "The Way to Life". If there is an engraved lintel over the wide path gate, it would probably also say, "The Way to Life". The wide path masquerades as the narrow path. Do not be deceived.
g) False teachings that direct people through the wide gate onto the wide path. Here are a few of them:
    1. "*You can be a Christian without being a disciple*". In fact a disciple is a follower of Jesus. Is a Christian something less? See Acts 11:26 See also Mt.28:19-20
    2. *You can accept Jesus as your Savior without acknowledging Him as your Lord.*
    3. *You don't have to repent of your sins to become a Christian. You don't have to forsake them.* (Forsake doesn't mean to immediately overcome them all.)
    4. Some even teach "*You don't have to DO anything to go to Heaven, just believe.*"

These teachings direct people through the wide gate and onto the wide path.

5. What does it mean to walk on the narrow path?
Your life is characterized by the following:

a) Being a disciple, a follower of Jesus
b) Loving, hoping in, and trusting God
c) Loving your neighbor, doing good deeds
d) Being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit
e) Obeying God, doing His will
f) Living a holy (righteous) life

The basic disciplines of this life are

g) Prayer
h) Study of the scriptures
i) Fellowship

This walk *itself* is eternal life because it is knowing God. Jn.17:3. If this is not what you want, you have chosen the wide path.

6. What are the characteristics of a walk on the wide path?

a) Those on the wide path may be taught to do everything that one would be taught to do on the narrow path. They will also be taught that "*you will still get to Heaven, even if you don't do any of those things. Obedience is optional. It has no bearing on your eternal destiny"*. This teaching is THE distinction between the wide and narrow paths. It is in direct contradiction to Jesus' statement "he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter".
b) Those on the wide path have been deceived into believing that obedience is optional.
c) There are numerous doctrines taught on the wide path that encourage and comfort those who are not doing the will of the Father, who are not obedient, who practice lawlessness.
d) A related wide path teaching is that all you have to do to get to Heaven, is *to believe* certain things *about* God and Jesus. What you do is unrelated to your standing with God.
e) On the wide path, people expect God to do what He has told them to do.

7. What are the hindrances to walking the narrow path?

a) First, it's hard. We are warned that we will experience tribulation and trials.
b) Second, there are numerous teachings of man that discourage those who seek to live a holy obedient life. Here are a few of them.
    1. You can't stop sinning.
    2. God's *sovereign* will is always done.

8. How are we to understand the terms "life" and "destruction" in the parable?

Ans. This terminology must refer to one's eternal destiny. In Jesus' application of the parable, "destruction" equates to "not being able to enter the kingdom" and to hearing Jesus say "depart from me". Those terms certainly refer to eternal destiny. Mt.7:21-23

SUMMARY:

Jesus gives a warning to all those who are looking to salvation through Him. Do not be deceived into thinking that you can be saved without obeying God. This warning applies to professing Christians. You must hear Jesus' words and act upon them. *Obedience is not optional.*

APPLICATION:

If you find that you have been walking on the wide path, or if you wish to begin a life of faith on the narrow path, here are things that you must do:

1. Hear and act upon the message of Jesus from the Bible.
2. Consider it and accept it as true - believe.

3. Repent of all sin, that is, change your mind about sinning – forsake it. Purpose to obey God in everything.
4. Trust that God accepts you into a walk with Him, if you trust in Jesus as the basis for your forgiveness of sins.
5. Surrender your life to God. Acknowledge that Jesus is your Lord. He bought you. He owns you.
6. Begin a lifetime of trusting and obeying God.
7. Your first step of trust and obedience is as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

This guidance should be given to someone *at the very start*. It is better for a person to say "No, I won't surrender; I won't repent", than to gain a false of assurance that they're on the path that leads to life when they're not. It is wrong-headed to start someone on the wide path with the hope of migrating them to the narrow path later on, through discipleship - especially if you've guaranteed them that "life" lies at the end of the path you've started them down.

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