

Title: The Christian Moral Life (4): The Narrow Gate and Christian Counter Culture
Date: 27 August 2017
Occasion: SSMC Sunday Worship
Text: Mat 7:13-27

1. **Introduction: “The Christian Moral Life”**

Sermon 1: The 10 Commandments
Sermon 2: The Beatitudes—Defining character
Sermon 3: Mat 6—Our “Hidden Life” in Christ

Sermon 4: “The Narrow Gate and Christian Counter Culture”
Focuses on 7:13-27; a series of four basic warnings from our Lord!

2. **The Narrow & Wide Gates Contrasted**

i. *Two gates—the narrow and wide; 7:13-14*

a. 7:13-14 explained

- The narrow and wide gates, and the hard and easy roads contrasted
The way of Jesus contrasted with the way of the world.

Note: The “world” is used here in the sense of human civilisation and culture built on rebellion against God; E.g. 1 John 2:15-17

“¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

- Note: No need to draw firm conclusions about whether only a few will be saved. Rev 7:9 speaks of “a great multitude which no man could number.” Also in Luke 13:23f, clearly Jesus is not encouraging us to speculate: “Will those who are saved be few?” Jesus’ reply, “Strive to enter by the narrow door!”

b. The narrow gate refers to the call to follow Christ. This involves:

- Repentance: e.g. Zacchaeus, or Jesus’ disciples
- Dying to self:
 - Not necessarily do what some great saints have done in the past like Sundar Singh or John Sung—although some may be so called.
 - But all of us are called to live in a manner that put Christ before ourselves! E.g. David Wilkerson: Sold his television and devoted 12-2 am daily to prayer!

Kilners: Opened their homes to overseas students over some 30 years!

- The world is deeply seductive: cf. Satan's temptation of Jesus, and many of us have fallen; e.g.
 - Corrupt practices; "money, sex and power" or gluttony, etc.
 - Preaching a watered down gospel; e.g. Sing taxi driver's response when asked about what he thought of the pastor of City Harvest

ii. *Two kinds of prophets—true and false; 7:15-20*

- Prophets are God-spokespersons:
 - forth-telling and sometimes foretelling
 - OT background: True and false!
- Today it would apply not just to prophets as such, but also especially pastors, missionaries and preachers of the Gospel.
- In the Bible, we are reminded that we should always test prophets!
 - 1 Thess 5:20 & 21a; "Do not despise prophecies, but test everything ..."
 - The Early Church has got some very down to earth (& humorous) teaching on how to test travelling prophets and teachers; cf. *Didache* (Para 12):

"4. Let every Apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord,
5. But let him not stay more than one day, or if need be a second as well; but if he stay three days, he is a false prophet.
6. And when an Apostle goes forth let him accept nothing but bread till he reach his night's lodging; but if he ask for money, he is a false prophet...
8. But not everyone who speaks in a spirit is a prophet, except he have the behaviour of the Lord. From his behaviour, then, the false prophet and the true prophet shall be known.
9. And no prophet who orders a meal in a spirit shall eat of it: otherwise he is a false prophet.
10. And every prophet who teaches truth, if he do not what he teaches, is a false prophet...
12. But whosoever shall say in a spirit "Give me money, or something else," you shall not listen to him; but if he tell you to give on behalf of others in want, let none judge him."

- In light of the above, what are we to think of many of travelling preachers and prophets today?
E.g. American preachers (Cerullo, Swaggart, etc.) and now some African ones?

iii. *Two kinds of disciples and ministers; 7:21-23*

- 7:21-23 should warn us against taking anything for granted!
- Cf. Paul in 1 Cor 9:27; "But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."
- How is this possible? They appear so gifted and anointed? Possible answers:

- Cf. Samson; “For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” (Rom 11:29)
- There times when a person with “gifts” may not be empowered by the Holy Spirit but by demonic powers. (e.g. exercise of *Qi* in Chinese culture)
- Note: If we think that God should withdraw His gifts to those who sin, then all of us are goners!

- Point: Do not be impressed with outward appearance or achievements or successes in the eyes of the world!
Back to 7:20!

iv. *Two foundations; 7:24-27*

a. 7:24-27 explained:

- Explain vv.24-27
- Cf. Mat 5:17-18

b. The denial of truth (1): This happens in different ways.
Many believe in truth, but we live in untruth.

- We know what is true, but for our own convenience or selfish gain we lie to others and also to ourselves!
- Others are pragmatist! What works is true for them!
Pilate in John 18:38; “What is truth?” is the perfect example!

c. The denial of truth (2): But there is a deeper problem today, which is that some deny that there is such a thing as truth.

- Modernity and post-modernity: many often use these words loosely without understanding them properly.
Philosophically, these are products of the Enlightenment:
 - Modernity: Only logical and scientific truths are true; there is no such thing as religious or moral truths. The latter is a matter of taste and choice.
 - Post-modernity goes one step further: There is no such thing as truth *per se*, only a matter of perspective.
- This is where the western world stands at the moment
 - Among the philosophers, university academics, many in the media, political leaders, and many in the centres of cultural influence today.

The best example comes from Harvard & its motto, “Veritas”:

For more than 200 years, it was followed by reference to John 8:32!

Originally the full motto was: “Truth for Christ and the Church.”

Years ago the words, “for Christ and the Church” were dropped.

Today, Harvard does not even believe that there is such a thing as truth in religious and moral beliefs—as the President told the entering class two years ago!

(One website, dated 2007, stated: “It remains to be seen, however, how soon the word Veritas would disappear from the shield. ‘Truth’ is simply not a concept favored by our postmodernist society.”)

- For these: God is irrelevant, truth is dead, and the modern world does not need either.
The result is a hardline secularism which rejects beliefs in God, Christ and the Gospel, and in morality.
 - Result: LGBT issues and sexual freedom, abortion rights (pro-choice) ...
 - Because of this, the Gospel will increasingly face a hostile world in the west; and the churches will slowly die, unless God intervenes!
- But the picture in the Asia, Africa and L America is similar and yet, fundamentally different.
 - Similar in that our cultures are influenced by western cultures.
The surface effects of modernity and post-modernity are infecting our worlds, especially the youth: sexual freedom, LGBT issues, pornography, individualism, disrespect for authority, etc.
 - But we are fundamentally different in that we have not accepted the Enlightenment's teaching that there is no such thing as truth!
Our intellectuals and our belief systems are still conditioned by our own ways of thinking and belief.
E.g. We have no problems with the supernatural and the miraculous!
Or, most still believe in God or some supernatural being.
The dominant way of thinking in our culture is not controlled by a hardline secularism which openly and aggressively denies God.
 - When then? Two very important implications:
 - To the extent that our culture are being influenced by the western on the surface level, we can now understand why the modern generation face so much pressure!
 - But to the extent that our culture has not accept the hardline secularism and unbelief of western culture, we have a much easier battle than Christians in the west.
 - [1] We must teach our young and prepare them to face the intellectual battles of today—the problems of Enlightenment philosophy, apologetics, ethics, etc.
 - [2] We must teach systematically from the Bible, with careful interpretation, etc.

Note: ON BOTH MOST CHURCHES IN MALAYSIA ARE FAILING BADLY!

- d. This brings us back to the two foundations that Jesus is talking about.
Are we building our churches on solid rock!?

3. **Summing-up**

- i. *The Narrow Way or Gate*

We have looked at the theme of Christian Moral living based on 10C and Sermon on the Mount.

- On Moral living: God's laws and truth are clearly lay down in the Bible. How seriously do we take them? Do we choose the narrow or the broad way?
- On Ministry: On what do we depend? The methods of this world, human cleverness and financial resources, and success by the standards and measure of this world?
Or, we depend primarily on God and in His strength?
- On Life Foundations: On the solid rock of God's Word and His truth; or on the falsehoods, the glamour and the seductions of a world in rebellion against God?

God has blessed the Malaysian church in many wonderful ways.
But have we given back to God the obedience we owe Him?

Is it not true that the church has failed to be the light that God calls us to be?

ii. *Christian counter culture*

- What does Christian counter culture mean?
 - To live in a different way: E.g. Career choices; to be a different kind of church (A hospital? Meditative worship?)
 - To go against the tide: E.g. an investment banker friend—the corruption in the industry, the corruption of her Christian boss, etc.
 - To be in the world but not of the world!
- The challenge of the Early Church: E.g. Cf. Cyprian's instruction to the church in Carthage, quoted in Rodney Stark (1997:87).

What do you think would happen to Malaysia if we start acting like this towards the underprivileged and the Malays?