

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Saved or Self-Deceived, Part 1

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-326

I want you to begin tonight as we return to the Word of God by following as I read Matthew chapter 7, verses 21 to 27...Matthew chapter 7 verses 21 to 27. Here are the words of our Lord Jesus Himself. And they are stunning words, shocking words, and tragic words.

“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. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy or preach in Your name? And in Your name cast out demons and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’ Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them may be compared to a wise man who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and burst against that house and yet it did not fall for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act upon them will be alike a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and burst against that house and it fell and great was its fall.”

Perhaps this is the most tragic text in all the Bible. The reality is there will be people one day who stand before the Lord, many of them, who will assume that they are about to enter heaven only to be told they're on their way to hell. This is the worst possible illusion that someone can have, to be mistaken about your eternal destiny, to be mistaken about your salvation.

I'm often asked the question, “Are Roman Catholics Christians?” And I would pose this question, “Are Protestants naturally or always Christians?” How about another question, “Are evangelicals necessarily Christians?” But a more important question than any of those is, “Are you a Christian?” Could be that you're among the many who are self-deceived. You're not alone. I am convinced that in the name of Christianity there are many places that call themselves churches and they're not churches. And they have men leading them who call themselves pastors and they're not pastors. And they have congregations who call themselves Christians and they are not Christians. They're not churches, they're not pastors, and they're not Christians and yet they proudly post the label Christian.

Now we learned in our message last time, from verses 13 and 14, that there are only two possible options. There is a narrow gate that goes to heaven and there is a broad road that says heaven but goes to hell. The narrow gate is hard to find and hard to go through because it demands denial of self, denial of self-righteousness, recognition of sin, full repentance, submission to Christ,

commitment to obey Him and follow Him no matter what the cost.

It's hard to find that truth and hearing it, it's hard to act upon it because of the love of self and the love of sin which is natural to the sinner. The true way to heaven is hard to find. It is away from the crowd. It is narrow, you come naked, you come alone, you come penitent. You strive to enter. At the same time, most religious people are on the broad road and there are plenty of false prophets who are enabling them. They are discussed, by the way, in verses 15 to 20. The false prophets, the false religious leaders, the false representatives of Christ, false agents of God who really are the agents of Satan, they are ministers of Satan disguised as angels of light, leading people on a road that says heaven but ends up in hell. For all the years of my ministry, there has been nothing that has come to the level of my concern for this issue.

Of course it's a tragedy for Hindus to go to hell, or Buddhists, or Muslims. It's a tragedy for atheists and Jews who reject the Messiah to go to hell. It's a tragedy for anyone to go to hell. But it seems to me that the tragedy of all tragedies is the oft repeated Judas tragedy where you hang around Jesus but end up belonging to Satan. That's the real tragedy. There are pastors who fit into this category, they're not even Christians. And churches are filled with people, some quote/unquote churches are made up almost all of non-Christians who are deceived about their true spiritual condition.

And so, it's important for us to hear the words of the Lord. If I'm concerned about this issue, believe me, He's far more concerned about it as well. And when the Lord said these words, He was not speaking to irreligious people, He was speaking to fastidiously religious people. He was speaking to people who were religious to the max, I suppose we could say. They were obsessed with religion. In fact, they couldn't divorce their social life, their civil life, their economic life, their family life, their national life from their religion. It permeated everything in Israel. These are THE most religious people. These people are as religious as you can get. But they have no relationship to God and no relationship to Christ. They are religious but lost. They are on the wrong road. To borrow the words of Paul, they have a form of godliness without the reality of it. They are self-deceived.

We have that today, as I said. It is everywhere...everywhere. People who in some way or another are connected to the idea of God and even Jesus, but utterly devoid of any divine life, any knowledge of God, any salvation at all. We have multitudes of deceived souls within churches who are on some kind of Jesus trip, thinking all is well. And the words of our Lord in this text really are the best words to deal with this deception. And I'm sure it's not just a deception that's out there somewhere beyond us, I'm sure it's a deception that is here within us. Of course it would be the tragedy of all tragedies, but it will occur and it does occur and it will continue to occur that someone would sit at Grace Community Church and end up saying, "But, Lord, but, Lord," only to hear, "Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness, I never knew you."

Our Lord had this concern even in the Olivet Discourse at the end of His ministry when He told a story in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew about some virgins who had all the trappings for the great event, waiting for the bridegroom to come for the wedding celebration. Only one thing was missing. What they needed on the inside, oil to light the lamp because they had no oil, symbolic of not having anything on the inside of spiritual light, they were shut out forever, though they had all the external trappings.

I suppose the shocking word here, at least the shocking word for me is the first word of verse 22, "Many will say to Me on that day..." And I can't help but tie that word back to verse 13, "Many are those who enter on the broad way through the wide gate." It's the same many. It's the religious but lost. It's the same many who go on the broad road that says heaven, but goes to hell. It's the same many who when they come to the end of the road think they will be admitted to heaven only to find that the entrance to heaven is from, as it were, the very portals of...the entrance to hell, rather, is from the very portals of heaven. What a shock that is to think you're on the way to heaven, only to find out you are in hell.

What lulls people into this deception? What does it? How could you get to that place where you're comfortable in your own deception, your own self-deception, even unaware of it. Well let me suggest some things. There are some things that contributed to this. And I would say, first of all, is a superficial understanding of the gospel, which...by the way...permeates if not dominates quote/unquote Christendom, a failure to understand the true terms of the gospel, the real definition of salvation and saving faith. We have such a weak and shallow and superficial and trivialized emotionalized psychologized approach to the gospel that most people who call themselves Christians couldn't give you a meaningful explanation of the great doctrines of redemption. They don't know them. Nor are they expected to know them because in many cases the people who teach them don't know them either. And so people have a false understanding of their spiritual condition because they don't even understand what saving faith and what the saving gospel are. And you would think that someone like myself who has spent a great portion of his lifetime trying to clarify the gospel and clarify what it means to genuinely repent, and what it means to genuinely put your faith in Christ, and what the doctrine of justification really means would be some kind of a hero to the Christian church, but the fact of the matter is, I'm an anti-hero, I'm treading, as it were, on people's feelings, I'm invading the comfortable bed of their tolerances, I'm being divisive. But the truth always does that...always does that.

The church is so ignorant about the gospel that when you preach the true gospel, you're very liable to be vilified for it by the church. I picked up another article today that was sent to me in a journal, I think about 15 pages long, attacking me for what I say it means to become a Christian, written by a man who is a Christian pastor. I tell you to preach the true gospel in the Christian world today is to engage yourself in more warfare than to preach the true gospel in the world.

So the first reason why people can be lulled into this deception is because they don't know the definition of the gospel. They can sit in a quote/unquote meeting somewhere that poses as a church and be taught by someone who poses as a Christian pastor, and surrounded by people who pose as Christians, and be made to feel good about whatever situation they're in.

The second contributor to this is a false sense of assurance...a false sense of assurance. The idea is that if you feel good about God, and if you have some emotional attraction to God which might be called love, if you believe in Jesus and you want to connect to Jesus, and you want to sort of associate with Jesus and be a part of what Jesus is doing, and you want Jesus to kind of work with you and make you what you want to be, you're in. And this will be affirmed. You will be told if you just pray this prayer, "You're a Christian." You'll be certified. In some cases if you come to an altar and pray this prayer, you're going to be doubly certified. In some cases if you show some kind of faithfulness to the meetings that you go to and they're all about Jesus, quote/unquote. That's a certification. But mostly if you feel good about Jesus and you want Him to fix your life and take your life, you'll be affirmed, you're okay. As long as you say you want Jesus in your life and as long as you say you believe in Jesus and as long as you pray to Jesus and ask Him to fix your life, say the right things, show the right emotional responses to the events that are done in the name of Jesus, you're okay. In fact, you'll be built up. You'll be affirmed regularly. God loves you and He loves you unconditionally. And all He wants to do is fulfill every dream and desire you have in your life. And you're here and you're showing your love for God and that put you in the spot where you're going to be just blessed.

And so, both the lack of definition in the gospel and this overwhelming desire to make everybody feel good and to assure them that they're okay with God if they just hang around the people who talk about Jesus, lures people in and seduces them into the dream that they are right with God. And they're not.

There's a third thing. A failure at self-examination...a failure at self-examination. When somebody says to me, "I'm not sure I'm a Christian," what should be my immediate response? "Well, of course you are. You're here. Have you ever prayed the prayer? Have you gone to the prayer room? What are you talking about, of course you're a Christian, look at you. You have a Bible. Hey, you have a MacArthur Study Bible, you have to be a Christian. What do you mean?"

But if anybody says to me, "I'm not sure I'm a Christian," my immediate response is, "The reason you may feel you're not a Christian is because you're not a Christian." It's much more important to demand an honest self-examination than it is to ride across somebody's doubts. If you doubt your salvation, there's a reason you doubt your salvation. It may not be a legitimate one, but it may be a legitimate one. You may have every right reason to doubt that you're on the way to heaven. You may have every right reason to doubt that you're a believer. And until I can see a pattern in your life and

make a good guess that this is unnecessary doubt, and that you're succumbing to temptation not to trust God who has saved you, and even then I can't be certain. I'm going to question the fact that if you doubt, maybe you have reason to doubt.

But that's not popular. In fact, the words that I'm saying right now to you are words that would be rejected soundly in many, many quote/unquote Christian churches. What? You are calling into question people's salvation? Who do you think you are?

Well I'm only endeavoring to make certain that the words of Jesus in Matthew 7 are brought to bear upon this generation, that people are living under a massive illusion about their relationship to God and there are many, many in that category. This is not my message, this is the message of the great Shepherd, I'm only His undershepherd, passing the message on.

And we're so grace oriented. We want people to feel so good. We want people to like us. We don't like confrontation. So we don't want to call people's spiritual life into question. We're so grace oriented, we don't want them to feel bad about their sins, we want them to feel happy about God's love. But that's not biblical. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 there is a word that we all need to hear and it comes from the Apostle Paul to a church, to a church where he had spent about two years of his life, to a church where people had professed Christ, where they had been baptized, where they had been taught by Paul, the Corinthian church, a church to which by the time he writes 2 Corinthians, he's already written three other letters...1 Corinthians and two other letters that aren't in Scripture. This is a church that has heard so much from this man. And by the time you come to chapter 13 here, you've now got a total of 29 chapters written to them just in the two epistles that are inspired by the Spirit and placed in the Scripture. And yet he says to them in chapter 13 verse 5, "Test yourself to see if you are in the faith, examine yourselves. Do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail the test?"

After years of ministry under the Apostle Paul, after years of instruction from Paul and from his emissaries sent to that church on behalf of Paul, after years of professing and confessing Christ, he says, "You must go back to the very beginning and examine yourselves to see whether you are really in the faith." In fact, this should happen in the life of the church as a normal course. What do you mean by that? Every time you come to the Lord's table, 1 Corinthians chapter 11, every time you come to the Lord's table, as often as you eat this bread...verse 26...and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes, therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner," and that would be someone who is not genuinely saved, for sure, "shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." If you are a false Christian and you take communion, you become guilty of His death. "Let a man examine himself." Every time you come to the Lord's table, it is a time of self-examination. If you don't do that, if you're unwilling to do that, the likelihood is you have found a comfort zone in your self-delusion.

There's a fourth matter that I think seduces people into this delusion...a fixation on religious activity...a fixation on religious activity. Being in a church, being with people who call themselves Christians, reading quote/unquote quasi-Christian literature, talking about God, as so many people feel today, feeling spiritual, even being in a Bible study, being a part of some Christian organization. This lulls people into the deception that that's the equal of being saved.

O my, Christianity is filled with people in all kinds of religious activities. Just think of all the Christian organizations, there's no end to them. Think of all the Christian publishing, books, music, literature of every imaginable kind, television, radio. It's endless. How many people are involved in all of this? Think of all the churches from Roman Catholicism, the Orthodox Church down through everything that purports to be Christian, including cults, all the way through to liberal Protestantism, denominations, all the way down to every different kind of church. And churches now pop up everywhere, the idea today is to start your own church. You're not supposed to be called or gifted or trained or ordained, you're just supposed to be entrepreneurial. Everywhere these churches pop up and then reinvent what a church should be around the personality of the leader. And they involve people.

I just got a little deal somebody showed me the other day, it came out to everybody in my part of town. The New Techno Church, and it features break dancing Jesus boy...break dancing Jesus boy in the New Techno Church. Now that's involving a lot of people. And when they meet, it says, when you come bring your stuff, bring your rap albums, bring your turntable and you can be a disc jockey...and who knows what's going on in that situation. It involves all kinds of people who feel like they're connected to break dancing Jesus boy. And we laugh at that because it's so absolutely ludicrous and ridiculous, but it's a tragedy beyond all tragedies. Religious activity everywhere...everywhere.

There's a fifth feature that I think lures people into deception, I like to call it a fair exchange approach...a fair exchange approach. It's so typical. It usually starts like this, I'm basically a good person, it's the idea that you believe in God and you're a good person as over against a bad person, which means given a twenty-four hour day, most hours in that day you're not committing a violent crime. That's the way it works. It's all about stacking up the hours. How many hours a day do I commit crimes? Well, it's a rare day when I do a crime, but there are a lot of other days when I don't do a crime, so I'm basically good. Or how many hours a month am I raping someone. Occasionally, but most of the time I'm basically a good person. That's how it works. They sort of balance off the timetable. We tend to also balance off our sin with something good. Hey look, I support my family...I support my family. Yeah, I know I stumble once in a while and I'm unfaithful to my wife and I cheat on my Income Tax, but I'm telling you this, I take my kids, you know, to the Saturday Little League, I'm a good dad. Really? Yeah, God wouldn't keep me out of heaven, after all I believe in God and hey, I believe in Jesus, I'm basically a good person.

Now, of course, that's the biggest lie in religion. You have to forget in order to buy that lie that God only justifies the ungodly. So it's not until you're ungodly and you know it, you're already ungodly, you just don't know it. But when you come to the knowledge that you are ungodly, then there's hope that you could be justified...but not until. This works for most people. Some bad over here, some good over here, balance...I'm on the good side, I'll be okay. God certainly couldn't keep me out of heaven.

There's another element in this little list of attitudes that give people a false sense of assurance. Familiarity with biblical morality...familiarity with biblical morality...they say, "Well hey, I don't deny what the Bible says, I believe in a biblical morality. I'm not pro-homosexual, I'm not anti-marriage, I'm not anti-family. I agree with that. I think sexual activity should be between a husband and a wife only inside marriage. I hold that morality, I must be on my way to heaven.

And there are lots of people who fit into this category. Take, for example, the Mormons. They say this is their way of life...although it doesn't always work out so. I'm not certainly trying to twist the Scripture. Look, I don't have any argument with the Bible. Actually I don't know what it says, but I think these are the kind of things that the Bible advocates and I'm for them.

And all these things are just a big deception because none of these things have anything to do with your salvation...none of them. The real issue is this, people who are deluded and deceived have failed to come through the narrow gate. They have failed to come through the narrow gate. What does that mean? Repentance for sin, confession of sin, submission to the Lordship of Christ, brokenness, humility, contrition, obedience to the Word of the Lord no matter what. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "What our blessed Lord wants, most of all, is ourselves, what Scripture calls our hearts." He wants the inner man, the heart, He wants our submission. He does not want merely our profession, our zeal, our fervor, our works, or anything else. He wants us. God does not want our offerings. He does not want our sacrifices. He wants our obedience. He wants us. It is possible for a man to say the right things, to be very busy and active, to achieve apparently wonderful results and yet not to give himself to the Lord. And that is, finally, the greatest insult we can offer to God. What could be a greater insult, says Lloyd-Jones, than to say, "Lord, Lord," fervently to be busy and active and yet to withhold true allegiance and submission from Him to insist upon retaining control of our own lives and to allow our own opinions and arguments rather than those of Scripture to control what we do and how we do it. This is the greatest insult of all to the Lord.

And the deceived come in several categories. There are the superficial. They are the ones who call themselves Christians because at some point when they were kids they accepted Christ. We'll use that buzz phrase. Or they believed in God. They are ignorant and they are uncommitted. I call them superficial because they have a superficial exposure to Christianity, some event in their life, probably reinforced by their parents. They think there's a real connection to God because of that. But they're just kind of superficial, it's all about a past event. They think they've put that to rest. They've settled

that issue. They've taken care of that sort of necessary item in their lives. And the only time you ever see them is on Christmas and Easter. When they roll into the church on Easter, you want to wish them Merry Christmas because you won't see them again till then.

And then there are the deceived who are not the superficial but the deceived who are very involved. They're all through the church. Jesus called them tares sown among the wheat. They know more about the church. They know about the life of the church, they're involved in the life of the church. They know a little bit about the Bible. They know Bible stories. They know what the buzz phrase is, the Jesus narrative to some extent. They could tell you some Bible stories. They know a little bit of theology, just enough to be dangerous. But there's no real humility, there's no brokenness, there's no godliness. They're just there. They're involved. They don't think deeply about things. They're not trying to be deceivers. They're not trying to be false Christians. They are, but they don't really know it. They're just kind of going along with the church activity, thinking...Hey, these are my people, this is where I belong.

And so you have the superficial, then you have the involved. And then you have, thirdly, the hypocrites. They know they're not believers. They show up on church on Sunday and they can't wait to get out of the place to go back to pornography, illicit relationships, wicked evil behavior. Oh the involved, they're trying to work on their ethics, they're trying to work on their morality and trying to be as good as they can be without any help from the Holy Spirit, pretty tough...actually impossible. But the hypocrites, they've given up trying to be what they can't be and they just pretend to be one thing when they show up at the church and the rest of the time they are exactly who they are.

Are these people all aware that they're being deceived? Oh I think the superficial probably are really deceived and they don't know it. I think the involved are deceived and they don't know it. I think, for the most part, the hypocrites, they aren't deceived, they are deceivers. I don't know what they think they're going to gain out of it.

Now let's say you're here in a church like this, or any church, you want to help. And you say, "Okay, we've got some tares here, and we've got some people who are here, they're doing things in the church. They're involved. They're working at this Christianity thing. We've got some other folks who show up now and then, only sporadically, they're the superficial ones. And we've got some well crafted hypocrisy going on that is articulated very effectively by some people who have been practicing it for a long, long time. How are we going to help these people? How do we get to these people to unmask them for their sake? What do you look for? How can a deceived person know he's deceived. How can we spot someone who is deceived and deceiving?"

Let me give you a few suggestions. And by the way, in this message I'm only giving you the introduction. Here's what to look for. When you're looking for people who are deceived, look for people who are seeking feelings, blessings, experiences, healings, angels, whatever that are only

interested in the byproducts of the faith, not in Christ. They're not consumed with the glory and the honor and the wonder and the beauty and the magnificence of Christ. They're not consumed with honoring Him, loving Him, serving Him, obeying Him, submitting to Him, exalting Him, proclaiming Him, worshiping Him, confessing Him. They're only there for the byproducts of that which is attached to Him...give me blessing, give me spiritual experience, give me a spiritual high, give me good feelings, give me healing, give me prosperity.

That's an interesting thing to realize that some years ago the prosperity gospel was just a small part of the larger Pentecostal Movement. Now it has swallowed the whole movement. The whole movement is predicated on giving people the products of God, but not God...the products of Christ, but not Christ. They're not looking for Christ. Let me have Christ whether I'm sick or well. Let me have Christ whether I'm rich or poor. Let me have Christ whether I'm alive or dead. Let me have Christ for my sins and Christ for my guide and Christ for my power and Christ for my King. I don't care whether I have anything but Christ.

That's not what you hear today. In fact, if that's your message, it's very likely the crowd will thin out fast. So when you're looking for people who might be deceived, look for the people who are seeking only the byproducts that are going to be what they want and not Christ. And as John Piper says, "The gospel does not offer to the sinner what the sinner wants naturally." What does the natural sinner want? Huh, good feelings, blessings, healing, happiness, riches, money, success, a bunch of angels working for him, all unregenerate people want that naturally. That's not the product of the work of the Spirit in an unregenerate heart. The gospel does not promise the sinner what the sinner already wants. It promises what the sinner does not want and that is righteousness, holiness, forgiveness, heaven and dominating all of that, Christ. And what is the attitude of the world toward Christ? They hate Him. That's why we study about Christians being persecuted, right? You'll be hated by all because of My name. They hate Me, they'll hate you. The unregenerate man has no affinity for the gospel that redefines him as a wretched sinner on his way to hell, desperately in need of salvation. And to get that salvation he has to abandon himself and embrace Christ.

So you look for the people who are looking for all the byproducts that they want in their unredeemed condition, rather than Christ. Secondly, you can look for people who are more committed to churches than Scripture...more committed to quote/unquote churches and Scripture, denominations, movements, groups because it very likely is a social thing. Oh not just purely social, but it's sort of social with a spiritual twang, you know? Ah, it feels good to be involved in a God thing. And you even hear people say that. Hey, come and meet with us, we have a God thing going here. It's a kind of a God social amalgam. And that's what they're committed to, not to the Word of God. How could you be committed to God and not to His Word? How can you say, "Oh yeah, I really want to connect with God." Okay, you want to connect with God? Here's what God says. Confess your sin, repent and embrace His Son as your only hope of salvation. That's the first thing He says. And if you don't agree to do that, you're going to hell forever.

Now do you want to hear the next thing God says? Maybe we could start there and then we'll work on, "Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him." Then we could work on, "Hate your father, hate your mother, sister, your brother and even your own life." And then we'll talk about count the cost.

Wait a minute, He's asking all that? And then, by the way, the Law of God is the Law of God because it's a reflection of His holy nature and the Law of God doesn't change, God's moral Law will have to become your passion. What? Which is another way of saying everything you love to do now, you have to hate. Everything you hate to do now you have to love. Are you ready for that? Look for people who have a commitment to some organization, some place, some group of people that is far more than their commitment to know the Word of God so that they can obey the Word of God.

I'm not under any illusions. I know why people come to this church. I know why you're here. You're here because you take the Word of God seriously, correct? And this is not a dog and pony show. Look, I get up here every week and do the exact same thing I did last week. There's no variety in this church. But you're not looking for a variety act here. It isn't a juggler this week and a dancing horse next week. You don't need to be entertained. You don't need a rock band. You're here for one reason, tell me what the Word of God says. That's why you're here. I know that. We all know that. That's why we're here.

And sometimes people will say, "Well, you know, we came to your church for a little while but it was a fifteen minute drive and we found a place closer by." Really? Do they teach the Bible there? "Oh no, no...not like you do. But it's close to where we are." Oh, okay, yeah. Not hard to figure out where you're at, is it?

There's one reason people come here and one reason they don't come here, because they don't want the constant exposure. I wouldn't come here if I didn't want to hear the Word of God. I'd take about one sermon from me and say, "I'm not going there again." Look, if you don't listen to the Word of God, and you're not interested in the Word of God, this isn't the place to be because nothing else is going to happen. So if you're waiting for the new wave to show up, it's not coming.

There's a third kind of person you might look at and wonder if these people are really converted. They're more involved in theology as an academic interest than for personal holiness. I hate to say it but seminaries all over this country are filled with professors who have a academic interest in Scripture, an academic interest in theology, who don't know God at all. And so whatever they think the Bible means is probably not what the Bible means, since the natural man even though he's a scholastic, cannot understand the things of God. It's no wonder that seminaries full of liberal professors can't get the gospel right, can't get Genesis right, can't get the Old Testament right, can't get anything right because unregenerate people no matter how well they're educated or theologically

trained still can't get it right. Because, as 1 Corinthians 2 says, only the Spirit of God knows the mind of God and only the Spirit can give understanding.

So you look for people who have an academic interest in theology and the Scripture rather than an interest in the Word of God for the sake of personal holiness and personal worship. You know, that's the two things that I draw out of Scripture. The first thing is the work of the Word in my own heart, the cleansing, purifying. It's like a knife, John 15, that prunes. It's like water that washes. And the second element is that it not only convicts and cleanses my heart and the heart of a true believer, but it also enables us to worship in fresh ways. Every new passage releases new things about God. Every verse that I go to, and I go so slowly through every verse explodes on me in a kind of cacophony of angelic voices praising God and opens new vistas of understanding for me.

And so what do I draw out of Scripture? That which produces personal growth and holiness in my own life, and that which expands my worship. I never read the Bible for academic reasons...never.

Another thing to look for in a person who is deceived is someone who is always stuck on one point of theology. I have run into these people all my life. They deal with only one over-emphasized point of theology and they're just seeking a platform to expound this sort of wacky view. And when they write me letters, you know these kinds of people, they write tiny writing, never spaced down all sides of the paper and then they write all over the envelope. And everything they say is all about the same point. And all they want is a platform, driven by some ego need. You're going to find with true Christians that there is not this obsession with some quirky aspect of theology, but rather there is this open balance in which they embrace all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are found in Christ.

Another and I'll just give you two more, another thing to look for when you're looking for people who might be in a condition of being self-deceived is that they are over-indulgent in the name of grace...they are over-indulgent in the name of grace. Another way to say that is they lack penitence. With true Christians, there's just an ongoing brokenness. There's just an ongoing kind of recognition that they fall short. We are the ones always confessing our sins and thereby, 1 John 1, we give evidence of being ones that are always forgiven.

When you find people who are over-indulgent in their sins, who are going to defend their right to conduct their life in a certain way and live a certain way because of grace, sort of super-grace, indulgent grace, and they lack penitence and brokenness and a measure of humility, it might well be that you're dealing with someone who is deceived.

And just one last one, and we've kind of talked about it, but you can put it in the list, number six, look for people who see God as the means to their own ends...who see God as the means to their own ends. I want to be...I want to get to God because I've got all these deals that I want to do, I've got all these plans, I've got all these dreams, I've got all these ambitions and hey, if you tell me God will help

me get there, that's Joel Osteen. He's a heretic. That's not Christianity. That is not Christianity. And that is not a church. It's heresy. God is not the genie in your bottle who jumps out when you rub it and says, "Tada, three wishes." That is not Christianity. It doesn't even approximate true Christianity. You need to help those people who see God as the means to their own ends.

Sad to say, people who live like this even though they hang around churches, called churches, and sometimes hang around real churches and some of them are even here in our church, they are on the road to destruction. They're among the many who will say, "Lord, Lord, it's us." Only to hear, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." These are the people who think they're going to heaven, but they're not.

Now with that, we introduce this text. I'm glad you still think that's humorous. That gives me hope that there is a future. We're going to return to this text and we're going to look more deeply into what is one of the most provocative and powerful of all of Jesus' teachings, the folly of empty words. Profession without possession, the tragedy of all tragedies. But for now, we bow in prayer and thank the Lord for what He's given us tonight.

Father, it is such a tragic thing to think of empty words coming from empty hearts of lives that will be destroyed when the rain of judgment and the flood of divine wrath comes in the end who will stand at the tribunal and say, "Hey, Lord, it's us, Lord, Lord." Only to hear, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity." Father, we know that all are deceived who have not ceased by Your power doing iniquity and begun to do Your will. What marks a true believer? They as we heard in baptism tonight are not longer a slave to sin but have become slaves of righteousness. On the other hand, if we look at this all positively, how can you tell a true believer? Consumed with the love of Christ, consumed with a hunger for the Word of God, longing to be holy and righteous, longing to be humble and broken, desirous to be above all things obedient from the heart, longing to worship, can never get enough obedience, can never get enough worship...all these evidences of a transformed life. And, Father, we would pray that if there are any with us tonight who are deceived about their true spiritual condition, Lord, may the light go on and may they see the reality. Give them a hunger and a thirst for righteousness. Give them an overwhelming love for Christ. Give them a desire to humble themselves, turn from their sin and submit to Christ as slaves submitting to a sovereign and all-gracious, merciful Lord. Give them a desire to worship. Free them from the longings of the natural heart, the unredeemed heart. Fill their hearts with the longings that belong only to the regenerate...obedience, submission, humility, holiness, worship.

Now, Father, just do your work, that's all we can ever ask. Ours is but to bring the truth and to bring the warning and to repeat the words of our blessed Savior. And we pray, Lord, that Your Spirit would do a mighty work in hearts through what we've heard tonight. We thank You for it in the Savior's name. Amen.

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