

Nominal Christianity

Bible Baptist Church, November 27, 2005
Harmony M.B.C., June 17, 2007; July 24, 2011
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Mat 7:13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Mat 7:14 Because strait (stenos: obstacles standing about) *is* the gate, and narrow (thlibos: to crowd with the idea of creating affliction or tribulation) *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Every day we are brought face to face with the reality that a form of Christianity is all around us in our culture and even in many parts of the world in other countries. There is a broad definition today for what a Christian is. Anybody who identifies themselves with a religion that has Jesus Christ as the nominal centerpiece in it is said to be a Christian. A 1995 estimate of the number of Christians in the world showed that this definition of a Christian fit 1,927,953,000 people. This was at a time when the world population was estimated at 5,694,418,460 people. This means that in 1995, one-third or 33% of the world professed to follow Christ.

- ❖ In statistics, “few” would suggest less than 5% and sometimes less than 1%. Now we know Jesus was not a statistician although He knew all statistics; and so, we don’t know whether he was talking about less than 5% or not. But even to you and I, human reasoning will tell us that a “few” is not one-third (think of how ridiculous this sounds: “give me a few dollars...what I’m asking for is one-third of all the money you have!”).
- ❖ This Greek word in our text (oligos = o-lee-gos) means puny in degree, number, duration, or value).
- ❖ Deuteronomy 26:5 speaks of Jacob as few in number when he went down to Egypt (history indicates that it was about 70 people; this could be compared with the millions of Egyptians in that land).
- ❖ It is important for the impact of the word “few” to sink in here, because:
- ❖ Estimates for a count of everyone who has ever been born on the earth range between 70 billion and 106 billion (Carl Haub, Population Reference Bureau). Average comes to about 88 billion. How many is a few for this number?
- ❖ If it is, say, 5%, then the median number would be about 4 billion, 400 million. The current world population is about 6.5 billion. So few even at 5% would not be the whole world’s current population that found the strait gate during the last 6,000 years!
- ❖ Notice also in **Mat. 7:21-23** as Christ continues to discuss the subject of the narrowness of the way and the few that find it He takes time to emphasize that he includes many religious people in the group that takes the broad way.
- ❖ One of the most important things we can do in the matter of spiritual things is to realize that religion and so-called spiritual pursuits do not indicate that somebody is on the road to heaven.
- ❖ Above everything, we need to know the details about our spiritual lives. We need to examine it and determine for ourselves that we have something besides religion,...something more than these in **Mat. 7:21-23** have.

I. Know the extent of your relationship with God

- ❖ Be sure about your calling and election

❖ **II Peter 1:1-10** - the direction of these passages is to give us insights into how we may confirm our calling and election. It is not enough for a human to talk about being the elect of God. That human needs to be able to look at the **proofs of God working in him and see that working as the evidence** that he **really is of God**. Without these proofs, witnesses about our lives cannot determine that we have Christ, and we ourselves can have no certainty about salvation.

➤ Illustrate: we get up in the morning and say, “the sun has risen.” How do we know that? Light; a big yellow or red ball in the east, etc.

❖ Be honest about where your affections lie

▶ **Col. 3:2-3** Set your affection (phroneo = have a sentiment for or be disposed toward) on things above, not on things on the earth. **3** For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

▶ **1John 2:15** Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

▶ Illustrate: We say we love watching football. How do others know this is true? How do we know it is true? People see us or hear about us watching the games every season. We ourselves think about the players, the game, the scores; we like to talk football talk; we may have football paraphernalia; we like to speculate on the outcome of games in general and the finals, etc.

II. Know the nature and direction of your worship

❖ Who is your God, (or) what is your god, or what are your gods? (I told you in a sermon some time back that Godchecker.com recorded that there were 1,700 different formalized gods known to be worshiped during man’s history including the present. But this does not include this list of **lesser known gods**: family, job, friends, recreation, automobile, house or property, personal lusts, personal ambition, toys, your body, and a host of others.)

▶ “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” is still a declaration and commandment of God today.

• **Mat 4:10** Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, **Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.**

▶ Illustrate: Somebody says the only car they will ever drive is a Ford. Next week you see him in a Toyota; the week after in a Chevrolet. He shows up at your house Monday night in a Dodge truck. Is he solely dedicated to Ford vehicles? Or has he divided his allegiance among several brands?

III. Know what your worship is built on

❖ **John 4:23-24** But the hour cometh, and now is, when the **true worshipers** shall worship the Father in **spirit and in truth**: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. **24** God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him **must** worship *him* in **spirit and in truth**.

▶ Worship must be **spiritual and of the truth**.

• As a car must have oil and gas to run, so a person must have both the Spirit and the truth in order to correctly and effectively worship.

• Spirit: First it takes the capacity to worship in Spirit. This is only possible if something spiritual from God has taken place:

✓ **2Cor 1:21-22** Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God; **22** Who hath also sealed us, and given the **earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.**

✓ **Rom 8:16** The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

- Spirit: second, it takes guidance by the Spirit into a worship mode.
- Illustrate using the testimony of John the apostle (Rev. 1:10) I was **in the Spirit** on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

• Truth:

✓ **John 14:6** Jesus saith unto him, **I am the way**, the **truth**, and the life....”

❖ **John 18:37** Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

IV. Know the nature and direction of your life and service

❖ Be clear about the focus of your life

- ▶ **Col 3:17** And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.
- ▶ **Col 3:23** And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;
- ▶ Illustrate: our lives are like working with a microscope; at one level of focus and magnification, we may see water bubbles and lint; at another more sharply refined focus and magnification we will see microbes under the glass; the difference is focusing on the item of interest.

❖ Be clear about who you serve

- ▶ **Col 3:24** Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ.
- ▶ Imagine how much confusion a waitress would find in her life if half the time she went out on the floor of the restaurant to take someone an order, she served the plate to the wrong person!

❖ Be clear about how and where you serve Him

- ▶ There is more and more talk nowadays about how a person can serve the Lord without getting involved in a church
- ▶ **Eph 3:21** Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.
- ▶ Illustrate: I have made a commitment to meet somebody in Paris on Tuesday to show them how to import a large data set into Microsoft Access. So, on Monday morning early, I drive to Nashville, board a plane, fly to Paris, France, and take with me some carpentry tools with instructions and knowledge about how to build a gazebo! What have I done? I have gone to the wrong Paris, on the wrong day, with the wrong teaching tools and the wrong information! This is what Christians do when they begin to imagine that they can serve the Lord by creating their own way of doing it.