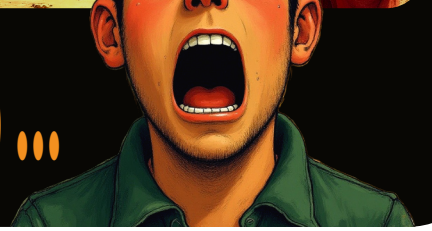
The Narrow Way

The hidden dangers of counterfeit religion

A shocking discovery … While traveling on the narrow way we will learn that many of the people traveling beside us as the people of God are not in reality the people of God.

- They do not know, seek, understand, worship, listen to or love God.
- They pursue what is empty and worthless.
- They exchange the truth of God for a lie.
- They exchange the glory of God for human creations.
- And it has been this way for centuries.



They love idols more than they love God …

1. Through the prophet Jeremiah the LORD called upon all the people of God to hear the word of God, 2:4, 2:1-3, 1:14-16.

- (Jeremiah 2:4 ESV) **Hear the word of the LORD**, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel.

A. Israel had at one time loved God and were holy before him but now disaster had come upon them.

- (Jeremiah 2:2–3 ESV) "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. 3 **Israel was holy** to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest. All who ate of it **incurred guilt**; **disaster came upon them**, declares the LORD."
- (Jeremiah 1:16 ESV) **And I will declare my judgments against them**, **for all their evil in forsaking me**. They have **made offerings to other gods** and **worshiped the works of their own hands**."

B. The first step toward recovery from their hopeless situation was to hear the word of God.

All the families of Israel were urged in view of the disaster of their lives and the impending judgment to hear with attention and interest what YAHWEH was saying to them.

Hear … [shaw·mah/] – to hear, listen to, obey; to hear with attention or interest; to give heed; to consent, agree; to yield to.

Word … [dabar] – speech, words; saying, utterance; a message; a communication that is most often spoken, but can come through other means.

C. *Lesson*: To escape worthless, counterfeit religion we must hear what God has to say to us.

2. The LORD called upon the people of God to answer a ridiculous question — what wrong had they found in him that caused them to stray far from him by pursuing emptiness, 2:5.

- (Jeremiah 2:5 ESV) Thus says the LORD: "**What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me**, and went after **worthlessness**, and became **worthless**?

A. The purpose of his question was to reveal their foolishness and irrationality in abandoning him by pursuing what is empty, meaningless and temporary.

Worthlessness … *hebel* – to be or become empty or meaningless or futile or absurd; to act emptily, to fill with vain hopes; a vapor, breath, vanity; a physical image that is worshiped as a pagan deity, i.e. an idol.

Hebel means breath and is used metaphorically of anything transitory, frail, unsatisfying; the same word used over and over in Ecclesiastes for vanity.

- (Ecclesiastes 1:2 ESV) **Vanity** of **vanities**, says the Preacher, **vanity** of **vanities**! All is **vanity**.

B. It is interesting to note that "hebel" is sometimes translated as idols or false idols.

- (1 Kings 16:13, 26; 17:15 ESV) … provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their **idols** … provoking the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger by their **idols** … They went after **false idols** and became false …

An idol is anything, physical or metaphysical, that is empty of eternal value and supplants the place of God in our lives. This explains the most important commandment. We love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength, and he maintains his preeminence in our lives.

C. Counterfeit religion is a vain deception of the heart in which what is in reality worthless is regarded in the mind of the deceived as what is most important.

- (James 1:26 ESV) If anyone **thinks** he is religious and **does not** bridle his tongue but **deceives** his heart, **this person's religion is worthless**.

Worthless … μάταιος [mataios] — empty, vain, vacuous; devoid of significance, point, or benefit; useless, of no purpose.

D. In the futile, darkened logic of counterfeit religion human glory is valued above the glory of God so they trade it off for the works of their hand and the imaginations of their minds.

- (John 5:44 ESV) **How can you believe**, when **you receive glory from one another** and **do not seek the glory that comes from the only God**?
- (Romans 1:21–23 ESV) **For although they knew God**, they did **not honor him as God** or give thanks to him, but they became **futile** in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were **darkened**. 22 **Claiming to be wise, they became fools**, 23 **and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for** images resembling

mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

E. The pursuit of meaningless is the opposite of the pursuit of God and takes the person far from God.

F. People who pursue what is empty and meaningless become empty and meaningless.

***G. Lesson*: To not fall prey to worthless, counterfeit religion we must love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength.**

3. God points out that the people of God did not involve him in their decision-making process as they descended further into worthlessness, 2:6-7.

- (Jeremiah 2:6–7 ESV) **They did not say, 'Where is the LORD** who **brought us up** from the land of Egypt, who **led us in the wilderness**, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells?' 7 And I **brought you into a plentiful land** to enjoy its fruits and its good things. **But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination**.

A. They defiled the land and turned the gift of God's provision into and abomination.

An abomination is something which causes horror and disgust in others.

B. In abandoning the LORD they did not take into account how he had cared for, protected and led them to his land of blessing.

C. In seeking emptiness and not the LORD they did not understand the blessing he had provided for them.

D. Pride had blinded them from seeking God.

- (Psalm 10:4 ESV) **In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him**; all his thoughts are, "There is no God."

E. The person who seeks God will be instructed in reverence for God.

- (2 Chronicles 26:5 ESV) He [Uzziah] **set himself to seek God** in the days of Zechariah, **who instructed him in the fear of God**, and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.

F. God observes from heaven and testifies that no one understands and no one seeks for God.

- (Psalm 53:2–3 ESV) God looks down from heaven on the children of man **to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God**. 3 **They have all fallen away**; together they **have become corrupt**; there is none who does good, not even one.
- (Romans 3:11–12 ESV) **No one understands**; **no one seeks for God**. 12 **All have turned aside**; together they have become **worthless**; **no one does good**, not even one."

***G. Lesson*: To not fall prey to false religion we must seek God so that we understand the things of God.**

4. The priests likewise left God out of their decision-making process, 2:8.

- (Jeremiah 2:8 ESV) The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD ***[YAHWEH]***?' **Those who handle the law did not know me**; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and **went after things that do not profit**.

A. The priests operated outside of the reality of the presence of God in the affairs of humans and left him out of their plans.

B. The priests who were the stewards of God's word did not know YAHWEH.

C. They rebelled against God, prophesied by a false god, and went after things that did not profit.

***D. Lesson*: We must live in the presence of YAHWEH to not fall prey to counterfeit religion as we conduct our affairs in the world of humans.**

5. YAHWEH levels his first charge against his people—they had exchanged the God of glory for their personalized gods, 2:9-11.

- (Jeremiah 2:9–11 ESV) "Therefore **I still contend with you**, declares the LORD, and **with your children's children I will contend**. 10 For cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see, or send to Kedar and **examine with care**; see if there has been such a thing. 11 **Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods**? **But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit**.

A. This exchange would profit them nothing and would put their families in an adversarial relationship with God through the next two generations.

God stated that he would not be on their side but would continue to contend with them even through the generation of their grandchildren.

The significance is that their false religious

practices would carry on from generation to generation in their families.

B. It was unheard of that a nation would change its gods but they changed God for their self-made gods.

C. Even more crazy was that the people of God exchanged the glory of God for their personalized gods who were as numerous as their cities.

- (Jeremiah 2:28 ESV) But where are **your gods** that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble; **for as many as your cities are your gods**, O Judah.
- (Jeremiah 11:13 ESV) For **your gods have become as many as your cities**, O Judah, and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, altars to make offerings to Baal.
- (Micah 4:5 ESV) **For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god**, **but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever**.
- (Psalm 106:20–21a ESV) **They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass**. 21 They forgot God, their Savior.
- (Romans 1:25 ESV) **Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie** and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

***D. Lesson*: The person who falls prey to counterfeit religion not only puts his own life in peril but also jeopardizes the spiritual wellbeing of the coming generations of his family.**

6. YAHWEH levels his second charge against his people—they had committed two appalling, shocking, horrifying evils, 2:12-13.

- (Jeremiah 2:12–13 ESV) Be **appalled**, O heavens, at this; be **shocked**, be **utterly desolate**, declares the LORD, 13 **for my people have committed two evils**: they have **forsaken me, the fountain of living waters**, and **hewed out cisterns for themselves**, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

A. Two extremely important emphases that will help us understand the grave nature of what "God's people" had done.

B. Emphasis #1: We must understand that when God says "my people" he is talking about a group of people who profess to know God.

C. Emphasis #2: We must not minimize the evil of these two evils.

D. These two evils are so dark and devastating in nature that the heavens should be appalled, shocked and horrified.

E. Evil #1: They abandoned belief in God as the fountain of living waters, in effect calling God a liar for his claim to be the only source of life.

- (Psalm 36:9 ESV) **For with you is the fountain of life**; in your light do we see light.
- (John 7:38 ESV) **Whoever believes in me**, as the Scripture has said, '**Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water**.'

F. Let's bring this to mind then that anything less than holding fast to Jesus as the way, the truth and the life is calling God a liar.

G. Let's also bring this to mind then that anything less than or different than holding firm to the truth of the gospel is calling God a liar.

H. Evil #2: They replaced the truth of God as the fountain of living waters with their own personal beliefs which they selected and collected regarding what they believed to be most important regarding life.

I. Then they dug a cistern to store and preserve their counterfeit religion.

A cistern is an artificial reservoir for holding water, especially rain water.

J. They will fight to their last breath to protect their ~~liberal denomination~~ cistern.

- (Mark 7:13a NLT) And **so you cancel the word of God** **in order to hand down your own tradition**.

***K. Lesson*: A person will never escape counterfeit religion until he turns to God alone as the source of life and vehemently refuses to pollute the saving truth of God with the personal beliefs, traditions and imaginations of humans that nullify the truth of God.**

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