Stop Signs on the Road That Leads to Hell

In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

The Old Tombstone

In the southern part of Indiana, not too far from Bedford, there is an old cemetery. People like to visit this cemetery because they enjoy reading the etchings on the old tombstones. Some of them are rather amusing, others are quite thought provoking. The story has been told of a certain Scotchman, who was wandering through this cemetery one day reading the epitaphs on the stone. He came to the grave of a certain Irish man, he stopped to read the message. The message inscribed on that stone reads like this, "My friend as you pass by, remember! As you are now so once was I and as I am now you soon will be. So prepare for death to follow me." This Scotchman had difficulty reading the etching on the stone because rain had been beating on it for years and had almost erased the words. He got

down on his hands and knees and adjusted his glasses, he got up very close to it and he tried to make it out, but he couldn't. He had to write it down letter for letter and he even had to fill in the missing letters, like you would in a crossword puzzle from the newspaper. He finally got it all written down. He adjusted his glasses and he stood up and read aloud with much meaning the message from the Irish man. "My friend, as you pass by, remember as you are now, so once was I, and as I am now you soon shall be. So prepare for death to follow me." They say at that point the Scotchman reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of chalk and on the tombstone he wrote, "My friend to follow thee, I am not content until I know which way you went!"

Two Ways

Well, I think that Scotchman had exactly the right thought, don't you? Because after all there are two ways. There is the straight and narrow way and there is the broad way. I hope that I can convince you, every one of you, that you are traveling one way or the other. Right now you are either on the road to Heaven or else you are on the road to Hell, there is no middle ground. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."

The Broad Way

If you are traveling the broad way, the road that leads to Hell, there are several things that you need to know about this terrible place. For example, in Matthew 25:41 Jesus said, "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Hell is a place of everlasting fire. If you are traveling this broad road that leads to Hell you also need to know that

there is no escape. In Luke 16 Jesus told us about a certain rich man, who died and went to Hell. He cried for water to cool his tongue and he prayed for somebody to go back and preach to his five brothers lest they would also come to this terrible place of torment. You remember that it was pointed out to this rich man in Hell, "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." So Jesus pointed out that there is no purgatory, there is no second chance, there is no probation. Hell is forever, there is no escape. Then if you are traveling that broad road that leads to Hell you also need to realize this fact that we find recorded in II Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Remember that God does not want you to go there. If you go to Hell, it will be against the will of God. He has done everything that He can do to stop you. He has erected stop signs along the road that leads to Hell and the only way that you can ever go to Hell, is for you to ignore these stop signs, like a reckless driver on the highway.

I. God's first stop sign on the road that leads to Hell is the Christian home. Since I came from a Christian home myself, I can give my own personal testimony. I know from personal experience what a Christian mother and a Christian father can mean in one's life. The home that I came from was a wonderful home. My Christian parents are still living and I thank God for that everyday. I never knew what it was like as a boy growing up to go to bed at night without first of all hearing my mother read from the word of God. Never once did I go to sleep without first of all seeing my father get down on his knees to pray God's blessings upon our family. Consequently by the time I was 6 or 7 years old, I knew all of the Bible stories by memory because they had been taught to me by my mother. I remember one of the first stories that I learned from the word of God, from the lips

of my mother was the story of Moses.

Moses And His Parents

Moses was born at a very dangerous time. Pharaoh, the wicked ruler of Egypt, had passed a law that every male child born to the Israelites should be immediately put to death. It was into an unfriendly world like this that Moses came, but his parents, Jochebed and Amram, being God fearing parents, would not submit to this wicked law of the king. They saved their baby boy's life by hiding him from the Egyptian soldiers and they were successful for about three months, but when the cries of the child became so loud that they could no longer conceal him. The loving hands of mother Jochebed fashioned a little ark and she embarked upon a daring plan. She took the ark and her child down to the Nile River and she set him adrift on the Nile trusting him into the hands of God. Miriam, her daughter, the sister of Moses, was to stand guard and bring back news as to what happened to the young child. That day of all days Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river to bathe with her maidens and while she was there, the baby was discovered. He began to weep, little did anyone realize that the tears of Moses would be the jewels that would ransom Israel from their bondage. When the child wept, the Princess of Egypt had compassion upon the baby and just then Miriam came running up and she said, "Do you want me to get a Hebrew mother to nurse the baby for you?" Pharaoh's daughter replied, "Yes, go get a Hebrew mother to nurse this child and tell her I will pay her wages to bring up the child for me." I can picture Miriam as she happily began running toward the house as fast as her legs would carry her. I can also picture Jochebed anxiously standing on the back porch of their slave quarters looking down towards the Nile River awaiting news about her baby boy, when all at once in the distance she can see somebody running toward the house and in a moment she realizes that it is her daughter. I am sure that her heart must have failed for fear because as she saw Miriam running so fast, she thought it would surely be bad news, but as Miriam came up all breathless she shouted, "Mother, Mother come quickly, guess what, Pharaoh's daughter has found the baby, but mother she wants to keep him alive. She says that she will pay you wages if you will nurse the baby, come quickly." I can see Miriam and Jochebed running toward the river as fast as they can travel, right up to the Princess of Egypt she races and asks the question, "Did you want a Hebrew mother to nurse this child." The Princess says, "Yes, if you would like the job, I will pay you wages." If she would have said, "I will give you half the kingdom of Egypt," it wouldn't have meant nearly as much as it meant to be able to hold her own baby boy safe in her arms once again.

Jochebed and Amram must have been real God fearing parents. They only had Moses just a few brief years, possibly until he was 7 or 8 years old. Then he was taken away and from that time on, he was brought up in Pharaoh's palace among all the idolatrous influences of a pagan, sinful nation, but Moses never forgot those years of training with his own Godly parents. The New Testament records this fact in Hebrews 11:24-25, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a reason." In Proverbs 1:8, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." Proverbs 23:22, "Despise not thy mother when she is old." The life of Moses is a testimony as to the influence that a Godly home can be upon the life of a young child.

A Godly Mother — A Rebellious Son

In Columbus, Ohio there is a deacon in one of our congregations who tells this story about his life. As a young man he left

the teachings of his Christian home. He began to drink and gamble and travel in a very sinful crowd. Night after night when he would come home after his night of sin and revelry, he would find his dear Christian mother down on her knees in prayer. The very carpet beneath her knees wet with her tears. When he would enter the house, she would arise from her prayer and begin scolding him and calling upon him to repent but he would not. He continued in his reckless way of sinful living. Finally his life of sin brought his mother to a premature death and even after her death, he would not repent. One night he was in a tavern drinking beer and suddenly over the top of his glass, he thought he saw an image of his mother's face. It was as real to him as though she had come back from the dead to haunt him and he was so startled that he took that glass of beer and he slammed it down on the counter, for it seemed as though his mother was shaking her head warning him once again to stop before it was too late. The young man walked out of the tavern and to this day, he has never touched another drop of alcohol. When anyone asks him what it was that caused him to be converted to Christ his answer is always the same, he will say, "It was the influence of my dear Christian mother. I could not get away from her, she followed me beyond the grave."

I am sure that many of you in this audience were blessed by having a Christian mother or a Christian father or both parents being Christian and you know that the one thing that you could do more than anything else to make your parents happy would be to give your life to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you would recognize them certainly your Christian parents would be one of God's stop signs along the road that leads to Hell.

Everyone of you have observed reckless drivers on the highway that will ignore the stop signs and drive right on through endangering their own life and the lives of others and that is exactly the way some people will do as they travel toward Hell. They will simply ignore God's stop signs, but God in His love and mercy has a second stop sign before us as we travel that

broad way that leads towards Hell.

II. God's second stop sign is His own word, the Holy Bible, "a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathways." If we would read God's word, God's word would certainly stop us from going to Hell. In II Timothy 3:14-17 the Bible says, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

I Can't Understand the Bible

But, here is the big problem, you can't get most people to read the Bible. Their excuse is universal. I can't understand the Bible. How many times have you make that remark? Oh, I believe in reading the Bible and I would like to read it if I could only understand it. Now you know why most people don't understand the Bible? It is because of their atrocious reading habits. Now you can tell me if this is not true. Most people never read the Bible until they get into trouble and it's only after trouble has come that they get the Bible out, conscience stricken, and they say, "Oh, I just know I have been having all of this bad luck because I haven't been reading the Bible. Now I am just sure if I start reading the Bible my luck will change and things will get better. So I guess the thing to do is to just read it from start to finish." Most folks start reading with Genesis and they get along remarkably well reading through Genesis, it is easy reading, all about how God created the heavens and the earth, Adam and Eve, all about Abraham, Moses, and so forth, it is really interesting just one story after another. Then they get over into the second book, Exodus and start reading about

Jewish worship and about how God gave the Jews the plans for the building of the tabernacle and the different articles of furniture that are to go into the tabernacle and the various altars and sacrifices, and not understanding Jewish worship, most people stop right there without even completing the second book of the Bible and they close it and say, "Well, the Bible is a very difficult book to understand, if I could just understand, if I could just understand it, I would read it but I don't know what this tabernacle is and all of these altars and offerings and everything else." So they put the Bible in the bookcase to collect dust or maybe they lay it out on the coffee table for good looks whenever the preacher calls and they forget about it.

More Troubles

Four or five years go by and then there is trouble. Once again, conscience stricken, they get the Bible out and shed a few tears and say, "Oh me, if I had just been reading the Bible why these terrible things wouldn't have happened. What am I going to do? I couldn't understand the Old Testament, I have heard folks say that the New Testament is easier to understand. I believe that I will try reading the New Testament this time." They start in Matthew 1 and they start reading, "Abraham begat Isaac; Isaac begat Jacob; Jacob begat Judas; Judas begat Phares;" begat, begat, begat, begat, begat. They wonder what in the world is it all about and without even completing the first chapter, they close the Bible and say, "Boy, I am telling you the Bible is too difficult to understand for me to read it, that is all there is to it."

Illness Comes

They put the Bible up and forget about it and four or five years go by and all at once there is an unexpected illness and they wind up in the hospital and conscience stricken they say,

"Oh I have just got to read the Bible. Would you please bring my Bible to the hospital." Somebody brings the Bible up and they get it out and they say, "Oh blessed book, if I had only been reading this wonderful book of God, I wouldn't be in all of this trouble. But I don't know what to do, I have read the Old Testament and I have read the New Testament, I don't understand any of it. I think this time what I will do is just poke my finger in and wherever it comes open I will read it and maybe I will get some kind of good out of it." They poke their finger in and it opens to Ezekiel and they start reading here about a valley of dry bones. After reading about this valley of dry bones and the army of bones, they close the Bible and say, "Did you ever read anything more weird than that? I tell you I have tried to read the Bible and I just can't understand it."

Death Comes

Again, they forget the Bible and four or five years go by and there is a death in the family and this time they are really conscience stricken and they get the Bible out and say, "Oh me, I have got to read the Bible. Just look at what's happened now. What am I going to do, I have tried reading the Old Testament and I have tried reading the New Testament and I can't get any good out of it. I think this time I am going to read from the back to the front and maybe I will get something out of it." So they started reading in Revelation about seven angels, and seven seals, and seven vials, and seven thunders, about 666, and the Battle of Armageddon, and after reading some of those things, they close the Bible and say, "Well, there you have it, I have tried it from generations to revolutions, I just don't get it."

Now isn't that about the truth, that is just about the way that most folks read the Bible and then claim they can't understand it. Say, you wouldn't understand any ordinary dime store novel if you read it that way. Suppose you picked up just the cheapest novel and read maybe a chapter and a half and then

forgot about it for five years. Then you picked it up and read a half a page of the middle chapter and closed it for five years. Then picked it up and read two or three lines of the last chapter. Do you think you would get any good out of it? Certainly not! How can you expect to gain any good out of God's word if we read it like that.

Dear friends, if we would pick up God's word everyday and read it reverently and prayerfully asking God to show us His will to guide us and to teach us, we would understand the Bible, but not all of it. The wisest man who ever lived never understood all of God's word, but you know I am like Mark Twain on that point. I don't really worry about the parts of the Bible that I don't understand, I'm worried about the parts that I do understand. There is so much of the Bible that we can understand and that we do understand and we need to be applying those parts of the Bible to our lives.

Faith

Now maybe you don't understand Jewish worship, but why worry about it? We aren't living under the Old Testament dispensation anyway. You do understand that you must put your faith in God, those scriptures are quite clear. Why don't you trust God, why don't you believe God's word, why don't you accept the Lord Jesus by faith and start obeying those scriptures and forget about the Jewish worship that you don't understand?

Repentance

Maybe you don't understand the purpose of the genealogies in the scriptures as they are found in the first chapter of Matthew, but you do understand God's word when it says, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" so why don't you obey what you do understand and repent of your sins and quit worry-

ing about the genealogies that you don't understand.

Confession

Maybe you don't understand Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones, but you do understand the Lord Jesus when he says, "If you will confess my name before men I will confess your name before my Father which is in Heaven." Why don't you come and publicly confess Jesus' name and quit worrying about the valley of dry bones.

Baptism

Maybe you don't understand Revelation with all of its symbols and prophecies of the future, but you do understand the Lord Jesus when he says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Why don't you come and obey Christ and be baptized and let Him forgive your sins that you might be saved and quit worrying about something in Revelation that you don't understand. In Hebrews 4:12 we read, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

If we would read God's word, it would stop us from going to Hell. But just as there are those who will recklessly ignore the Christian home and proceed on down the broad way toward Hell, so there are those who will recklessly ignore God's word and continue speeding on toward Hell.

III. Because of God's love and mercy, He has a third stop sign on the way that leads to Hell and God's stop sign is the preaching of the Gospel.

Notice that I didn't say the preacher was God's stop sign, but the preaching of the Gospel, that is the important thing. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of

God unto salvation to everyone that believeth to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Romans 1:16. This is the big problem in our modern age of 1973, there are too many preachers who are not preaching the Gospel.

Preaching the Reader's Digest

I was holding a revival meeting in Buchanan, Michigan and I visited a lady and I invited her out to the revival and she said. "No thank you, I will not come." I said, "Why not?" She replied, "Because preachers don't preach the Gospel," Now I said, "Wait a minute, some preachers don't preach the Gospel, but that is the very thing that we are preaching in this meeting." She said, "I will attend one night and see if you are telling the truth." I asked her, "Why are you so skeptical? What does your preacher preach?" She said, "The Reader's Digest! I can read the Reader's Digest and understand it myself, and when I go to church I don't want to hear an article review out of the Reader's Digest, I want to hear God's word." I told her, "You come, that is what we are preaching, the word of God." She attended that night and when the invitation was given she came forward and accepted Jesus and was baptized. I was surprised because I had understood she was a member of one of the big denominations in town. So when the service was over I went up and congratulated her and said, "Tell me, didn't you say you were a member of ______' and she said, "Yes." I asked her, "Didn't they ask you to accept Jesus, didn't they ask you to be baptized when you became a member?" Her only reply was, "No." I said, "What did you do?" She said, "Oh, we just told the preacher we wanted to be a member and he wrote our name down on the book and that was all there was to it." "Well." I said, "If he preaches out of the Reader's Digest, I guess that would be as good of a way as any to become a member." Now imagine, that is what she heard where she was going to church.

Preaching Politics

I was in Pauls Valley, Oklahoma and I invited a man to come to church and he said, "No thank you." When I asked him why not, he said, "Because preachers don't preach the Bible." I said, "What does your preacher preach?" He answered, "Politics, and I am sick of it!" I told him, "Well, come to the revival, we are preaching the word of God." I will never forget it, that man came that night and he shook my hand going out the door and he said, "It's the first message from the Bible that I have heard in over six years."

Preaching on the Texaco Strike

I was in Lawrenceville, Illinois holding a revival meeting and found out one of the doctors was not attending church, so I visited him and invited him to come to the meeting. He said, "No, I'm not interested." I said, "Doctor, why have you stopped going to church?" He answered, "Well, I'll tell you. When I go to church, I want to hear the Bible and our preacher doesn't preach the Bible." I asked him, "What does he preach?" He said, "Well you know we have a Texaco refinery plant here in Lawrenceville? Well, a few weeks ago the plant went on strike. Our preacher got up and for three solid Sundays he preached on the labor side of the strike. Then the next three Sundays he preached on the management side of the strike. Since our congregation is about equally divided into labor and management, why after the sixth sermon, our church split. Now I hear about the strike all week long and when I go to church on Sunday, I don't want to hear about the Texaco strike. I want to hear a message from God's word." I said, "Doctor, that is exactly what the Christian Church or Church of Christ believes. We preach God's word. If you come that is what you will hear." The doctor came and this was at a time that we were getting ready to leave for Australia. Before that meeting was over,

the doctor made a generous contribution toward our mission to Australia, simply upon the basis that we were going to preach God's word.

Christian Church Preachers Believe the Bible

I have the feeling that most members of the Christian Church or Church of Christ do not appreciate how wonderfully we have been blessed by having ministers who believe and preach the word of God. Isn't it wonderful that you don't have to question whether your preacher believes that God is alive or that Jesus Christ is really the son of God. According to "Christianity Today", October 13, 1967, Western Reserve sociologist, Jeffery Hadden contacted ten thousand protestant clergymen in the United States asking what they believed. Of the ten thousand enquiries that he mailed out, he got 7,441 replies. One of the questions that the ministers were asked was this, "Do you believe in Jesus' physical resurrection from the grave?" 51% said "No". Another question, "Do you believe in the virgin birth of Jesus as a biblical miracle?" 60% said "No". Another Question, "Do you believe in Satan and the existence of demoniac powers?" 62% said no. Perhaps the most revealing and alarming result of the poll, "Do you believe the Bible is the inspired word of God?" 82% said no.

I don't think we realize in the Christian brotherhood how blessed we are to have ministers that believe God's word and that preach God's word. You never have to ask of a minister in the Christian Church or Church of Christ, does he believe the Bible, does he really believe that God is alive, does he really believe Jesus rose from the dead, does he really believe in the vicarious death of Christ? All of our ministers we know believe these things and preach God's word but the rest of our religious neighbors have not been so fortunate as we. We must realize that this terrible scourge of atheism in the pulpit is sweeping our

land. We have so many preachers that preach everything on earth except the Bible and that is not going to save anybody's soul. We must preach God's word! I realize it's not the most popular thing.

The Lady Who Didn't Like My Preaching

There was one lady who went out the door one night, and she almost gnashed her teeth right in my face. She was really upset, she said, "I don't like your preaching at all." I said, "Well, I'm sorry, what did I say that was wrong?" She answered, "You upset me, that's what is wrong." I said, "How did I upset you?" She said, "You called me a sinner, and you have got me so upset I won't be able to sleep tonight without taking two or three tranquilizers. You told me I was going to go to Hell. I am so upset, why, I am even scared to even step outside this building." I said, "What would you like me to preach?" She said, "Something soothing if you don't mind." I realized the preaching of God's word is not always the most popular thing.

When we preach the Gospel, we do remind men and women, boys and girls that they are sinners and when we preach the Gospel, we remind them that there is a burning Hell where sinners will go and when we preach the Gospel we do preach the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and we do preach that there is a Heaven where we can go if we will let Jesus save us from our sins. Some of those things are quite upsetting to people who are not willing to yield to the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many who will ignore the Gospel preaching and they will speed right on towards Hell, but God in His love and mercy has given one last stop sign on the road that leads to Hell.

IV. God's final stop sign is His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for you. You say, "Well, I have seen pictures like that before", maybe you have, but if you haven't done

something about it you need to look at it again. I want you to take a good long look at God's last stop sign for this is the one who loved you and gave himself for you and beyond this there is no other stop sign. The word of God describes Jesus in this language found in Isaiah 53:3-6, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Think how the Son of God suffered for you; a crown of thorns was smashed down upon His head and the blood came trickling down His face, nails were driven through both hands and feet and the blood drained from His wounds and stained the ground below. In great agony the Son of God hung there for six long hours suffering just for you, that He might stop you from going to Hell and save you and take you to a beautiful home in Heaven.

The Boy Who Started a Night Club

I read the story about a young man who wanted to get rich. He decided to open up a night club. His Christian father was broken hearted and he said, "Son don't do it. You will be sending your own soul to Hell and every customer will be going to Hell and it will be your fault." The young man said, "Dad, the people are going to blow their money and I might as well get it as the next fellow." He went ahead with his plans. He rented a hall, he engaged a dance band, he put out his advertising. Opening night came, but at 8:00 pm when the doors were opened, not

one person entered. 8:15 pm came around and still there were no customers. The dance band was getting nervous and they were saying, "Where are the people?" The man could not understand it because he fully expected his place to be packed and so he finally decided to go outside to see if he could figure out what was wrong. Perhaps you can imagine his shock, his surprise when he stepped outside the door and saw his own father blocking the entrance to the parking lot. With his own ears he heard his father say to a whole car load of people, "Sorry folks, this joint will not open, drive on." The young man was so enraged that he rushed out there and he grabbed his father and choked him, and he beat him with his fists, and knocked him down and stomped upon him and fortunately someone restrained him or he would probably have killed his father. Being restrained, he gradually came back to his senses, a crowd had gathered. He began to apologize and he said, "Folks, this crazy idiot was driving away all of my customers. I'm sorry, please come on inside, the first drinks will be on the house." While he was busy apologizing, his poor old dad struggled to his feet and got over by the door way and he fell across the door way blocking it with his own body and then he raised himself up with one hand and he held his other hand up that was all scratched and bruised and bleeding from the beating his son had given him and he cried. "Stop, oh stop, please stop. Don't enter this place. If anybody wants to go in there, I'm going to make you walk across my body." For that is how much he loved his son.

Christ Blockades the Way

The Lord Jesus Christ has loved you with that same great love. So great is His love that He has placed His own body as the last stop sign, the final barricade on the road that leads to Hell. If you go to Hell, you have got to walk across the bruised, the bleeding body of Jesus because He has placed Himself there

upon the cross to try and stop you and save you.

Let us bow our heads and pray. Our Father, we do thank thee for thy great love and we thank thee for Jesus for His willingness to suffer, to bleed, to die, to save us. We pray for those in this audience who do need to accept Jesus as personal savior. We pray for those who need to repent of their sins for those who need to be buried in baptism and have their sins forgiven. We do pray that they will make up their mind and come to Jesus now while there is time and before it is too late. We pray for those who need to transfer their membership and make their church home here where they live and be faithful to thee, praying they will come tonight and make that decision. For we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Russell Martin, Charles De Vore, and A.B. Mc Reynolds shared ideas for this message.

Reggie always used large stop signs with a picture on each illustrating the 4 main points of the sermon.