

Build on the Rock

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A New Gospel

In His well known Sermon on the Mount, the Lord proclaimed a new gospel—a new, comprehensive doctrine of life. In this new doctrine the Lord emphasized the idea that true religion is not merely the observance of formal rituals and customs, but rather a way of life according to recognized and acknowledged principles.

He began by pronouncing a blessing on the humble, the merciful, the pure, the lovers of peace, and the faithful. He pointed out that anger and hatred are to be shunned because they are the cause of murder. He entreated people not to judge others harshly, but to be compassionate and forgiving. He taught that the evil of adultery is to be shunned in will, thought and intention—not just in act. He warned against vain and useless oaths. He tried to lead people to distinguish between a person and the evil done by that person, urging them to love and promote the person's welfare, but not the person's evil. He preached against making a pretentious show of religion, saying that true worship comes from the heart. He exhorted people to strive for *eternal* riches, and not to be unduly concerned about worldly things. He promised the protection, providence and guidance of God for all who place their trust in Him. He warned against profanation and the ridicule of holy things. He pointed out that a tree is known by its fruits. If it bears no fruit, a tree is to be cut down. Thus, He provided us with a standard of judgment for human conduct: we are to judge according to use.

Having clearly and powerfully expounded the fundamental principles of His new doctrine, the Lord concluded His sermon with a vivid description of the two possible responses his hearers could have to His teachings, and the consequences of each. He said:

*“Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and **does them** I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and **does not do them** will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall”* (Matthew 7:24-27, emphasis added).

The Verb to Do

The basic difference between the wise and the foolish men in this parable hinges on one simple verb, the verb to “do.” This is the key word of our text. The purpose of all Divine teaching is that people may *do* it. Hearing it is a means to this end. (Yet many people today believe that it is not the doing of the law that results in salvation, but faith separated from doing.) In this parable the Lord separates people into two categories: (a) those who hear the Divine law and do what it teaches; and (b) those who hear and do not do it. The words themselves leave no room for doubt about the matter. And the circumstances in which they were uttered emphasizes this teaching. They are the concluding words of a new and comprehensive doctrine, a doctrine of life for the

church which the Lord came on earth to establish. The Lord concluded His discourse with this vivid and dramatic parable to draw attention to the absolute necessity of doing what He teaches.

The Lord likened those who hear and do His Word to a wise man who built his house on the rock. Everyone, while on earth, builds the house in which he will live to eternity. The materials a person uses are truths, or knowledges of truth, from the Word—that is, if he is going to have a home in heaven. But the stability of the house depends on the foundation upon which a person builds. A wise man builds on the rock. In the Word a “rock” is the symbol of Divine truth, and, in the highest sense, of the Lord Himself, for He is the Divine truth itself—the stone which the builders rejected, but which, in the New Church, is to become the head of the corner. The “rock” that the wise man builds his house on is the acknowledgment of the Lord’s Divine Humanity—the acknowledgment that Jesus Christ is God, the one and only God of heaven and earth.

“Upon this Rock”

That this acknowledgment of the Lord’s Divine Humanity is the rock foundation of true Christianity is clear from the sixteenth chapter of Matthew. The Lord asked His disciples,

“Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” And they said, “Some say that You are John the Baptist; some Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” He said to them: “But who do you say I am?” And Simon Peter answered and said: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:13-16).

The Greek word *PETROS* is used in this passage, both for “Peter” and for “rock.” This makes the meaning of the Lord’s words clearer. The faith which Peter expressed and represents—a faith in the Lord’s Divine Humanity—is the rock upon which the Lord would build His church, and it is the rock upon which a wise man builds his spiritual house.

The Storms of Life

The assaults of evil desires and false thoughts are what are meant by the inundating rains mentioned in our text. Water, in the Word, is usually a symbol of truth, as when the Lord spoke to the woman of Samaria about the life-giving water which He provides—if a person drinks of it, he shall never die. But it also has the opposite correspondence when its destructive potential is mentioned, as in the flood of Noah and the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. In such instances water and rain refer to falsities which inundate the mind of a person who loves evil. The floods refer to the temptations that arise as a result of the deluge of falsities—temptations in which the person either overcomes or is overcome. The winds refer to subtle but powerful reasoning from falsity in favor of our evils.

Everyone, in the course of life, is exposed to the storms of life. We undergo temptations on various planes: physical and mental, natural and spiritual, external and internal. If a person’s house is founded on the rock—if his religion is based on the acknowledgment of the Lord Jesus Christ as the one and only God—and if he knows, understands, and believes Divine truths *and*

does them, then that person will survive the storms and tempests of life, and the “gates of hell shall not prevail against” him.

Sand in the Memory

We are told that “‘sand’ signifies Divine truth received only in the memory, and somewhat...in the thought, and this in a scattered and disconnected way, because intermixed with falsities” (*Apocalypse Explained* 644:24). Love, we know, is a bond; it is a strong, uniting force that draws and welds things together. When the truths of the Word are *done*, they are implanted in love, and love then draws them together and welds them into one—they become firm and strong like a rock. But when truths are learned, and even understood, but *not done*, then they are not implanted in the will or in love. They are not drawn together and welded into one. They remain fragmentary; they get mixed with false ideas and lose their properties of cohesion. They become loose and shifting like sand.

A house, or a mind, which is built on such a foundation cannot withstand the trials and tempests of life. When false principles and ideas attack it, the loose and disconnected truths begin to separate and move. When strong temptations (floods) arise, they are simply washed away. And when the powerful winds of human reasoning—emanating from self-interest and expediency—beat on the house it falls, for it is founded on sand.

Affection, Thought, and Deed

The human mind consists of two parts or faculties, the will and the understanding. Both are essential to make a person. The character or essence of a person is according to his will or love, and the person’s form or quality is according to his understanding. Although these two faculties are closely related, and together should make one, nevertheless the will is the dominant of the two—for “Love is the life of man” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 1). When these two faculties are founded upon the Divine truth, the foundation of the mind is firm and strong.

The sole purpose of Divine revelation, or of Divine truth, is that people do it: that they establish their principles, values and their character upon it. Hearing the truth and reflecting on it with a view to understanding it is essential, for we can only do that which we know and understand. But this is only a means to an end. Truth is given to us so that we may live according to it, day-by-day, throughout our lives.

There are three things that make one: affection, thought and deed. When the affections of our will are from the Lord, and the thoughts of our understanding are from the Word, and these are ultimated or expressed in speech and act, then our spiritual house—our eternal abode—will stand firm and strong. The fury of the hells will not prevail against it, for it is founded upon “the rock”—the rock of Divine truth, known, understood, loved, and lived.

Amen

Lessons: Jeremiah 7:21-29; Matthew 7:15-29; *Arcana Coelestia* 9282