

13 *Building On Sand*

Not Putting in Practice Jesus' Commands

Jesus bluntly teaches a lesson about obedience to His words by using a *building* simile. Talking of building on sand, Jesus once more says if you do not obey His sayings/ commandments, then simply listening to them and even agreeing with them without corresponding action cannot save you.

Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and **doeth them**, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock: (25) and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock. (26) And every one that heareth these words of mine, and **doeth them not**, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. Mat 7:24-26

The Greek, if translated more accurately, would say the one who 'keeps on doing the will of my Father' is the wise who builds on a rock. The verb for *doing* is the present participle active. It is thus a continuous tense — *keeps on doing*.

Let's broaden out the passage, and see the larger context. In it, *salvation is clearly linked to deeds*. Jesus says:

Not everyone who **says to me Lord, Lord**, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who **does the will of my Father** who is in heaven... I will declare to them, Depart from me you who practice *anomia* [*i.e.*, Greek word meaning either *lawlessness* or *negation of the Law of Moses*.] Therefore everyone who hears these

words of mine and ***puts them in practice*** is like a man who built his house on the rock....And every one that ***heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not***, shall be likened unto a foolish man... (Matt. 7:21, 24, 26.)

Some suggest this means you only need believe, because this is the will of the Father. However, such spin of Matthew 7:21-24 leads to inherent illogic in the context of the passage.

In Matthew 7:21, the people going to hell called Jesus *Lord*, and did many mighty miracles and signs and wonders *in His name*. Jesus never suggests that they did not *believe* in Him. Rather, they called Him Lord and even had wonderful spiritual experiences serving the Lord. However, their flaw was they *did not keep on doing the will of the Father*. The literal Greek actually says they worked *anomia* — the *negation* of the Mosaic law (v. 23). They contradicted Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:19, which disapproved of anyone who taught the smallest command of the Law of Moses should no longer be followed. These once highly successful followers heard Jesus’ words *but did not put them into practice* (vv. 24-26).

In fact, verses 24-26 are Jesus’ amplification of the same theme — faulting people who call Him Lord, hear His words but *do not put them in practice*. ***In this passage, Jesus is not worried about people who fail to believe that He is Lord.***

Rather, to the contrary, Jesus is concerned about those who *disobey* His teachings and “do not put them in practice” even though they call Him Lord. (Matt. 7:21, 24-26.) Thus, Jesus’ meaning in verse 21 is that Christians who *disobey Jesus* can call Him Lord and do even miracles and prophecies for Him but, as Jesus explains in verse 27, they risk a “great fall” of their house if they disobey Jesus and do not put in practice His teachings and commands.

One of those commands and teachings is this parable itself. However, many construe it so as to fit the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. By doing so, Jesus' message is lost.

Which brings us to the point that Jesus has a message to all of us about the cheap grace gospel's method of interpreting Jesus' words. For if you follow the Modern Cheap Grace Gospel interpretation which negates Jesus' meaning here (and at every other turn), you are no longer building on Jesus' words. You risk facing a "great fall." Hence, Jesus tells you to build on *all* of Jesus' teachings. Jesus' teachings cannot be reduced down to a single command: to believe. Once you listen and build your house on all of Jesus' doctrines, you are building aright. Then you will hear warnings that you currently *never* hear. This will help you prevent having a 'great fall' when it comes time for the judgment.

Or is it possible the pro-Modern Cheap Grace Gospel commentators have interpreted this warning of a great fall correctly as merely causing loss of rewards if we forget to obey Jesus' commands?

Is The "Great Fall" A Warning About Damnation?

We know Jesus means *great fall* means a loss of salvation because of (a) the context and (b) His parallel messages about the consequence of disobedience.

The Context

Jesus says the wind, rain and flood will come on two different houses. These potentially destructive events will expose the foundation of each house. One "puts in practice" Jesus' words and the other fails to "put in practice" Jesus' words. One is *obedient*. The other is *disobedient*.

Thus, the wind, rain and flood has a winnowing effect. One of the builders has everything he built on destroyed while the other survives the storm. The idea of a destruction of one's home due to disobedience has an obvious parabolic parallel to the final judgment. Jesus is talking about *survival*, not happiness. *Everything you own* is wiped out or preserved depending on how you built the house. This is a simile to the judgment-seat of Christ. It is not an exhortation to *obey* so all goes well from *day-to-day* on this earth. It is an exhortation to obey so that you are not destroyed by virtue of your disobedience.

Parallel Messages On Disobedience

We also know Jesus intends this *builder* simile to talk of the coming judgment because of the parallel messages of Jesus on the consequences of disobedience.

In the lesson of the disobedient son, the obedient son enters the kingdom over the disobedient. (Matt. 21:28-32.) In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the disobedient religious rulers are unsaved and murderers of the man left to die on the road, but the obedient Samaritan is the one who loves his neighbor and who has life, as Jesus told the Torah-scholar was the step to eternal life.

In John 3:36, we find salvation rests on those who "keep on trusting the Son," but the "wrath of God" resides upon those who "keep on disobeying the Son...."

As we previously saw, the Bible tells us: "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they *shall* have *the right* to the tree of life, and enter through the gates into the city." (Revelation 22:14.) Those who keep God's word are those who shall have the right to the tree of life. In other words, they are the ones who will be granted salvation. The dividing line between those who are saved and those who are not saved is obedience.

*Modern Gospel Defenders Deny That
Salvation Is At Stake*

The proponents of the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace quickly discount the possibility that the sandy-founda-tion simile is a message about the risk of final destruction from disobedience.

One writer, John Edmiston in *The House Built on the Rock* of the Asian Internet Bible Institute says Jesus does not exhort salvation by works. He claims Jesus teaches obedience “brings solid stability to our life that allows us to survive the shocks and storms of life.”¹ He later explains this brings greater “happiness” and “real blessing.”

But why does Jesus say the consequence of disobedi-ence is a *great fall*? While it may be true obedience brings blessings and happiness, Jesus teaches more than this in this passage. Jesus says obedience avoids a *great fall*. It avoids being destroyed by storms and waves.

Edmiston tries to grapple with this aspect of the mes-sage. Edmiston says this destruction applies to life of the dis-obedient on earth. “Jesus says that their lives will topple over with a great destruction.” Their life here is destroyed, while the disobedient have their home in heaven always spiritually maintained.

However, Jesus is giving spiritual messages of the consequence of disobedience, and paints the end of the dis-obedient as a *great fall*. It points to a singular end of total destruction, not merely temporary *temporal difficulties*. A single room is not wiped out. A roof is not merely torn off. Instead, Jesus portrays one suffering a crashing end which finishes off a disobedient person. Jesus is not warning about a life fraught with problems requiring constant rebuilding. Jesus is *not* promising that *you can lose your home on earth but another one is waiting for you in the heavens*. If the dis-

1. http://aibi.gospelcom.net/articles/house_built_on_the_rock.htm (last accessed 10/29/06).

obedient inherit eternal life, then why does John 3:36 read that all “who keep on disobeying the son, the wrath of God keeps remaining on them...” And if the disobedient make it to heaven, why does John 8:51 says all those who “keep on obeying the son should never ever die”?

Some Admit Salvation Is At Stake But Spin It To Not Harm the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace

Others like Cooper Abrams admit that salvation is at stake in the sandy-construction simile. However, these commentators insist the person who fails to put in practice Jesus’ words is a non-believer who trusts in good works. Abrams writes: “They built their lives on the sand of false hopes, hoping their good works, church membership, baptism or something will keep them from hell...yet when the time of judgment comes the end is sure...they fall and great is their fall.”²

What is driving Abrams? His interpretation is the only way to read Jesus compatible with the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. Salvation is so much about faith without works that a call to *obedience* in this building simile is supposedly a call to faith alone. It is amazing what people can see in something so contrary to what they are saying.

In other words, Mr. Abrams is missing the whole point of the building simile. Abrams is presupposing the validity of the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. Then he is reading it into Jesus’ words. He is not letting Jesus test the Modern Cheap Grace Gospel’s assumption. For Abrams, the only obedience needed is to *ignore* the need for obedience!

Rather, Jesus is clear. The dividing line between the one who suffers destruction and the one who does not is that one obeys Jesus’ words and the other fails to “put into prac-

2. Cooper Abrams, *Heaven or Hell?* <http://www.bible-truth.org/hell2.html> (last accessed 10/30/06).

tion" Jesus' words. *It is all about works of obedience to Jesus' commands (which is added to your faith) that is the dividing line in salvation as told in this simile.*

Mr. Abrams actually directs you *away* from what Jesus insists you must concern yourselves about. Jesus wants you to be concerned to have an *expectation* that obedience matters. Instead, Mr. Abrams tells you to continue to trust in *faith alone* as what will save you. You supposedly disobey Jesus when you think obedience matters. Abrams in fact wants you to think that anyone who believes obedience to God's commands matters for salvation, in fact, will have their house collapse and their end is destruction. Mr. Abrams has turned Jesus' message on its head. Jesus directly teaches against that, however, not only here but pervasively throughout His gospel.

John MacArthur's Struggling Analysis of the Sandy Foundation Simile

The famous pastor, John MacArthur, explains that the simile is definitely talking about salvation. In one breath MacArthur will say he believes in faith alone, but in the next breath make obedience for a Christian *essential* for salvation. MacArthur is struggling to stay true to both Jesus and the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. It is a struggle of wills where Jesus finally wins out in MacArthur's heart while MacArthur uses all the vocabulary of Cheap Grace.

First, MacArthur says the wind and storm are just another example of the final judgement and day of reckoning. MacArthur writes:

And what happens ultimately? Well, according to verse 25 and verse 27 ***the day of reckoning*** is going to come....What it's simply saying is, is one day a storm came and it was obvious what house was on the rock and what house was on the sand, and someday there's going to come ***a***

divine accounting. That's what it's saying, God is going to blow the **wind of judgment** and rain the **rain of judgment** and sent **the flood of judgment**, and when He does **some are going to stand and some are going to fall**. Whether your religion is true or false it's going to be tried, and whether you're chaff or wheat is going to be found out. Someday the chief winnower is going to come and He's going to separate the chaff and the wheat, He's going to blow the wind of judgment and those who have built their lives on the rock are going to stand. ³

MacArthur explains that Jesus means that whether you based your life on obedient righteousness is the dividing line of salvation:

[A] mere verbal profession you just keep saying it and saying it until finally you've convince yourself it must be true even though there's no evidence....Now in verses 24 to 27 the Lord again reminds us that the standard of **righteousness** is required for entering the Kingdom of God, and **unless your life is built on that standard** no matter what it looks like and no matter what you know in your head and no matter how feverishly you conduct your spiritual activity when the flood comes **you're going to get washed away**, if all you have is a head knowledge.⁴

MacArthur, however, struggles to maintain the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. He derides that any notion that obedience to the Law is necessary as merely a fleshly means

3. John MacArthur, *Empty Words - Empty Hearts* <http://www.ondoc-trine.com/2mac0183.htm> (last accessed 10/29/06).

4. John MacArthur, *Empty Words - Empty Hearts* <http://www.ondoc-trine.com/2mac0183.htm> (last accessed 10/29/06).

of justification. He claims the “Jews had developed a system of works, righteousness, a humanly devised system of self-stimulated fleshly effort that fell far short.”

Thus, MacArthur is merely repeating the old saw that is used to mis-analyze the flaw of the Pharisees, and thereby prop up the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace.

MacArthur then does restate the build-on-sand simile correctly. Please listen to MacArthur:

Lots of people hear Christ's teaching but **only the ones that do them are in the Kingdom**, did you get that? That's the bottom line.

MacArthur understands Jesus perfectly. Only those who *do* what He commands will enter heaven. Unless one wants to measure this as one single command — *believe* — then you have a refutation of the entire Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. MacArthur has hoped to deflect that he is a heretic by adding that faith alone is the foundation. Thus, MacArthur apparently wants to be able to be understood as saying *doing* what Jesus commands is obeying only the command to believe. In fact, MacArthur so far has led you to believe that relying upon obedience to Jesus' *other* commands (such as the commands He, as “I am”, gave Moses) for justification would be a *fleshly* justification, and lead you to miss salvation.

Thus, to this point, MacArthur is giving a mixed message: one of Jesus and one from the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace.

Next, MacArthur claims the one who does not do what Jesus commands is a “false believer” while the one who builds on the rock is a “true believer.” MacArthur is again making sure no one can accuse him of violating Cheap Grace when later, as you will see, he clearly contradicts its standard message. MacArthur is clearly struggling to appear orthodox while he affirms Jesus' meaning in ways that disaffirm the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace.

Finally, MacArthur later changes direction as he struggles to more honestly interpret Jesus. MacArthur appears to understand the verses on the *sandy simile* correctly. He says the flaws of the religious leaders who built on sand was as follows:

And again we see a powerful rebuke of the religion of the Pharisees. They had no regard for 1, spirituality of soul, they had no regard for purity of heart, they had ***no regard for integrity*** of behavior, they had ***no regard for obedience to God***, and they were building their big spiritual structure on sand. They prayed, sure, and they fasted, of course, and they gave their alms for sure but only as a public show to parade their supposed spirituality and try to enhance their reputations. They had a religion of ***externals*** and that is sand.

In other words, Jesus condemned the Pharisees for only teaching the parts of the Law that could be measured by external examination. They did not teach obedience to the major parts of the Law, Jesus said. (Matt. 23:23.) MacArthur repeats this. Now we see that MacArthur is turning to the ***true point*** of the *sandy foundation* simile.

MacArthur then quotes Arthur Pink (a famous Baptist pastor) as well, who likewise sees the message of Jesus correctly. Pink says the religious folk Jesus criticizes in the *build-on-sand simile* are with us today in new form:

They are sticklers for immersion or early morning communion but they take ***no thought about keeping their hearts with all diligence***. They boast of their orthodoxy but ***disregard the precepts of Christ***. Multitudes of professing Christians abstain from external acts of violence yet hesitate not to rob their neighbors of a good name by spreading evil reports against them. They contribute regularly to the pastors salary but shrink not from misrepresenting

their goods and cheating their customers persuading themselves that business is business. **They have more regard for the laws of man than those of God** for His fear is not before their eyes.

Pink and MacArthur now are getting close to Jesus' point. They insist this is about those who merely *profess* but do not obey, as if the problem is they *profess* but have *no belief*, which is why they don't obey. However, that is a semantical twist added to keep the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace somehow squared with Jesus. However, to repeat, Jesus' message is to demand *obedience* for salvation by telling you how disastrous is the idea you can *profess* but not *obey*. ***Profession, whether sincere or false, without obedience will not save.*** That is Jesus' point.

MacArthur then discusses the claim by many commentators that the one who builds on the rock is the one who builds on God. MacArthur says these commentators fail to recognize ***Jesus is instead exhorting obedience***, not faith in God. MacArthur says Jesus' meaning in context is that the solid ground is *obedience*. MacArthur explains:

And frankly most commentators take it to be God or Christ, but I want to take it a step further, as I mulled over this passage I think it's clear what the rock is. "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine," builds his house upon a rock. No. "Whosoever hears these sayings of mine, and (what?) ***does them***, builds his house upon a rock." What is the rock? It is ***obedience to the Word of God***. That's the rock. Yes God is a rock, yes Christ is the chief cornerstone. But I believe that what our Lord is saying here is simply this, these sayings of mine become the rock bed foundation of the church, the true church, the redeemed church.

MacArthur recognizes that had Jesus meant God is the rocky foundation rather than obedience to the sayings of Jesus, then Jesus' wording would be different. The commentators have distorted Jesus' meaning to avoid recognizing that disobedience leads to destruction.

MacArthur then backs off and reaffirms his allegiance to the modern faith-alone gospel. He argues obedience is confirmation of one's having saving faith. But then simultaneously MacArthur struggles to affirm Jesus' true message by making obedience virtually indispensable for salvation. MacArthur writes:

Obedience is the only validation of your salvation. It is the only possible proof that you recognize the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Because ***if there's no obedience then you're confessing Jesus is Lord is just so much verbal exercise.***

If confessing Jesus and not obeying is a mere "verbal exercise," then MacArthur must be saying Jesus intends us to know *faith alone* does not save.

MacArthur then even shows some emotion about the soul-deadening effect of what obviously is the *faith alone* doctrine in the churches: "Christianity has become ***so superficial*** it just galls me to hear some of the presentations of Christ that are supposed to be legitimate." MacArthur recognizes the major flaw of the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. Even though it galls MacArthur, he too gives lip service to the faith-alone doctrine, even though ultimately he stands on Jesus' words for a very different message.

MacArthur then attacks the easy-believism that pervades modern Christianity:

Secondly, those who dig deep [Luke 9:58] show a desire to give a maximum effort. Men are always drawn to ***the easy path***, the easy way. And I think sometimes ***we make the Gospel so easy that it's no Gospel at all*** and it's no conversion at all.

Do you hear what MacArthur is saying? The Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace is the easy path that leads men to destruction. It is "so easy" it gives the hearers *no Gospel at all*. There is no true conversion because something *essential* is missing. What is that? Those who dig deep are *obedient* to Jesus' commands.

Thus, while MacArthur repeatedly gives lip service to faith alone, he ultimately realizes that faith that remains alone does not save. ***Faith must be tied to obedience or it is just so many words.***

MacArthur's discussion of the builder simile shows the pathological struggle of someone trying to be true to Jesus. MacArthur is concerned he will be chased from the pulpit. Look at the tightrope he is walking upon. He engages in incessant double-speak so he can hold onto his pastor-position. MacArthur tries to use vagueness at various points to uphold Jesus but not be deemed a heretic if he was scrutinized closely.

Finally, MacArthur really gets tough when he says what it means to build on Jesus' commands. He says the soul which will be saved is the following:

He makes the ***maximum effort to strive*** to enter in, he makes the ***maximum effort*** to place the Word of God in his heart that ***he might not sin***, he is interested in a genuine love relationship with Jesus Christ, not a routine of spiritual activity, he does not build on visions, he does not build on experiences, he does not build on supposed miracles, he builds on the Word of God, and he builds for God's glory not his own.

Amen brother!

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