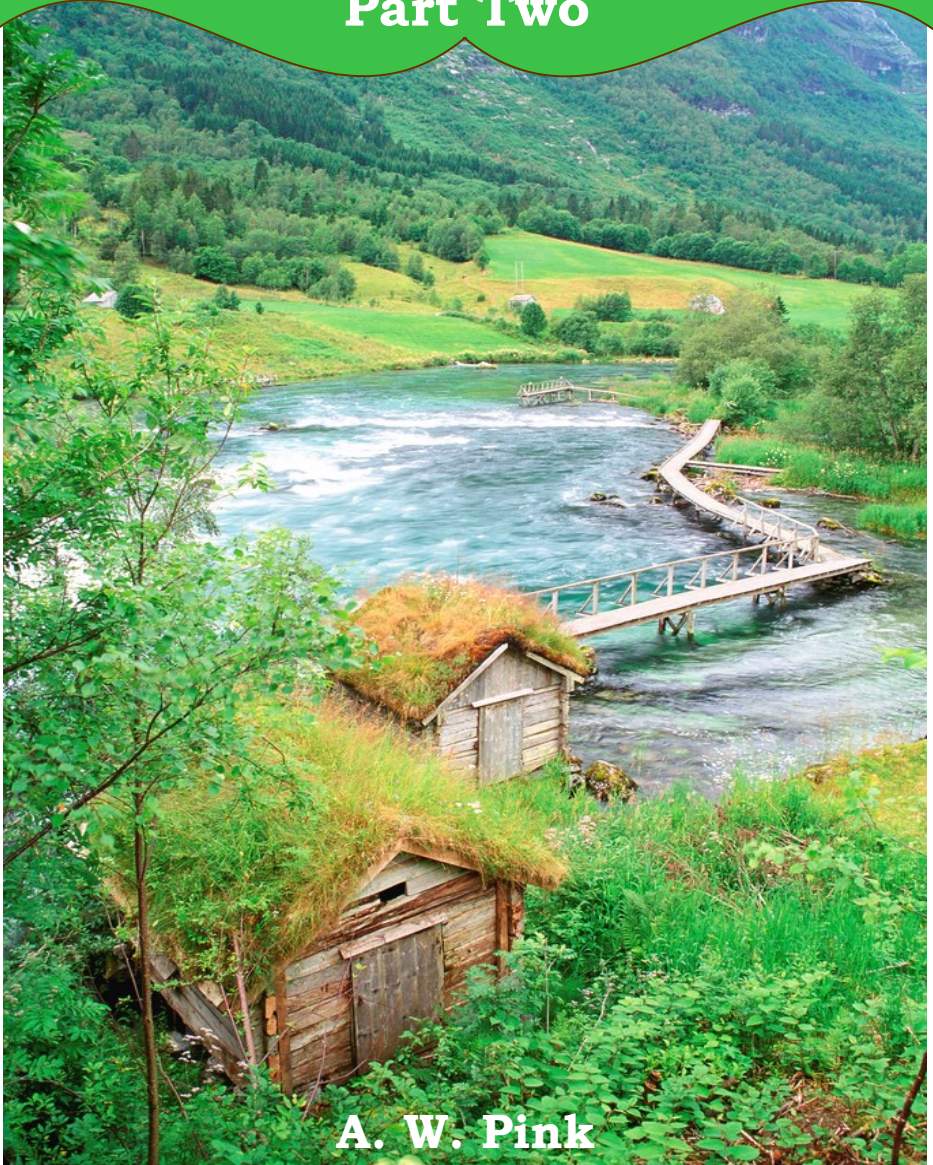


Christian Profession Tested Part Two



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“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: 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 a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall he likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it”
Matthew 7:24-27.

These verses form the conclusion of our Lord’s Address. Upon them Spurgeon said, “These were the closing words of our Saviour’s most famous Sermon upon the Mount. Some preachers concentrate all their powers upon an effort to conclude with a fine thing called a peroration, which being interpreted means a blaze of rhetorical fireworks, in the glory of which the speaker subsides. They certainly have not the example of Christ in this discourse to warrant them in the practice. Here is the Saviour’s peroration, and yet it is as simple as any other part of the address. There is an evident absence of all artificial oratory. The whole of His hill-sermon was intensely earnest, and that earnestness was sustained to the end, so that the closing words are as glowing coals, or as sharp arrows of the bow. Our Lord closes not by displaying His own powers of elocution, but by simply and affectionately addressing a warning to those who, having heard His words, should remain satisfied with hearing, and should not go forth and put them into practice.”

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: 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 a rock” (verse 24, 25). Simple as that language is, many have misunderstood its meaning and missed its import. No two of the commentators give a uniform exegesis of these verses,

and though there is more or less substantial agreement with the older and soundest expositors, yet even among them there is considerable difference of opinion. When we consult more recent writers thereon, especially those who may be broadly classed as belonging to the “fundamentalist school,” while there is much more of a saying of the same thing, yet we are personally convinced it is a saying of the *wrong* thing. A critical examination of the view they have taken obliges one to point out that they have read into this passage what is not there, that they have utterly failed to bring out what is there, and this because they have missed the scope of our passage through ignoring its context.

According to the antinomian interpretation of this passage our Lord ought to have said, “Whosoever believeth the Gospel and trusts in My atoning blood, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and everyone who endeavours to heed My precepts and then trusts in his own good works to obtain for him acceptance with God, I will liken unto a foolish man who built his house upon the sand.” But in the verses before us, Christ said nothing of the sort. And why? Because He was dealing with something more solemn and searching than what constitutes the ground of a sinner’s acceptance with God. It is perfectly true, blessedly true, that every sinner who exercises a saving faith in the sacrifice of Christ is a wise man, and that he is eternally secure; as it is equally true that anyone who relies upon his own obedience to the Divine commandments in order to obtain a passport into everlasting bliss is a fool, as he will prove in the day of testing. But we say again, Christ is not here speaking of either the object or ground of saving faith, but of something far more probing and revealing, and we throw everything into the utmost confusion if we confound the two things.

Before we are ready to weigh the *terms* of our passage we must first ascertain and determine its *scope*, and that calls for a careful noting of its context. In the verses immediately preceding it is clearly the testing of profession which is in view, the making evident of the reality which lies behind all surface appearances, and in this closing section Christ continues to show what it is which distinguishes the genuine and living Christian from a

nominal and lifeless one. In some passages the “house” or home is a figure of the place of affection and rest, but here it is viewed as a shelter and refuge from the storm. The stability and security of a house depend ultimately on the strength of its foundation. For if *that* be faulty, no matter how good the materials of which it is composed or how reliable the workmanship of those engaged in its construction, when a hurricane strikes it will fall. This obvious fact has been grasped by all the commentators, but as to *what* our Lord signified by the “rock” foundation there is wide difference of opinion.

Probably the passage which occurs most readily to the minds of many of our readers in this connection is Isaiah 28:16, “Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation,” and from Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:5-7, we know that that precious “stone” and “sure foundation” is Christ Himself. Yet we make a great mistake if we suppose that *every* New Testament passage containing the word “foundation” looks back to Isaiah 28:16, or refers to the same thing. Not so. “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth [loveth, and therefore preserveth] them that are His” (2 Tim. 2:19): as the contrast with the preceding verse denotes, the “foundation” here signifies the Divine decree or foreordination, which cannot be overthrown. “Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20) refers to the ministerial foundation, the Truth proclaimed. Hebrews 6:1, speaks of “the foundation of repentance from dead works,” for one has not made a start in practical godliness until that has been laid. Thus there is a need for the teacher here who is qualified to distinguish between things that differ.

There is one other passage which it is important to consider in this connection, namely “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on

eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:17-19). Why is this passage so infrequently cited and still more infrequently expounded and enforced? For every time allusion is made to it, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11) is quoted twenty times. Is that handling the Word honestly? No, it is not, and the churches have suffered greatly because of such unfaithfulness in the pulpit. This passage, be it noted, is addressed to the minister of the Gospel. specifying one of the duties his office obligates him to perform, but has one preacher in a hundred, during the past fifty years, conscientiously discharged it? Have not the vast majority toadied to their wealthy members and withheld from them that which they most needed?

But does this passage teach that we are required to perform deeds of charity for the purpose of acquiring “merit” before God and thereby purchase for ourselves His favourable regard, or, as one has expressed it, “raise a cloud of gold-dust which will waft us to heaven?” Certainly not: there is nothing here which fosters the fatal delusion of papists. Nevertheless, there is important instruction which we cannot afford to ignore. It is *Christians* that are “rich in this world” who are to be thus charged: “Be not high-minded,” affecting yourselves to be superior to the poor of the flock, “nor trust in uncertain riches,” which may speedily disappear, “but in the living God,” who changes not, and is your true Portion; “Who giveth us richly all things to enjoy,” but not to squander on overindulgence; “That they do good” with what God has loaned to them, faithfully discharging their stewardship; “Laying up for themselves a good foundation” in their conscience, a reliable basis for their hope, a sure ground of assurance, thereby confirming their personal interest in Christ, for “good works” are the evidences of the genuineness of our faith.

“Laying up in store for themselves [not “before God”] a good foundation against the time to come:” whether it be adversity that overtakes you through financial reverses, so that those you have aided will be the readier to assist you; or a bed of lingering illness, so that you may not have the additional anguish of a conscience accusing you of selfishness and callousness; or the hour of death itself, that you may have the comfort of knowing

you have discharged your stewardship faithfully and that the poor call you blessed; or the day to come, when “they that have done good” will come forth “unto the resurrection of life” (John 5:29) and their “good works” will be owned and rewarded by the Judge of all the earth. “That they may lay hold on eternal life:” obtaining a firmer conscious grip on the same, for the “good works” of the Christian are so many testimonies of his portion in heaven. Having our affections set upon Christ and our true riches in Him, let us act like wise merchants, not grasping at shadows and uncertainties, but using for His glory and the good of our fellows what He has entrusted to us, thereby laying up for ourselves “treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:20) and acquiring additional confirmation that we already possess the “earnest” of “eternal life.” The “house” of *such* a one is built upon a “rock!”

It will be seen from the last four paragraphs that the term “foundation” is found in different connections, that it is not always used to denote precisely the same thing, and therefore that its significance in a particular verse must be sought by ascertaining the scope and meaning of the passage in which that verse occurs; and that is no task for the “novice,” but rather for the experienced expositor. What, then, is the *scope* (the dominating subject and design) of Matthew 7:24, 25? As already stated, it is the *testing of profession*, a furnishing proof of the reality or worthlessness of the same. Rightly did Andrew Fuller point out: “Our Lord is not discoursing on our being justified by faith, but on our being judged according to our works, which, though consistent with the other, is not the same thing, and must not be confounded with it. The character described is not the self-righteous rejecter of the Gospel, but one who, though he may hear it and profess to believe it, yet brings forth no corresponding fruit. It is not a passage suited to expose the errors of Romanists, but one which needs to be pressed upon Antinomians—they who hold only believe, and all is well.”

Our passage opens with the word “Therefore,” which indicates our Lord was drawing a conclusion from what He had just been saying. In the preceding verses He was certainly not describing work-mongers, those who trusted in their good deeds and

religious performances to gain them acceptance with God. Rather is He there calling upon His hearers to enter in at the strait gate (verse 13, 14), warning against false prophets (verse 15-20), denouncing an empty profession. In the verse immediately before (verse 23), so far from presenting Himself as the Redeemer, tenderly wooing sinners, He is seen as the Judge, saying to the hypocrites “depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.” Thus to say the least, this would be a very strange point in His discourse at which to abruptly introduce the Gospel of the grace of God and announce that His own finished work is the only saving foundation for sinners to rest their souls upon: this would give no meaning whatever to the opening “therefore.” Moreover, in what at once follows, instead of speaking of our need of trusting in His atoning blood, Christ shows how indispensable it is that we render obedience to His precepts.

John Brown, the renowned Scottish expositor, brought out quite clearly the force of our Lord’s “Therefore” both in reference to what preceded and to what follows. “Surely, if not every one who calls Christ ‘Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he only who doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven;’ if to all workers of iniquity, even although they shall have prophesied and cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in the name of Christ,’ it shall at last be said by our Lord, declaring by His judgment the final state of men, ‘depart from Me: I never knew you;’ then it certainly follows that he who hears and does our Lord’s sayings is a wise man, and that he who hears them and does them not is a fool. The one saves, the other loses, the salvation of the soul, the happiness of eternity.” As Matthew Henry also pointed out, “The scope of this passage teaches us that the only way to make sure work for our souls and eternity is to hear and do the sayings of the Lord Jesus.” They who think they are savingly trusting the blood of Christ while disregarding His commands are fatally deceiving themselves.

In many respects Matthew 7:24-27, is closely analogous to 25:1-12. Both passages treat of professing Christians. In each case those professors are divided into two classes, called the “wise” and the “foolish.” In each case these radically different characters

had something in common: in the former, both are likened unto builders and each erects a house: in the latter, both are termed “virgins” and both go forth to meet the Bridegroom with lamps in their hands. In each case the latter is found wanting when put to the proof and meets with irretrievable disaster: in the former when the storm bursts the house of the fool falls, in the latter when the Bridegroom arrives the fool faces a closed door. In each case the difference between the two classes was nothing external, but that which lay *out of sight*—the faulty “foundation” of the former and the lack of oil “in their vessels” with the latter. We have compared these two passages together not only to note the interesting correspondence which exists between them, but chiefly because the latter throws light upon the former and helps to fix its interpretation.

Let us duly note what Christ does *not* here say of the one He terms wise, “he that heareth these sayings of Mine and *understandeth* them,” nor even “he that heareth these sayings of Mine and *believeth in Me*:” what He *did* say goes much farther than that. There are multitudes who believe in Christ who do not put His precepts into practice. In the same way that there are millions in India who believe in Buddha, millions in China who believe in Confucius, millions in Africa who believe in Mohammed, so vast numbers in Christendom believe in Christ. And because “they believe in Christ” they suppose that all is well with them and that when they die they will go to heaven. Nor are there many now left on earth who are likely to disillusion them. The great majority of the preachers in this apostate age are only adding to the number of the deceived, by telling them that all God requires of them is to believe in the Gospel and receive Christ as their personal Saviour. They quote such passages as John 3:16, and Acts 16:31, which contain the word “believe,” but are guiltily silent on the many verses which insist on repentance, forsaking of sins, denying of self, and which call to obedience.

How often, for example, we hear quoted, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature [or creation]” (Gal. 6:15), especially by those who (rightly) wish to show that neither the ceremonial ordinances of

Judaism nor baptism and the Lord's supper of Christianity are of any worth in the justifying of sinners before God. So, too, though not quite so frequently, we are reminded that "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6), that is out of gratitude to God for His unspeakable Gift and not from a legal motive which works only for what it may obtain. But how very rarely is this one ever mentioned: "Circumcision is nothing. and uncircumcision is nothing, but the *keeping of the commandments of God*" (1 Cor. 7:19). That which concerns our submission to the Divine authority, our walking in subjection to His will, is studiously kept in the background: such partiality is most reprehensible. It is only by placing these three verses side by side that we obtain a complete and balanced view. We are not vitally united to Christ unless we have been born again; we are not born again unless we possess a faith which "worketh by love;" and we have not this saving faith unless it is evidenced by a "keeping of God's commandments."

No wonder there is now so much dishonesty among those in the pew when there has been such dishonesty in the pulpit. The unsaved are frequently told, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13), but who is faithful enough to tell them that none ever did or could savingly "call upon" Him out of an *impenitent heart*? Fewer still will remind them that Christ is "the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:9). In like manner, when addressing those who profess to be Christians, how many preachers give great prominence to the comforting promises of God, but say little about His holy requirements. There is also a certain class of Calvinists who are fond of citing "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," but they fail to add "ye are My friends, if ye *do* whatsoever I command you" (John 15:13, 14), which is the surest identifying mark of those for whom Christ died. There are thousands who glibly talk of their love for Christ, but how rarely are they reminded. "And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we *keep* His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His

commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3, 4).

In the passages before us Christ continues to insist upon the imperative necessity of practical godliness. The regard or disregard which we pay to His precepts in this life He likens unto building our house on a sound or a worthless foundation, and the issue thereof in the Day of testing is compared to a tempest which puts to the proof our labours. Only those who have actually done that which lie enjoined, who have rendered sincere obedience to His laws, will endure the test. He who has heard Christ’s sayings and talked about repentance but has never repented, he who has admired the statutes issued by Christ but never rendered personal submission to them, shall be put to utter confusion in the hour of crisis. For the last time in this sermon our Lord enforced what may be termed its text: “except your righteousness shall exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” It is not sufficient to eulogize the practical righteousness which He taught: it must be embodied and expressed in our personal character and conduct. Saving faith is a practical persuasion of the truth of Christ’s teaching which is followed by a wholehearted obedience to His authority.

¶ A pondering of Matthew 7:24-27, suggests the need of our seeking to supply answers to the following questions. First, what is the force of the opening “Therefore?” Second, who are represented by the “wise” and the “foolish” men? Third, what is denoted by the “rock” and the “sand” on which they build? Fourth, what is signified by the “house” which each one erects? Fifth, what is portrayed by the hurricane which bursts upon the “house” and tests its security? Simple as these questions are, the replies returned thereto will determine the soundness or unsoundness of any exposition given to the passage. In seeking our answers recourse must also be had unto the parallel passage in Luke 6:47-49, which supplies a number of additional details. The best analysis of these verses we have met with was furnished by one of the earliest of the Puritans, W. Perkins, 1590. He focused attention on three things: the duty inculcated—obedience; the property of this duty—wisdom; the reward—security. The three

parts of this wisdom lay in digging deep, in securing a rock foundation, and in building thereon.

First, the force of the opening “Therefore.” In addition to the more general remarks made previously thereon, let us now point out that Christ was here drawing a plain but searching conclusion from His solemn statement in verses 21-23. There He had declared that not everyone who renders lip-service to His Lordship shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of the Father as made known by the Son; yea, that the many who substitute preaching and performing wonderful works for actual obedience to His commands, He will yet say unto such, “Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.” Then He at once added, “*Therefore* whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.” Is not the connection, then, between the two passages unmistakably indicated? Is not our Lord’s design and meaning in the verses now before us crystal clear? In verses 21-23 Christ is viewed in His office of Judge, testing professors, making known unto us who it is that will survive the fiery trial of that dread Day; and in verses 24-27 He reveals the path which must be trod if that Day is to be wisely and successfully anticipated.

In the Day of testing, not what we have said but what we have *done* in obedience to the Divine will shall alone be accepted as evidence: not the profession we have made, but the verification we have given of it in our Christian walk; not the doctrines we believed, but the fruits they bore in our daily lives. It will be useless to plead that we possessed extraordinary gifts and employed them in “Christian service,” that we were leaders in the churches and did much in the name of Christ, if we wore not His yoke and followed not the example He has left us. Real practical godliness is the only thing which will be approved in that Day. Personal holiness is little esteemed here, but it will be everything there (Heb. 12:14). In that Day the Judge of all the earth will “give to every man according as his *work* shall be” (Rev. 22:12). Therefore, the man who acts wisely now is the one who makes conscience of the commandments of Christ, who regulates his conduct by them; conversely, the one who disregards the revealed

will of God and follows a course of self-pleasing, no matter what garb of religion he wears, is playing the part of the fool, as he will yet discover to his eternal undoing.

The answer to our second question has largely been anticipated in what we wrote in the preceding chapter. The “wise” man is the one who “heareth these sayings” of Christ, who “cometh to” Him (Luke 6:47), which involves turning his back upon the world and forsaking the service of Satan, and who “doeth them.” “These sayings of Mine” are emphatic, having particular reference to the principles Christ had enunciated and the precepts He had inculcated in the previous sections of this Sermon on the Mount. We have to go unto other parts of the New Testament to learn Christian *doctrine*, but here we have described Christian *practice*. Some, like Tolstoi, have magnified this Sermon to the disparagement of the Epistles; others, like the Dispensationalists, have exalted the Epistles above the Sermon: the one is as reprehensible as the other. One part of Scripture must not be pitted against another part. Both this Sermon and the Epistles are essential parts of the revealed will of God. “Who have, in every age, uprightly and unreservedly, obeyed these sayings of our Lord, except they who have firmly believed the doctrines of the Gospel as more clearly and fully revealed in the apostolic epistles?” (T. Scott).

The “wise” man, then, is the one who comes to Christ, hears His instructions and does them. To do that which He has commanded includes, first, a believing of them, that is a definite appropriation of His precepts, a taking of them home to myself. It involves an understanding of them, and that calls for humility and meekness of mind rather than keenness of intellect; a meditation upon Christ’s words and a crying unto Him, “that which I see not teach Thou me.” It involves a making conscience of them, the realization that these sayings of Christ contain not only good counsel which it is my wisdom to heed, but that they are His imperative requirements which I disregard at my peril. It involves an actual putting of them into practice so that I abstain from those things which He forbids and perform those duties which He specifies: “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do

them” (John 13:17). “*All* the sayings of Christ: not only the laws he has enacted, but the truths He has revealed must be done by us. They are a light not only unto our eyes, but to our feet, and are designed not only to inform our judgments but to reform our hearts and lives” (Matthew Henry).

We regard the word “doth” as the all-important one in our present passage, and care needs to be taken lest we improperly limit its meaning. To “do” our Lord’s sayings includes very much more than the mere outward performance of those actions which He requires. Our whole inner and outer man must be conformed to them; our character must be moulded by them, our affections must be regulated, our wills governed, and our habits of thought dominated by them, as well as our actions being in accord with them. The Word of Christ must “dwell in” us, and that “richly” (Col. 3:16), and that calls for a definite process of spiritual horticulture. We must “lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness” if we are to “receive with meekness the engrafted Word which is able to save our souls” (James 1:21). Note well that expression “the *engrafted* Word:” that which is addressed to us must be rooted in us, planted in the soul, drawing all the sap of the stock to itself—“all that is within us” serving the Word. Thereby ye are “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). This, and nothing short of this, is what constitutes a genuine “conversion.”

From what has been said above it will appear how intimately related are the several answers unto those questions we formulated in a previous paragraph, how that they necessarily grow naturally out of each other. Cannot the reader now decide for himself what is denoted by this “rock” on which our Lord represents the wise man as building his house? Bearing in mind the scope of our passage and its relation to the context, does not the first half of verse 24 furnish a decisive index to the meaning of the second half? It is “these sayings” of Christ, understood, believed and obeyed, which are the “rock” here. “These sayings are the dictates of eternal truth and righteousness, and the everlasting mountains shall be sooner rooted up than any one of these shall be falsified. This is the foundation on which the wise

builder places his edifice: not his own conjectures or reasonings, nor the arguments and reasonings of other men, but the ‘true and faithful sayings of God’” (J. Brown)—to which may be added, and not following the carnal desires of our own hearts. If the reader still insists that the “rock” here is Christ Himself, we reply, If so, Christ considered as Prophet and not as Priest, as Lord and not as Saviour, as *Teacher* and not Redeemer.

There should be little difficulty in determining *what* is signified by the “house” which the builder here erects upon the “rock” or “sayings” of Christ, though a certain latitude should be allowed as to *how* it be stated. The principal definitions made by the best of the expositors are: the *profession* he makes, the *character* that is formed, the *hope* which is cherished. When analyzed these three expressions or things differ little in essence. The profession made is valid only if it be verified by a character which is formed by the whole range of Christ’s teaching in this Sermon, a character which is displayed by conduct in accordance therewith. So too the hope cherished by the believer, the assurance he possesses, that God has accepted him in the Beloved, is but presumption, a mere carnal confidence, unless it be grounded upon this “rock,” that is unless the one claiming such a hope be possessed of that character which alone warrants the expectation of everlasting bliss. Furthermore, the cherishing of a good hope, the possession of a peaceful assurance that I am a child of God, is an essential part of a character which is formed by an appropriation and assimilation of the “sayings” of Christ.

This figure of the building of a house to represent the formation of a Christian character under the teaching of Christ is employed frequently in the Acts and Epistles. When taking leave of the elders of Ephesus Paul commended them to God and the Word of His grace “which is able to *build you up*” (Acts 20:32). The Colossian saints were exhorted, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: Rooted and built up in Him” (2:7, 8); while Jude bade the saints be “building up yourselves on your most holy faith” (verse 20). The same word here rendered “built” is also translated “edify.” Thus, “Follow after the things which make for peace and things wherewith one

may edify another” (Rom. 14:19); “Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification” (Rom. 15:2). “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying” (Eph. 4:29). “Wherefore comfort [or “exhort”] yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thess. 5:11). Timothy was instructed, “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith” (1 Tim. 1:4). How careful we should be in our converse with each other that what we say be of a spiritually constructive character and not destructive.

The “house,” then, may be taken first for the profession made, which is yet to be put to the proof in the day of testing. Or more definitely it represents the character of the one making a Christian profession; and by “character” we include the whole frame of his beliefs, sentiments, affections, and active habits. Having by the faith of the Truth found the only sure foundation, he erects on it an edifice of thoughts, feelings and volitions. He is moulded according to “that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Rom. 6:17). He is not regulated by his own carnal desires, nor the opinions and examples of his fellows, but by the sure and authoritative precepts of Christ. Accordingly he cherishes a “hope of eternal life” (Titus 1:2) and it is a “good hope through grace” (2 Thess. 2:16), for it is based upon a reliable foundation, grounded on the precepts and promises of the Lord; which precepts have been laid hold of and translated into practice, and which promises have been mixed with faith and made our own. Such a hope will prove both “sure and steadfast” in the hour of testing.

From all that has been before us on the different points it will be seen that everything goes back to and turns upon the word “doeth:” *that* strikes the keynote of the verse, and therefore its dominant theme is our practical compliance with the Divine will. The importance which God attaches to and the value which He places upon *obedience* comes out plainly in the words of His prophet, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22). To keep strictly to the path

of the Divine commandments is more pleasing unto God than any of the outward forms of religion or the most liberal contributions to His earthly cause. Well did T. Scott point out with regard to the Levitical sacrifices, “their value was entirely from the appointment of God, and they were not acceptable except offered in obedience to Him, and with a penitent, believing and pious mind. When therefore they were substituted in the place of true piety or trusted in as meritorious when the means were used to compensate for the neglect of the end, they became an abomination, however costly and numerous they were.” So now.

The same insistent emphasis upon obedience was made by Christ. When interrupted in His talking to the people by one who informed Him that His mother and brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him, He made answer by stretching forth His hand “toward His disciples” and saying, “Behold My mother and My brethren. For whosoever shall *do* the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:46-50). It was as though He said, Those that are nearest and dearest to Me, spiritually speaking, are My “disciples,” and they are described as the ones who *comply* with the Divine will. Again, when a certain woman said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that bare Thee and the paps which Thou hast sucked,” He replied, “Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it” (Luke 11:27, 28). The ones on whom the benediction of God rests are they who *keep* His Word—in their hearts, as their most precious possession; in their minds, by frequent meditation; in their lives, as the rule of practice.

Conscientious souls are likely to be troubled at this point, sensible that their obedience is so imperfect and faulty. It remains therefore that we should endeavour to set their fears at rest and attempt to show more definitely what Christ did *not* signify and what He *did* imply by “whoso heareth these sayings of Mine and *doeth* them.” Our Lord did not mean that His disciples perpetually and flawlessly perform His precepts, for He does not remove from them the carnal nature at their regeneration, nor does He grant them such a measure of His grace in this world as to enable them

to render a sinless obedience. God could have done both had He thought well, but it has pleased Him to exalt imputed righteousness rather than inherent in this life. Not only does every saint fail to render that obedience which is required by God's Law as a whole, but he does not obey any single commandment perfectly, for every duty we perform, yea, our highest act of worship, is marred by sin. In the most holy men corruption deprives them of the purity that ought to be there, and lusts fight against the perfect holiness they desire and strive after (Rom. 7:18-21; Gal. 5:17).

Christians perform the sayings of Christ *sincerely* though not perfectly, in spirit and in truth, though not in the letter and full execution. When Christ said to the Father of His apostles, "They *have kept* Thy word" (John 17:6), He did not mean they had done so as flawlessly and excellently as He had Himself done. And when we read "hereby we do not know that we know Him if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3), consistency requires us to understand it that as we only "know Him" in part in this life (1 Cor. 13:12) so we only "keep His commandments" *in part*. Where there is a *genuine willingness* (Rom. 7:18; Heb. 13:18; 1 Tim. 6:18), God accepts it for the deed (2 Cor. 8:12). Because His people have His Law written in their hearts (Heb. 10:16), because they delight in it with their inner man (Rom. 7:22), because they truly desire to obey it fully (Psa. 119:5), and pray earnestly to that end (Psa. 119:35), and repent of and confess their disobedience (Psa. 32:5), God is pleased—according to the terms of the covenant of grace, and for Christ's sake—to accept their imperfect obedience and account it as a keeping of His Law.

To prevent wrong conclusions being drawn from the last paragraph two things need to be pointed out. First, it must *not* be inferred that God has lowered His standard in order to meet our infirmities: that standard is *par excellence* and shall never be altered. But the Surety of God's people fully conformed to it and His perfect obedience is reckoned to the account of those who savingly believe on Him, so that imputatively they are flawlessly righteous in the sight of the Law. Inherently they are righteous in the sense that they fully approve of the Law, delight in it, and

sincerely set themselves to an unreserved obedience of the whole of it; and thus “the righteousness of the law *is* fulfilled *in* them” (Rom. 8:4). Yet because of their remaining depravity they fail to realize their desires (Phil. 3:12), mourn over and confess their sinful failures, and are forgiven for Christ’s sake. In this life they are more active in seeking from God the remission of their failures than they are in offering to Him that which is faultless. Some of the old writers were wont to say that the present perfection of a Christian consists in a penitential acknowledgment of his imperfection.

Second, the nature and scope of this sincere but imperfect obedience needs to be amplified and honestly stated. (1) The Christian’s compliance with “these sayings” of the Lord is *internal and spiritual* as well as external. If any man should respond to every positive and negative precept of Christ in his outward conduct and yet his inner man be not affected and influenced by them, it would be like a body minus a soul—a corpse. As someone has aptly expressed it, obedience of soul is the soul of obedience. It is at this point, especially, that the righteousness of the saints exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, for while they rested wholly on their outward obedience of the Law, within they were full of unmortified lusts. The Law is “spiritual” (Rom. 7:14) and requires spiritual compliance thereto. The only worship God will accept is that which is “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Nevertheless, our obedience is not to consist solely of spiritual meditation and contemplating the mortification of our lusts and the cultivation of our graces: there must be an external walking in the Truth also.

(2) Sincere obedience is *impartial*, extending to the whole Law as it is explained in the precepts and exhortations of both the Old Testament and the New. To affect much devotion unto the things pertaining to God and then evince an utter lack of conscience and equity in things pertaining to men is horrible hypocrisy. The Pharisees were notorious in this: they made long prayers, yet devoured widows’ houses; they fasted twice a week, yet laid burdens on their disciples grievous to be borne; they tithed, yet taught that neither father nor mother was to be relieved if men had

placed their substance under a vow to God. Oh, my reader, your attendance at “early morning communion” or “the breaking of bread” is a vile mockery if you are unscrupulous and grasping in your dealings with men. Your psalm singing and lauding of the person and perfections of Christ are a stench in God’s nostrils if you lie and thieve. On the other hand, however honest and truthful with your fellows, if you rob God of the submission, devotion and praise which are His due, your heart is rotten. Of the parents of the Baptist it is written, “They were both righteous before God, walking in *all* the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6).

(3) Sincere obedience is *universal*, by which we mean it includes things to be believed as well as practiced, and hence it is termed “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5). God’s commandments must not be limited to the prohibition of wickedness, but extended also to false doctrines. If the Epistles be read attentively it will be found that the apostles were as emphatic and stern in their denunciation of teachers of errors as of lascivious livers, and that they pressed the necessity of a sound and holy faith as vehemently as they did a good and pure conscience. A sincere heart is set against heresies as definitely and diligently as against sinful conduct, and sinful conduct as heresies. One who is opposed to ungodliness but indifferent about false doctrines may justly suspect the soundness of his heart; while one who denounces false doctrine but tolerates wickedness in himself or his family has serious reason to question the validity of his profession. Christians are given no more license in matters of faith than of deportment. Stubborn heretics are to be cast out of the church equally with the openly immoral.

“And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall he likened unto a foolish man which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it” (verses 26, 27). It is scarcely necessary to point out that our Lord was here using parabolic language, but what is the force of the figure He employed? What is signified by this building a house upon the sand? Clearly He

had in view those who claim to be His followers, but whose profession has no reality behind it: a class of people who expect to go to heaven, but whose hopes rest upon a faulty foundation; those who trust in something which will fail them in the hour of testing. Unspeakably solemn, then, are these verses, containing that which should cause every reader who values his soul to tremble at them, and to re-examine himself with sevenfold thoroughness, to discover whether or not they describe his own perilous condition.

For the last time in this Sermon our Lord enforced the text on which it is based: “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (verse 20). Wherein lay the defectiveness of their “righteousness?” First, there was a total neglect of their internal condition: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27)—there was no mortification of their lusts. Second, they failed to put first things first: “Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith” (23:23). Third, they wrought for their own glory, from a principle of self-interest: “But all their works they do for to be seen of men” (23:5) and not for the purpose of obeying and honouring God. Fourth, they practiced not what they preached: “they say, and do not” (23:3)—their talk was all right, but their walk was all wrong.

Spirituality of soul, purity of heart, integrity of conduct, the scribes and Pharisees had no regard for. They were forward in fasting, praying at street corners, and giving of alms ostentatiously, but it was all done with the object of enhancing their reputation among men. And in *their* religion we have an exemplification of what is the natural persuasion of men the world over, namely that a religion of external performances will suffice to ensure a blissful eternity. Undoubtedly there are many who would in words deny this, but who in their works substantiate it. They bring their bodies to the house of prayer, but

not their souls; they worship with their mouths, but not “in spirit and in truth.” They are sticklers for immersion or early morning communion, yet 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 neighbours of a good name by spreading evil reports against them. They contribute regularly to the “pastor’s 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.

After dwelling at such length previously on the “wise” builder, there should be little difficulty in identifying the various groups which are commonly classified as the “foolish.” They are all those, no matter what their profession and pretensions, who *do not* the “sayings” of Christ. Even F. W. Grant, in his brief notes on this passage, said: “He who puts His sayings livingly into practice shall build a house that will endure the storm. None else and nothing else will:” though we are very much afraid that scarcely two out of a hundred of those wont to read his *Numerical Bible* really believe any such thing. In Luke’s account of the “wise” builder an additional item is added: “Whosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and *digged deep*, and laid the foundation on a rock” (6:47, 48). The “foolish” ones *failed* to “dig deep.” As this is the vital point which distinguishes the two classes let us endeavour to show what is signified by this “digging deep.”

If ever there was a time when these words “digged deep” needed to be pressed upon the notice of professing Christians it is today. We are living in an age characterized by superficiality and shallowness, when religion itself has degenerated into a mere surface thing. There is no deep ploughing, no spade work, no foundation exercises, no brokenness of heart. If I have never mourned over my waywardness, I have no solid ground for rejoicing. “Want of depth, want of sincerity, want of zeal in

religion—this is the want of our times. Want of an eye to God in religion, lack of sincere dealing with one's soul, neglect of using the lancet with our hearts, neglect of the search-warrant which God gives out against sin, carelessness concerning living upon Christ; much reading about Him, much talking about him, but too little feeding upon His flesh and drinking of His blood—these are the causes of tottering professions and baseless hopes.” If Spurgeon found occasion for making such complaint as far back as 1870, how sadly conditions have worsened since then!

A saving apprehension or laying hold of Christ is not the simple thing so many suppose. Man must be humbled into the dust before he will, as a beggar, betake himself to the Redeemer. The Divine Law is the appointed schoolmaster to drive sinners to Christ, but so many people play truant—run away from school. Not a few attempt to build upon Christ, but there has been no proper foundation-work, and so in the day of testing the floods of opposition and persecution come in between their hearts and Christ, and temptations part them to the overthrow of their profession. By nature our hearts are so filled with self-love and self-pity that there is no room for Christ. Many are willing to receive Him for His benefits who have no love for His person and no resolution to bow to His Lordship, which is like a woman marrying a man solely for his money. Observe Paul's order: “For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil. 3:8, 9)—first Christ Himself and then His righteousness!

1. He “digs deep” who does not enter upon a Christian profession hurriedly and lightly, but instead “sits down and counts the cost” (Luke 14:28). There are some who say they are saved before they have any feeling sense that they are lost. There are others who profess to receive Christ who yet have no realization of the claims of His sceptre. There are those who present themselves for baptism who know nothing about the terms of Christian discipleship. Such people rush into a profession of

religion, and in most cases rush out of it again. They receive the Word “with joy” rather than with painful convictions of sin, but they have “no root in themselves” and so “dureth for a while” only (Matthew 13:20, 21), Hence it was that when one said unto Him, “I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest,” Christ told him that he had not “where to lay His head;” and when another lightly said, “I will follow Thee,” He answered, “No man, having put his hand to the plough [and ploughing is no easy work!], and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:58-62); while to His apostles He gave the warning “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32).

2. He “digs deep” who labours to be emptied of self-righteousness, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency. The sinner needs first to be convicted of his utter inability *to come* to Christ—that God must give him a heart which is willing to receive Him as King to rule over him. Observe how the Lord Himself pressed this fact upon His hearers: “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (John 6:44)—but who believes that today when the “free will” of man is so much cried up! “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Matthew 9:12). Why should I seek unto the great Physician for strength when I have no consciousness of my weakness, for cleansing while I am quite unaware of my foulness? Only God can subdue our innate pride and self-complacency, and in order thereto there must needs be ardent wrestlings of soul with Him that He would graciously put forth His power and overcome that in me which rises up against Him.

3. He “digs deep” who strives after an experimental and inward knowledge of the Truth. A mere notional or theoretical acquaintance with it will not suffice him. He longs to have a practical knowledge of the Truth so that it becomes deeply rooted within him, so that it finds a home in the “hidden parts” (Psa. 51:6). Truth has to be bought (Prov. 23:23), and the wise builder is quite willing to pay the necessary price—sacrificing worldly interests so to do. As Spurgeon said, “Seek an inwrought experience of Divine Truth. Ask to have it burnt into you. Why is it that people give up the doctrines of grace if they fall in with

eloquent advocates of free will? Why is it that they renounce the orthodox creed if they meet with smart reasoners who contradict it? Because they have never received the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit so as to have it sealed in their hearts. . . . It is one thing to have a creed, it is quite another thing to have the Truth graven upon the tables of the heart. Many fail here because Truth was never made experimentally their own.”

4. He “digs deep” who balks not at the work of mortification, who follows Christ as the grand Exemplar of mortification. What the Saviour suffered in His pure flesh by way of expiation, those who would be saved must suffer in their corrupt flesh by way of mortification. It is true the flesh in us is reluctant, as was the holy humanity of Christ, saying, “let this cup pass from Me,” but the spirit is willing, crying “Father, Thy will be done” even in the crucifixion of my dearest lusts. Christ died a violent death, and sin must not die an easy and comfortable one. His body was nailed to the tree till His soul was separated from it, and the body of sin must be so nailed till the soul of sin—the will and love of it—depart. Christ died a tormenting death, in pains and agonies, and we must so die to sin that we “suffer in the flesh” (1 Pet. 4:1). Christ died a lingering death, and so does sin languish little by little, mortification upon mortification, dying “daily.” Alas, how few dig deep enough to come to the denying of self!

5. He “digs deep” who endeavours to hide God’s Word in his heart so that he may be kept from sinning against Him (Psa. 119:11). By “hiding” is not here meant concealing but treasuring, so that it may be preserved. To so “hide” means, first, to obtain a spiritual understanding of it—and for that, diligence and labour are required (Prov. 2:1-4). Only then does “wisdom” enter the heart and knowledge become pleasant unto the soul (Prov. 2:10). Second, when it is assented unto by faith, otherwise it will quickly vanish: “The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Heb. 4:2). Third, when it is kindly entertained: Christ complained to the Jews, “ye seek to kill Me, because My word hath no place in you” (John 8:37). Fourth, when it is deeply rooted, settled in the affections, so that it becomes the “engrafted word” (James 1:21). The Word must not

be studied out of curiosity, or for the object of teaching others, nor for our comfort, but with this prime end in view: that it may deliver us from sin—storing our minds with what is holy, resisting Satan’s temptations with an, “It is written,” its promises sustaining us in times of trial.

6. He “digs deep” who sincerely endeavours to have his heart sensibly affected by the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Since sin be that abominable thing which God hates, that which occasioned the death of Christ, and that which is the cause of all his own misery, the believer seeks to obtain a deeper horror for and hatred of sin. To this end he frequently reminds himself of and meditates upon the fearful tragedy which the first sin introduced into Eden, how that it corrupted at its source the stream of human nature. He constantly ponders the fact that all the sorrow and suffering in the world is the immediate effect of sin. He essays to view sin in the light of eternal punishment. “When I meet with professors who talk lightly of sin, I feel sure that they have built without a foundation. If they had ever felt the Spirit’s wounding and killing sword of conviction, they would flee from sin as from a lion. Truly forgiven sinners dread the appearance of evil as burnt children dread the fire. Superficial repentance always leads to careless living. Pray earnestly for a broken heart” (Spurgeon).

7. He “digs deep” who makes diligent search and thorough examination within to make sure that God has written His Word on his heart (2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Pet. 1:10). He is so concerned about his eternal welfare, so aware of the deceitfulness of the human heart, that he dare not take anything for granted. He is determined to prove his own self, that a supernatural work of grace has been truly wrought within him. He spares no pains to measure himself by the Word to see whether the fruits of regeneration are really being brought forth in the garden of his soul. He earnestly seeks the Divine assistance in the all-important matter, crying to God, “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart” (Psa. 26:2): let me not be mistaken, but graciously make known to me my real condition, and if I be one of Thy redeemed cause Thy blessed Spirit to bear witness with my spirit that I am a child of Thine. And if the seeker be sincere and importunate his

quest will not be in vain, neither will his request fall upon deaf ears.

Let us now describe several kinds of “foolish” builders. First, they build “upon the sand” whose hope is based upon a round of religious performances. The one who counts upon church membership, church attendance, the saying of prayers and the reading of the Bible as being all that is needed to ensure for him an entrance into the everlasting kingdom is resting on a broken reed. That was the case with the Pharisees. They fasted and tithed, made long prayers and were most punctilious in attending to ceremonial rites, but they were outside the pale of God’s mercy. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3) no matter how zealous he be in attending “communions,” how liberal in supporting “missionaries,” or how “faithful to the cause.” Until I have a heart which receives Christ as my Prophet, Priest and King, which unfeignedly loves Him, which obeys Him, there is no hope for me.

Second, they build “upon the sand” whose hope is based on visions, dreams and happy feelings. There is a class in Christendom, larger than some suppose, whose trust reposes in those very things. Ask them to tell you their experience, inquire what ground they have for concluding that God has met with them in saving grace, and they will relate to you some mysterious vision, some remarkable dream, some voice which spoke to them, many years ago, saying “thy sins be forgiven thee,” which produced an ecstasy of joy and assurance which nothing can shake. Now we will not positively affirm that they were deluded into imagining such things, yet we would point out that Satan transforms himself as an “angel of light” and can produce remarkable impressions. Whatever remarkable experience you met with in the past, unless you are *now* trusting in the blood and righteousness of Christ and sincerely endeavouring to *perform* His precepts, you are trusting in what will fail you in the Day to come.

Third, they build “upon the sand” whose hope is based on a “faith in Christ” which produces no obedience to Him. Unto such He searchingly says, “Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the

things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). A mere intellectual assent to the Gospel or a belief in the historical Christ is worthless, for it brings forth no spiritual fruits. To hear and acquiesce and then perform not is a mocking of God. As there were many who “believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did” to whom the Saviour “*did not* commit Himself” (John 2:23, 24), so there are thousands today who non-savingly “believe in Christ” yet have not “the root of the matter” (Job 19:28) within them. The faith of God’s elect is one which in a vital and practical way is “the acknowledging the truth which is after godliness” (Titus 1:1), which issues in “purifying their hearts” (Acts 15:9), which “worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6) and which “overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4). Only *such* a faith will suffice for time and eternity.

Fourth, they build “upon the sand” whose hope rests on a merely intellectual knowledge of the Truth. The difference between theoretical and practical knowledge is one both of kind and of degree. Theoretical knowledge is fluctuating and evanescent, constantly subject to alteration; but practical knowledge is deep-rooted and permanent. Once I have experienced the burning effects of fire no sophistical arguments can persuade me it is harmless. Once I have tasted that the Lord is gracious none can convince me that He is not. The difference between the two is apparent also from the effects produced. Pilate had a theoretical knowledge that it was contrary to the evidence before him to condemn Christ to death, but when the issue of his own interests with Caesar was raised (John 19:12) his practical judgment determined him to save his prestige. One who has a theoretical acquaintance with the precepts may talk well about them, but only one with a practical knowledge will walk according to them. One with a theoretical knowledge of the Truth may admire it, but only one with a practical knowledge thereof would die for it.

Fifth, they build “upon the sand” who make not conscience of confessing sin. There is a radical difference between the unregenerate and the regenerate in this matter. The former, being dead toward God and having but light thoughts upon sin, are not

weighed down by it; but to the latter it is their heaviest burden, and therefore are they thankful to unbosom themselves unto the Lord. Christ has bidden them pray to their Father “forgive us our sins” (Luke 11:4). Scripture warns them, “he that covereth his sins shall not prosper” (Prov. 28:13), and so David proved: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long;” but eventually he said, “I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Psa. 32:3, 5). After his sad fall, Peter went out and “wept bitterly.” Read through the second half of Romans vii and observe how keenly distressed Paul was by indwelling corruption. The believer has a sensitive conscience and keeps short account with God; but the conscience of the unbeliever is calloused, and he neither mourns over nor confesses his sins.

To sum up. No matter what experience I have had, or what be the character and strength of my faith, or how deep and steady be my assurance, or how eminent my gifts, unless any or all of these issue in a life of practical obedience to Christ they will avail nothing when death overtakes me. And that is no harsh verdict of ours, but the decision of the Son of God: “every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and *doeth them* not, shall be likened unto a foolish man who built his house upon the sand.” Not that the Christian will “do” them perfectly—“For in many things we offend all” (James 3:2)—though he ought to, and must not excuse but rather mourn over and confess his failure. No, the obedience of the Christian is not a faultless one, yet it is real and actual. It is not flawless, yet it is sincere. It is the genuine desire, resolution and endeavour of the Christian to please Christ in *all* things, and it is his greatest grief when he displeases Him. Lord, “*Make me to go* in the path of Thy commandments; for therein do I delight” (Psa. 119:35).

It now remains for us to ascertain what is signified by the hurricane which struck the “house” of the “wise” and of the “foolish” builder. Concerning that of the former it is said, “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 a rock” (verse 25). Identically the same thing is narrated in

connection with the latter, except in regard to the outcome: “it fell, and great was the fall of it.” After having entered into such detail concerning the “wise” and the “foolish” man, the “digging deep” of the former and this fatal omission by the latter, the foundation of “rock” and that of “sand,” and the “house” which each one erected, there should be little difficulty in discovering the general drift of what is denoted by the storm: though the language used be figurative, its purport is obvious. By means of the storm the strength and stability or the weakness and insecurity of the “house” was demonstrated.

The hurricane was that by which the work of each man was put to the proof and his wisdom or folly made evident. Thus it is clear that once more what is here before us is the *testing of profession* and the making manifest of its worth or worthlessness. This had been the dominating theme of our Lord’s Sermon from 7:13, onwards. The “strait gate” and “the narrow way” correspond to the digging deep and the foundation of rock, while the “wide gate” and “broad way” correspond to the omission of digging deep and the foundation of sand. In like manner we may see in the “wise” builder the “good tree” which brings forth “good fruit,” and in the “foolish” builder the “corrupt tree” with its “evil fruit.” In the “he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven” we have the one whose house stands firm, while in the many to whom Christ will say, “I never knew you, depart from Me, ye that work iniquity” we have those whose building is overthrown by the storm.

We must not, however, conclude that nothing more is signified by our Lord in this figure of the storm bursting upon the house than the testing of Christian profession, though scarcely any of the commentators seem to have seen anything further in it. Surely due attention to the immediate setting, to say nothing of the more remote or general context, requires us to enlarge our viewpoint. Consider the *outcome* of the storm. In the case of the “wise man” it beat upon his house in vain: in spite of all its fury, his building stood firm. And why? Because it was founded upon a “rock.” And what did that purport? Why, that the wise man was something more than a hearer of the Word, namely a *doer* of it, one who

heeded its warnings, who responded to its exhortations, who performed its precepts, whose character and conduct were moulded and regulated by its teachings. This, and nothing but this, is what Christ insists upon at the beginning of our passage: “Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine and *doeth* them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock.”

Among the “sayings” of Christ are some peculiarly distasteful to flesh and blood, yea, at direct variance with the inclinations of fallen human nature. To pluck out right eyes and cut off right hands, to love our enemies, bless them which curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them which despitefully use and persecute us, is not so simple as it may sound—see, then, the appropriateness of our Lord’s similitude of “digging deep” when portraying such tasks. To distribute our alms and perform our devotions in secret, to expressly ask the Father to forgive us our debts *as* we forgive our debtors—being told that if we forgive not neither shall we be forgiven—to take no anxious thought for the morrow but to have a heart freed from carking care, to have such confidence in the providential bounty of God that we trustfully count upon Him supplying our every need, are duties which will tax our abilities to the utmost. True, but we shall not be the losers by practicing such precepts.

“And it *fell not*, for it was founded upon a rock:” that is what we desire to lay hold of in this connection. Here is *encouragement* indeed. Instead of being so occupied with the narrowness of the way, cast your eye forward to the glorious goal to which it conducts you—even life. Instead of being so concerned about the painfulness of the work of mortification, think rather of what it is the appointed means of saving you from—even from being “cast into hell” (5:29). Instead of complaining about the difficulties of obedience, consider its rich compensation. God has definitely assured us that in the keeping of His commandments “there is great reward” (Psa. 19:11), such as “the answer of a good conscience,” peace of soul, the enjoyment of His approbation. It is *this* aspect of the Truth which Christ is here pressing upon our attention: the one who *does* His “sayings” is assured of *safety* in the day of testing and trial. The “house” of such a one will not,

cannot, be overthrown by the storm. Is not *that* a recompense well worth striving for?

Throughout this Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus had presented a most exalted and unique standard of morality and spirituality, one which calls for real self-sacrifice on the part of those who sincerely endeavour to measure up to it and perform the duties it enjoins. But here He shows how great is the reward of those who submit themselves unto His yoke. In the stability and security of the wise man's "house" we have depicted one of the principal fruits of an obedient walk: the actual doing of these "sayings" of Christ delivers from the fatal assaults of the Devil, the world and the flesh. This consideration ought to move us to perform obedience readily and gladly, for this is a benefit which no human monarch can bestow. Neither wealth, education nor social prestige can confer security on the soul—rather do such things generally occasion destruction to their possessors. Neither human wit nor strength of resolution can procure preservation in the hour of trial and tribulation: nothing but the keeping of Christ's Word will obtain it, but that *does*. How this promise should encourage us and stimulate unto unreserved obedience!

The force of the figure which was here used by Christ would be more impressive to His immediate hearers than to those of us who live in strong houses and in those parts of the earth where devastating floods and tornadoes are seldom or never experienced. "In Judea, as in other oriental countries, the rains are periodical. When they descend, they often descend in torrents, and continue to do so, with unabated violence, for a number of days. In consequence of this, the most trifling mountain brook becomes a mighty river—a deluge rushing down with dreadful impetus from the high grounds to the plains, converting them into one wide waste of waters. The huts of the inhabitants, generally formed of clay hardened in the sun, are exposed to great danger. They are often literally melted down by the heavy rains or overturned by the furious gusts of wind; and, when not founded on the solid rock, undermined and swept away by the resistless torrent. In such a country, it is the part of a wise man to take good care that the foundation on which he builds his habitation be

solid. He who attends to this precaution is likely to find the advantage of doing so, and he who neglects this precaution is likely to pay dear for his folly” (J. Brown).

Spurgeon was right when he said, “Whether your religion be true or false, it will be *tried*; whether it be chaff or wheat the fan of the great Winnower will surely be brought into operation upon all that lies on the threshing floor. If thou hast dealings with God, thou hast to do with a ‘consuming fire.’ Whether thou be really or nominally a Christian, if thou comest near to Christ He will try thee as silver is tried. Judgment must begin at the house of God, and if thou darest to come into the house of God, judgment will begin with thee.” It is God’s will that whosoever takes upon him the profession of His name shall be tried and proved. Adam and Eve were tempted and tried by Satan. God made trial of Abraham when He bade him take his only and dearly loved son and offer him up for a burnt offering on mount Moriah (Gen. 22). For the trial of his faith and patience He gave Job and all that he had, except his life, into Satan’s hand. God left Hezekiah to himself to try him and make known what was in his heart, when the ambassadors of Babylon came to inquire of him what wonders God had done in the land of Israel (2 Chron. 32:31).

It will be gathered from the above that we do not accept the view of those who *restrict* this trial of the “house” to the hour of death or the day of judgment. It is true that at death “the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7) and that it then enters paradise or is consigned to the abode of the damned. At the Grand Assize the worth or worthlessness of the profession will be made manifest to an assembled universe. But we can see nothing in our present passage which requires us to limit the meaning of this storm unto the final testing, while on the other hand there is much in Scripture which makes it clear that both real and empty profession is, in a variety of ways but in different degrees, put to the proof in *this* life. When our Lord announced of His apostles “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31). Which desire was granted, He expressed that which applies to all His people. It is as requisite that the faith of the saints should be tried by afflictions as gold is tried in the

fire (1 Pet. 1:7).

When the apostle said to believers, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Pet. 4:12), he was referring unto an experience which is met with in this life, and one which, as his language denotes, is by no means exceptional. For example, for a Jew belonging to an orthodox family to make public profession of the Christian faith has always involved dishonour and disgrace; his family disinherited and disowned him, and in the sight of all his brethren he is regarded as “the offscouring of all things.” In the first two centuries A.D., being a Christian frequently involved forfeiture of citizenship, the “spoiling of his goods” and being cast unto the lions, or at least living in caves “destitute and afflicted.” Yet notwithstanding such trials the faith of God’s elect remained unshaken. During the past century the Lord’s people, and especially His servants, have been tested in a more subtle manner: they have had to suffer the reproach of credulity and simple-mindedness, of being hopelessly behind the times, because they refused to believe the agnostic scientists and the theories of “modern scholarship”—sensitive natures find such reproaches harder to bear than physical sufferings. In this day, the test is to resist the seductions of an alluring world, to refuse to compromise.

Having generalized so much upon the verses before us, it is time that we turned to examine more closely their several details. First, “And the rain descended.” This may be taken as a figure of the providential trials and adverse dispensations by which those bearing the name of Christ are put to the proof. “These rains typify *afflictions from heaven*. God will send you adversities like showers, tribulations as many as the drops of the dew. Between now and heaven, oh, professor, you will feel the pelting storm. Like other men, your body will be sick; or if not, you shall have trial in your house: children and friends will die, or riches will take to themselves wings and fly like an eagle. You must have trials from God’s hand, and if you are not relying on Christ, you will not be able to bear them. If you are not by real faith one with Christ, even God’s rains will be too much for you” (C. H.

Spurgeon). The response of the heart, the manner in which we act in times of adversity, reveals our state; if unregenerate, our unbelieving heart will betray itself by acting as the worldling does—seeking to drown our sorrow amid carnal pleasures, or sinking in despair.

Second, “and the floods came,” or as Luke 6:48, says, “the floods *arose*.” Thus it is a thing of the earth which is here in view, namely *opposition from the world*. By this also must the professor be tested, to demonstrate whether or not his claim to being a Christian is genuine. It is true that in former days the floods of persecution raged more furiously than they do now; nevertheless, they are far from having totally subsided. The world’s opposition assumes many forms: sometimes it is ridicule—and how often have the gibes and sneers of the ungodly tumbled down the “houses” of those who made a fair show in the flesh! Cruel mockings are still used against the people of God. In other cases it is reproach and slander, the “cold shoulder,” boycotting, and only those who have a rock foundation will bear up under them. Not that the ones exposed always drop their profession entirely: far from it—often they retain the *name* of Christian, but compromise and walk arm-in-arm with the world to escape its persecutions.

Third, “and the winds blew and beat upon the house.” Here it is “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2) who is at work: in other words, it is *Satan assaulting* the one who claims to be saved. At times he will cast a cloud of despondency over the human spirit, assailing with artful insinuations and blasphemous suggestions, particularly so when God’s providences seem to be all against us, seeking to fill the soul with doubts of the Divine goodness and faithfulness. At other times he seeks to beguile with error, and only those established in the Truth will withstand him. He employs various tactics, according as he approaches in the form of a serpent or seeks to terrify as the roaring lion. He attracts by the world, appeals to the carnal nature, and only those whose “treasure” is really in heaven scorn his gilded baubles. He suggests a compromise, the making the best of both worlds, the serving of two masters, and none save they who have truly “received Christ Jesus *the Lord*” (Col. 2:6) resist him.

The Lord plainly teaches us in this passage that he who takes upon him the Christian profession must expect a stormy passage through this world. He who is Truth incarnate painted no false and flattering picture of what Christian discipleship involves, but faithfully warns us that severe testings and trials await those who profess to be His followers. So far from being carried to heaven on “flowery beds of ease,” they may expect to meet with fierce opposition from the world, the flesh and the Devil. He who was despised and rejected of men, tempted of the Devil, hated by the world, opposed by the religious leaders, deserted by those who should have stood by Him, has said, “the disciple is not above his Master.” “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), and they who deny this are false prophets. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12), yet that very persecution shall be made to work together for their good.

“And it fell not.” Here are consolation and compensation indeed. Severely assaulted and shaken their “house” may be, but overthrown it shall not be. And why? “For it was founded upon a rock,” that is to say the profession was a *genuine* one, and, therefore, one which endures and survives every testing. It is no comfortable thing to live through such an experience as this hurricane: Ah, but dwell upon the happy issue. It is no pleasant experience to meet with the sneers of acquaintances, the loss of friends, the opposition of the world and the enmity of Satan, but is it not worth all these and much more if, like the three Hebrews, we come forth from the fires unharmed? While I *do* Christ’s “sayings,” Satan can gain no advantage over me: while I tread the path of obedience the “flesh” is denied and cannot bring about my ruin. Neither in this life, the hour of death, nor the day of judgment will the “house” of such a one fall.

“And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell; and great was the fall of it” (verse 27). Here is the solemn contrast. Here is the fearful outcome for the one who erects his house upon the sand. Here is the certain fate of all who rest their hope and base their confidence on a worthless foundation. Here is the fearful ruin

which overtakes the empty professor. He who makes no conscience of Christ's "saying," joins not practice to profession, who refuses to walk in the path of the Divine commandments, is headed for eternal damnation. An empty professor may withstand the lighter gusts of opposition in days of peace and prosperity, but he is not at all likely to survive the temptations of the times in which our lot is cast, as witness the multitudes now making shipwreck of the faith they once affirmed. And even those who continue to call themselves Christians but refuse the Master's yoke will find in the hour of death that they have no refuge from the judgment awaiting them.

Sometimes God exposes those who have made an eminent profession by sending them such anguish of conscience and foretastes of hell that at the end they are exposed to all around them. A notable example of this was Francis Spira in the seventeenth century. For weeks he lay groaning on his couch, not from physical pain but from anguish of soul, and though numbers of God's servants spoke to and prayed with him, no relief was obtained. Said he to the ministers and friends around his bed, "Take heed of relying on that faith which worketh not a holy and unblamable life, worthy of a believer. Credit me, it will fail. I have tried it. I presumed I had gotten the right faith. I preached it to others. I had all places of Scripture in memory that might support it. I thought myself sure, and in the meantime lived impiously and carelessly. And behold now the judgment of God hath overtaken me: not to correction, but to damnation." He felt the fires of God's wrath burning in his soul as few have ever experienced them in this world, and expired thus. His house "fell" and great was the fall of it.

What has been before us should dispel the influence of the world, move us to self-judgment, and warn us against a superficial use of God's Word. If we allow Satan's world so to ensnare us that, for the sake of enjoying it, we consent to ignore Christ's rules for separation from evil and holiness of life, then dire will be the consequences. Such a passage as this ought to bring home to us both the heinousness and madness of our acts of disobedience, cause us contritely to confess the same, and entreat

the Lord's pardon while it may yet be obtained. Finally, we would press upon our readers that the will of God, the standard He has appointed, cannot be known by mere casual and occasional glances at the Bible. Too many are but text-mongers, singling out favourite passages which appeal to them. It is only by carefully and earnestly searching the Scriptures, by a systematic and continuous pondering of them, that we can discover "all the counsel of God." Those who do so will have their souls sustained by grace and upheld by the power of Christ in the day of trial, and will have no regrets for so employing their time and energies when the hour of death is upon them.

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