Squaring The Life With The Bible

By D. M. Panton

The main body of our Lord's teaching, and the clearest of all His instructions on practical living, are embodied for ever in the Sermon on the Mount. And His whole revelation in the Sermon is based on a studied contrast of the church's grace with Israel's law, thus launching a new dispensation which is still in force.

The emphasis with which our Lord stresses the necessity of obedient – an emphasis of 'solemn awfulness,' as someone has stated it – is expressed in a vivid figure. "These sayings of Mine," says Jesus – these sayings (that is, the Sermon on the Mount just uttered) – are the foundation rock on which every believer is to construct his living. Any other foundation of conduct will, to a certainty, the Lord says, hopelessly crash in the coming storms.

"'These sayings of Mine' – these words, these utterances, testimonies, as I have now given them in one entire and perfect harmony, this whole discourse appealing to the conscience is the word of the future Judge."

It is first of all extremely important for all of us to master the fact that our Lord is not distinguishing between believers and unbelievers of the word He has uttered, but between hearers and doers of it. "Hearing" is a word He uses of faith. *"He that is of God heareth the words of God: For this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God"* (John 8:47).

Both groups which the Saviour is visualizing listen attentively to their Lord speaking. Both recognize that there are commands to be obeyed by someone. Both then leave the Mount to live their life – that is, to build their house of conduct. One group reproduces the Lord's words in action; the other – possibly believing and warmly applauding them – nevertheless acts, in the points named by our Lord, on other principles of conduct, so building another house, a house on another foundation than the Sermon on the Mount.

It is extraordinarily illuminating of our Lord's words that a large section of some of the most scriptural Christians in the world pronounce the Sermon on the Mount as not for the church, and therefore not to be obeyed by us at all. The fact is, the difficulty of living it is enormous.

"Literally hundreds of volumes have been written about the Sermon on the Mount, yet I read it through recently in eleven minutes. You can read it quickly, but you must take a life time to try to live it, and even then you will fall."

Stupendous Consequences

A brief summary of our Lord's main points will reveal at once both the reason of their rejection, and the stupendousness of the consequences. For example, if obeyed, they would make a worldly Christian unknown. In these words Christ claims absolute sovereignty. Every

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main section is not a counsel, or an ideal, but a command. His word is law. Here are seven of the main sections:

(1) *"It was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill: but I say unto you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment"* (Matt. 5:21).

(2) *"Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you"* that a look can be adultery (vv. 27-28).

(3) *"Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all"* (vv. 33-34).

(4) *"Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"* – exact justice: *"but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil"* – utter grace (vv. 38-39).

(5) *"Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies"* (vv. 43-44).

(6) *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven"* (6:19).

(7) *"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, so do ye also unto them"* (7:12).

Our Lord summarizes the Sermon as the standard of right conduct for entrance into the Kingdom. *"I say unto you, that except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees"* – the standard of the Law, immeasurably excelled by the standard of the Sermon – *"ye"* – the disciples whom He is addressing – *"shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."*

Human Reasonings

Over against this marvelous revelation, embodying love in action, we are met with every human reason why we should not obey: it is a noble ideal, but impracticable; it is for Jewish disciples before the church was founded, and therefore it is not for us; it is a revelation of world-law when the Millennial Kingdom shall be established; the commands in it are to be taken figuratively, not literally. These reasons for non-obedience prove at once that they are merely attempted escapes from the obvious. The warnings of the Apostle James (1:23) springs into light: *"Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves."*

What Are We Constructing?

This Sermon, preached wherever Christ is preached throughout the whole world and identified with Him throughout all time, faces every hearer. Every Christian hearer is constructing a building – his religious conduct, enshrining his life. Some believers are building on the Sermon. They are living it. In this case the life is built, all down the years, out of these sayings. It is not merely believing them, nor accepting them, nor admiring them, nor even

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expounding and teaching them. It is doing them! This person the Lord calls a wise architect.

"Every one which heareth these words of Mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, which built his house upon the rock" (Matt. 7:24).

All the hearers are able to build, and all as a matter of fact are building. The foolish believer builds as carefully on the sand as the wise man on the rock. Sand can look like rock. The house we build reveals our wisdom or our folly.

If our conduct is to stand on rock, we must simply obey Christ. *"Ye are My friends, if ye"* – not quote or approve or even preach, but - *"do the things which I command you"* (John 15:14).

The Lord most carefully reveals the consequences of how we build. *"The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house"* (Matt. 7:25). Throughout all the ages the believer has had to stand up against the brunt of a hostile world. The subtle floods of the flesh, the hurricanes of Satan, and countless buildings within the church of God crash. Rain assails the roof, winds assail the walls, and floods attack the foundations: rain – the attacks of evil spirits out of the heavenlies; winds – the sagging pressure of false doctrines, *"carried about with every wind of doctrine"* (Eph. 4:14); floods – doubt sweeping our foundations into apostasy.

Sustaining Grace Confirms Obedience

The Lord's tremendous revelation of the value of living the Sermon now shines out simply priceless. *"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"* (Matt. 7:25).

This believer "digs deep." The Sermon on the Mount deals with the depths of our being – cutting away our lusts, our ambitions, our worldliness, and introducing an amazing standard of spiritual life. The safe depth of the structure is especially revealed in Luke: *"He is like a man building a house, who digged and went deep; and when a flood arose, the stream brake against that house, and could not shake it: because it had been well builded"* (Luke 6:48).

He only digs deep whose living gets down to the central realities of the spirit as expressed in our Lord's commands; and sustaining grace confirms obedience, all the way. God's grip on our conduct corresponds with our grip on Christ's words. And the Lord's summary reveals the enormous revelation that if we build on the Sermon, and even if we are in the Great Tribulation, our house stands. No storm can wreck it.

So the Saviour warns us of the consequence of hearing, believing, admiring, but not doing these sayings. *"Every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand…and* (the elements) *smote upon that house, and it fell: and great was the fall thereof"* (Matt. 7:26).

All the hearers are equally skilled in building. Where alone they differ is on what they build. And the second class – building on anything but the Sermon on the Mount, however high the ethics or sublime the philosophy – build, our Lord says, on sand.

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"We may build, as our little children do on the seashore, our sand houses, and we may pile them up very quickly too, and be very pleased with them, but they will all come down as the tide advances" (C. H. Spurgeon). The consequent crash is terrific. *"Great was the fall thereof"* (v. 26). What Christ says is rock. What man says is sand.

Thus, dropping our Lord's figure, we have the unutterably solemn dual truth expressed elsewhere by Christ Himself in plain language.

(1) *"That servant which knew his lord's will, and made not ready, nor did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten"* – for naturally it is the duty of the servant of God to find out his Lord's will – *"with few stripes"* (Luke 12:47). The first servant consciously disobeyed, the second unconsciously.

(2) Here is the golden reverse: *"He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him"* (John 14:21).

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