On Rock or Sand?
Matthew 7:24-29
(The following text is taken from a sermon preached by Gil Rugh.)

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The study of Matthew 7:24-29 is the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is again drawing attention to the issue of true profession versus false profession. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew describe the character and conduct of a child of God. At the end of chapter 7, Jesus is using a sharp contrast to draw a distinction between those who are the children of God and those who merely profess to be His children. There is a great danger that many will assume they are the children of God, but in reality, they are not His children.

1. Two Groups of Humanity: Believers and Unbelievers

Jesus simply breaks down all humanity into two groups: Those who are the children of God and those who are not. The contrast in Matthew 7:13-14 is between the narrow gate and the broad gate, the narrow way and the broad way. The end of life for those who enter the broad gate and travel on the broad way is destruction. Jesus describes two gates, two ways and two ends. There is no middle ground between them.

Jesus’ approach is the same in verses 17 and 18 where He speaks of the good tree and the bad tree. According to this analogy there are only two kinds of trees. There are no crossbreeds; there are none that are in between. The good tree represents believers and the bad tree represents unbelievers thus dividing everyone into two groups. Jesus continues with the approach in Matthew 10. He said in verse 39, “He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.” The two kinds of people are those who lose their lives and those who find them. It is a very simple breakdown, but the two groups again are the same.

Jesus takes the same approach repeatedly in Matthew 13. The reason I am emphasizing this is because the issues tend to get blurred and it is easy to think that there are all kinds of people with all kinds of variations across the scale. Jesus says that is not the case. The categories are very simply defined giving us a black and white issue. You are either in the group belonging to the lost or the group belonging to those who have eternal life. Everyone fits into one group or the other.
Matthew 13:11-12 continues the comparison of the two groups. Verse 11 says, “And He answered and said to them, ‘To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.’” To one group knowledge of the kingdom will be granted, but the other group will not be granted that knowledge. Verse 12 says, “For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.” This verse also mentions two groups—the haves and the have-nots—speaking in a spiritual context.

Matthew 13:14-16 draws a contrast. Verses 14 and 15 speak of those who do not see, hear or understand spiritual truths; but Jesus said in verse 16, “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.” All human beings are again divided into two groups—those who hear and understand spiritual truths and those who do not.

In Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus gives the parable of the wheat and the tares. He says in verse 30, “Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.’” The two groups are mentioned again in this section—wheat and tares. The wheat is destined for God’s presence, “gather the wheat into my barn,” but the tares are destined for destruction.

Verses 47 through 50 describe two kinds of fish: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” One is destined for destruction and one for life. Beginning in Matthew 25:31, Jesus speaks of sheep and goats. Speaking to the goats, Jesus says in verse 41, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.” But the sheep are invited into the kingdom that God has prepared for those who love Christ.

The same kind of contrast is developed in the closing verses of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. Verses 15 through 27 deal with those who profess to belong to God but who in reality are not His children. In verses 21 through 23, Jesus made it clear that there are people who will live their entire lives believing they are servants of Jesus Christ and representatives of Him, but in reality they are not the children of God. They are convinced that they are God’s children right up until the time that they stand before Jesus Christ for judgment. He will say to them on that day, “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (v. 23). They never had a relationship with Jesus Christ; they never belonged to Him. They were totally self-deluded.

This is not intended to undermine the confidence of true believers. You can know you are a child of God if you have understood that you are a sinner and believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died to pay the penalty for your sins. If you are trusting Him alone as your Savior, you have salvation. If you are truly a believer, your life will be different because you have undergone a transformation.
Have you trusted Christ? Is your life different? Those two things work together to give confidence and assurance as the Spirit ministers and testifies within the believer that he is indeed the child of God. Unfortunately many people blow right by the issues. Even though they mix in much of the truth of God, they mix it with error and miss the point of the message. As a result they are totally self-deceived and self-deluded.

For two reasons it is imperative to understand these issues. First, it is important to examine ourselves to be sure that we have believed in Jesus Christ and that our lives evidence that fact. Secondly, it is important to examine those who present themselves as teachers or spiritual leaders to be sure that we are following the ones who are indeed followers of Christ.

2. Jesus Christ Is the Sure Foundation

Jesus picks up the same theme in verse 24 and gives a parable as an illustration of what He is saying. Since He basically repeats the same thing, this gives us an idea of how important it is to be aware of the danger of false profession. “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock” (v. 24). Then He continues in verse 26, “And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand.”

You should underline two significant words in verse 24: “hears” and “acts.” Acting is the issue involved in this verse. The word which is translated “acts” is actually the word “to do.” Jesus is saying that the one who hears and does is wise.

He says in verse 26 that the one who hears the Word of God and does not act upon it is foolish. The word which is translated “foolish” is the base for the English word “moron.” The one who hears but does not act upon the Word of God is foolish or stupid. He has not really considered the issues. Notice where the contrast is between the groups. Both groups hear the Word of God, but the difference is in the response to the Word. Response is the crucial issue, and that is where Jesus wants to focus. Some are doers of the Word and some are not doers of the Word.

Jesus refers to “everyone who hears these words of Mine” (v. 24). The words of Christ will be the foundation, the rock upon which a house is built. The parable is of two people going out to construct a home. One goes out, digs through the superficial topsoil to the rock and establishes his house with the foundation on the rock. When the storms come and beat on that house, it weatheres the storm. Contrast that with the person who goes out and builds a house upon the sand. When the storm comes, it washes away the foundation so that the house collapses.

When I read this story, I never fail to think of an incident which occurred when I was young and living in the East. On one occasion we were experiencing some major flooding, so we went out to see the Delaware River which had swelled over its banks. As we were standing there watching the water rush down the valley, lo and behold, here came a house floating down the river. It floated right by us and smashed into the bridge near where we were standing. That house looked decent, but it had no foundation under it. It floated down the river until it hit the bridge, then it didn’t float anymore! That is the picture Jesus is giving here. A house without a foundation will get washed out, and then it will collapse upon itself.
Jesus is saying that the foundation of the house which will stand the storms is “these words of Mine” (v. 24). The immediate context to which He is referring is the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew, Chapters 5 through 7. The one who hears these sayings which Christ has been teaching and acts upon them is like someone building his life upon a rock—a firm foundation. But the foundation is not limited to the Sermon on the Mount. The sayings of Christ would include all the teachings of Christ. In reality, when you talk about the words of Christ, you are talking about the words of God. It is important that we understand this to see clearly what the foundation is.

There is no difference between the words of Christ and the words of God. Jesus refers in John 16 to the Holy Spirit who will come and indwell believers after He has been raised from the dead and ascended to the Father, a prophecy which is fulfilled in Acts 2. Jesus said in John 16:

“I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you” (vs. 12-15). Jesus is promising that when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide believers into all the truth. That will be the ministry of the Spirit of God. “For He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (v. 13).

Jesus Christ Himself is the truth, so the Spirit of God will be making Jesus Christ known. Verse 15 says, “All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you.” When the Spirit of God reveals Jesus Christ, He is revealing the truth. When He reveals Jesus Christ, the truth, He is revealing God the Father. All that God the Father has also belongs to Jesus Christ. To reveal Christ or the Word of Christ is to have God and the Word of God. The triune God is revealed in this passage. When you speak of the sayings of Christ, the person of Christ and the Word of Christ blend together and are inseparable.

3. Jesus Christ Reveals God

In John 1:1, Jesus is called the Word of God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Our words are the expression of our person and our very character. Later in Matthew Christ teaches that we will be judged on the basis of our words. He also tells us that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. We reveal our character by our words. Jesus Christ is the very revelation of the person and character of God, so He is the Word of God, the One who expresses and reveals God completely.

John continues in verse 18: “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” No man has seen God the Father at any time because God is a spirit. But the only begotten God, Jesus Christ, the One who became man, He declares God, reveals God or makes Him known. He is the Word of God. To have the sayings of Christ is to have the truth concerning Christ, His revelation of Himself which is the truth concerning God.

The Apostle John also wrote of this concept in the last book of the New Testament. “The
Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1). Notice that this is a revelation of Jesus Christ from God the Father. He continues in verse 3, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it.” This is the same point Jesus makes in Matthew 7. He is saying that those who hear and do what He says are those who hear and do the Word of God.

4. Jesus Christ and Scriptures Are Inseparable

You cannot disassociate Christ from the Scriptures. He cannot be separated from the Bible. The Bible is the revelation of Jesus Christ. To reject the Bible is to reject Christ. That is significant, because today we have people who claim to know Jesus Christ and love Him, but they are false teachers. They reject large portions of the Scripture, which is, in effect, a rejection of Christ. When a person rejects the Bible or any part of it, He is rejecting God and Jesus Christ, because the Bible is a revelation of Jesus Christ and of God. If I reject a portion of the Scripture, I am saying, “I don’t like this about God; I am unwilling to accept God.” It is a rejection not just of a book, but a rejection of God.

Sometimes people have charged that some fundamentalists are members of a “paper cult.” But as fundamentalists, we have an authoritative, final standard in the Word of God. Because it is the revelation of God, it is the absolute, final authority for everything about which it speaks. All we know about Jesus Christ is contained in the Bible. How can one reject this Book, which is a revelation of Him, yet claim to know Him and love Him? It is foolishness and self-deceit.

In the parable Jesus gives in Matthew 7, the house is built upon a rock when a person hears the Word of God and believes it. To believe in the Word of God and to believe in Jesus Christ are synonymous, because the Word of God is the revelation of Jesus Christ. If I believe the Word of God, then I am saved. That may shock you. “I thought you were saved by believing in Jesus Christ,” you reply. That’s right, I am. But the Word of God tells me, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.” (Acts 16:31). The gospel that brings salvation is the proclamation of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is God’s means of providing redemption for fallen, sinful humanity. When I believe the Word of God, I am believing in Jesus Christ. The two are inseparable.

Just as has been true throughout the Sermon on the Mount, the emphasis is upon doing the Word of God, upon doing righteousness. If I truly believe the Word of God, I will be doing it. It will be lived out as a result of the transformation God has brought about in my life.

5. The Coming Storm

The storm is introduced in Matthew 7:25: “And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock.” The house He just described has a firm, unshakable foundation.

Again, this is not new material Jesus is talking about. If you were a Jew in Jesus’ day hearing this, you would identify it with what the Old Testament had already said in this regard.
“Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed” (Isaiah 28:16). That verse is quoted again in the New Testament in Romans 9:33 and 1 Peter 2:6. The one who believes in this firm foundation will not be shaken--he will not be ashamed or disturbed. That promise is concerning Christ. He is the foundation. You must believe in Him and His Word. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:11, “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” He is the only foundation for the Church to be established upon and the only one upon which lives can be built. He is the rock who provides the stability for the house.

The Jews to whom Jesus is talking in Matthew 7 are aware of the claim He is making when He tells them to believe in Him and their house will be established. The coming of the storm is recorded in verses 25 and 27. No attention is given in this passage to the details of the construction of the houses. The only crucial matter is the foundation. The appearance of the houses could be very similar. But when the storm comes, one will stand and one will not. The stability of the house is not determined by the kind of windows that were put in it, by the roof line, by the veneer used, nor by the layout of the rooms. The stability was determined by the foundation that was laid.

Multitudes of people today are investing intense amounts of energy constructing their lives without giving any attention to the foundation on which they are building. They are concerned about what kind of windows they want to use, whether they want to build with brick or aluminum siding and whether they want a shake roof. But they never give any thought to the foundation.

A few days ago I talked to two individuals neither of whom is a believer in Jesus Christ. Both of them are well beyond their three score and ten years that the Bible speaks about. Neither of these individuals had given any thought to the foundation of his life. Both are close to the brink of eternity, yet neither one has given any thought to where he is going to spend eternity. What a tragedy to spend 80 years constructing your life and never give a thought to the foundation. Is it any wonder that Jesus said such people are fools? They have put all that intense effort into acquiring wealth, possessions, influence, comfort and a good reputation; but they have not considered what kind of foundation they have. What a tragedy! The test is going to be the foundation. Only houses founded upon the rock, only those lives founded upon Jesus Christ, will withstand the test.

The storm Jesus is referring to in verses 25 and 27 is the coming judgment that He talked about in verses 21 through 23 when people will stand before Him. Hebrews 9:27 says, “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.” Yet people want to go on through their lives, refining and rearranging the details, but giving no thought to the foundation.

In order to validate this, why not take some time to talk to people about what they are doing with their lives? Ask them about the things they are interested in, like their jobs, social activities and families. Notice how they can talk on and on about these things. Ask them about the events of the week and find out how many details they know about them. Then get down to the real issue.
Ask them about the foundation of their lives. Ask them where they are going to spend eternity. See if they know that God says they are sinners without hope apart from Christ. As you do this, take note of how interested people are in talking about the foundation. All of a sudden they have nothing to say. You can talk about the details of the construction of their lives all you want to, but when you narrow in on the foundation, they have nothing to say.

Unfortunately, many people spend their lives investing in the details that do not matter and neglect the one thing that does—the foundation that will stand the test of God’s judgment. The tragedy is that many of these people hear the Word of God but fail to do it.

6. Hearers and Doers

This is the same issue that James talks about so eloquently in the first chapter of his letter. In that passage he uses the analogy of a mirror. He speaks of the danger of self-deception in verse 22: “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.” Then he continues in verses 23 and 24 describing the one who is a hearer, but not a doer of the word. “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.” That is a good description of the problem Jesus is addressing. The purpose of the mirror is to let you know how you look.

Suppose I got up this morning, looked in the mirror, then said to you, “My, isn’t it marvelous to be tall, dark and handsome! There is nothing like those dark eyes, those dark eyebrows and that straight black hair. I am really something!” “Yes,” you would say, “you are. You’re crazy!” Why would you say that? It would be because I had looked in the mirror and deluded myself. I could walk down the street saying, “My, it is great to be six feet four with black hair and a dark complexion.” Someone would finally remind me, “You have forgotten what you saw in the mirror.”

Wouldn’t you think that people who hear what God says about their sin and their need of salvation would hear what God says about hell and would stop and contemplate it? But many people hear the message and do not even want to talk about it. They have looked at the mirror of the Word of God, then they have turned around, walked away and not given it another thought. God says they delude themselves. It is as though by not thinking about it, it will go away. That would be just like thinking in my mind that if I consider myself to be tall, dark and handsome, that is the way I will really be. Such individuals think that if they do not consider eternity, death, sin or hell, everything will be all right. But they only delude themselves, because what God says stands true.

People sometimes ask why there is not a greater response to the Word of God. Many will hear it, but not everyone who hears it will act upon it. But the question is are we being faithful in proclaiming the Word? Our responsibility is to proclaim it as faithfully as we can, then the response is a matter between that individual and God.

7. Jesus Christ’s Authority Recognized
The last two verses of Matthew 7 show the impact of Christ’s teaching on the people who heard Him. Verse 28 says, “The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching.” The word which is translated “amazed” is an interesting and strong word. It literally means struck out of their senses. We would say today, “They were blown away.” These people were dumbfounded, awestruck, astonished. Jesus has finished His teaching, and everybody continues to sit there. They cannot believe what they have heard. Matthew 7:29 says that Jesus spoke with authority, “for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.”

The people were accustomed to the teaching of the scribes who went out of their way to quote all the authorities they could come up with to give weight to what they were saying and to impress the people with their views. They would tell what all of the leading rabbis had to say about what they were teaching, as though if you could get enough people with weight behind you, that meant you must surely be right.

Some preachers are like that today. When they preach, they do not teach from the Bible; they tell you what this writer says, what this scientist says, what this doctor says and what this reverend says. You came to hear what the Word of God says, but they give you a book review. Curses on their houses! They are in the line of the scribes; they are not in the line of Christ. Verse 29 says that Christ spoke as one who had authority. He obviously had authority because of what we have seen about Him in the other passages. He was revealing God and the truth of God.

Jesus claimed this kind of authority from God. In Matthew 5, Jesus in speaking to the people used the expression “but I say to you,” six times. Go back and read through the Sermon on the Mount and find out how many times Christ quotes form Rabbi Gamaliel or Rabbi Hillel. He does not really care what those rabbis said. He is presenting the unchanging and unshakable truth of God.

This ought to say something to us today. We have the truth, the Word of God. It does not matter how many doctors, scientists, reverends or other supposed authorities say otherwise. Anyone who disagrees with the Word of God is wrong. “Well,” you say, “all of these theologians and scholars must know what they’re talking about.” They know what they are talking about when they agree with the Word of God. When they disagree with God, they are “morons,” using the word that Christ used and that Paul used later as well. When you stop and think of it, it is stupid for someone to read what God says in black and white, then to disagree with it. The kindest thing that you can say about such a person is that he is an idiot. How can he say that God is wrong?

Believers ought to be unshakable. We have the truth of God in His Word. That truth is unchanging. Society, culture and opinions change, but God does not change. We still must come to the Word to find out what is sin. We must also come to the Word to find out what God says about salvation and about what is right and wrong. These things are the same yesterday, today and forever because the Author is the same yesterday, today and forever.

The same word used to describe Jesus’ authority in Matthew 7:29 is also used in Jesus’
concluding words in the Gospel of Matthew: “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20). Christ has the authority, so He demands obedience to His Word.

Jesus said in John 8:26, “I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.” He is speaking the truth from the One who Himself is truth. That is unchanging, settled forever. We never need to worry about things changing in the world and God’s Word not being true tomorrow. His Word is absolute, final truth. As believers we need to make sure that our mentality does not get fuzzy by the fluctuating standards of the world. Unbelievers do not have a standard. I do not understand how they live their lives. They live them because they are willing to live with the contradictions of their own philosophy. There must be right and wrong. In order to have absolutes of right and wrong, there must be a source of absolute truth. Jesus said He was speaking from the One who is true.

8. Jesus Christ’s Words Are Life

Some people compromise the truth of the Word of God in order to get a crowd. Jesus Christ did not do that. By the time He concludes teaching in John 6:66, many of those who had been following Him had packed their bags and left. They did not like what they heard. Jesus said to the twelve disciples in verse 67, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” Note the response of Simon Peter in verse 68, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.” What a statement!

If you turn away from Christ, where will you go? If you look at yourself in the mirror of God’s Word, you will see that it reveals you as a sinner under condemnation, destined for hell. It reveals that Jesus Christ is the Savior who died on the cross for your sins. If you do not believe in Him as the Holy One of God, the Savior, where will you go?

I have built my hope in eternity on what the Word of God says about Jesus Christ. All of my expectations for life in eternity are based on this Book. “Well,” you say, “I don’t know that I want to do that.” On what do you base your life? What is your foundation? Are you basing your eternal destiny on what some men have said? Are you basing it on what you feel deep down in your heart? Is it based on some personal convictions you have developed over the years or the teaching of your church or your parents? You are building your life on something. What is your foundation? If the Bible is true, the storm is coming. You will have to stand and be judged. I would rather have my life built upon the Word of the One who is true than anything else because it alone will stand in the face of the coming judgment.

Jesus Christ has the words of eternal life. Believe in Him and you will live. “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).
9. Our Responsibility

We ought to remind ourselves as those who have believed in Jesus Christ that obedience does not end when you obey the command to believe in Jesus Christ. Rather, that is the beginning of a life of obedience. As Jesus concluded His earthly ministry with His disciples in John 13, He said, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (v. 17). In some of our Bible-believing, fundamental circles, we have misinterpreted and mistreated that verse. We say, “If you know these things, you are blessed.” Then we spend our lives trying to pack our heads full of knowledge without anything else. But that is not what Jesus said. It is important to know these things, but He said, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (emphasis added). We need to be careful that our lives are a testimony to the saving grace of God which God demands they should be. We are to begin to obey Him when we submit ourselves to the Spirit of God and trust Jesus Christ as the One who died to pay the penalty for our sins. But that is not the end of a life of obedience, it is the beginning. When we believe in Christ, God transforms us within and makes us new persons. We do not have perfect lives at that point, but we should have lives that are different. Our lives should show that they have been changed and testify to the reality of the faith we say we have in Him.

Do your actions testify to the work of God’s saving grace in your life? What is your life built upon? Maybe you have been too busy pursuing your career, your family or other things. Did you ever stop and analyze what must be the foundation for your life? What are you basing your hopes for eternity upon? If it is anything other than the Word of God and the Son of God as revealed in the Word, it is a foundation of sand that will be washed away in the face of the coming judgment.