

# *Building on Rock*

## WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

1<sup>st</sup> in a five-part series

June 1, 2014

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*Matthew 7:13–14, 24–29 (NIV)*

<sup>13</sup>“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup>But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

<sup>24</sup>“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup>The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup>But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup>The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

<sup>28</sup>When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, <sup>29</sup>because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

*1 John 2:1–11 (NIV)*

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup>He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

<sup>3</sup>We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. <sup>4</sup>Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. <sup>5</sup>But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: <sup>6</sup>Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

<sup>7</sup>Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. <sup>8</sup>Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

<sup>9</sup>Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. <sup>10</sup>Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. <sup>11</sup>But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

*Which will it be: rock or sand? God's way or your own way?*

*Walking in the light or stumbling around in the dark?*

This week's study is fraught with peril, so please read carefully. Jesus' teachings about obedience of God's law, God's instruction, are easily misunderstood by believers and non-believers alike.

Gallup and other groups often poll Americans about their religious beliefs. One consistent finding is that well over half of all Americans, a lot of whom have to be Christian, believe that if we do enough good things in our lifetime we can earn our way into heaven. But this is *not* the Christian proclamation. We have to be very clear about this before we consider Jesus' brief parable about building on rock.

Here goes: **there is nothing that you or I or anyone can do that will make God love us more or make God love us less.** We can't pile up enough good deeds to earn our way into God's presence nor can we commit enough horrible acts to place ourselves outside God's redeeming love. God desires that we be in a loving relationship with him and we are put into this right relationship with God through Jesus' death on the cross, when he took upon himself the sins of us all. How could God demonstrate his love for you any more than to give up his own son for you . . . long before your birth!

Yes, we can please God and we can displease God, but doesn't mean God loves us more when we do as he asks or loves us less when we don't. I know that is how I felt about my sons; it certainly can't be less so for God.

All God asks of us is that we trust him, that we place our faith in Jesus Christ and what he accomplished for us all. There are many ways to say what I just said; but that is basically it. It is by God's grace<sup>1</sup>, his amazing grace, his grace alone, that we are made right with God.

When the apostle Paul crisscrossed the eastern Mediterranean proclaiming this message of God's grace, the reaction of many went something like this: "Wow! You mean that I'm made right with God by faith, not by what I do . . . alright! I've got faith, now let's go party!!"

You may think I'm exaggerating, but I'm not. Some people even suggested to Paul that since grace overcomes sin, then we should sin more so that there can be more grace (Romans 6:1). Hardly. Of course obedience matters. Not because we can earn our way into God's presence. Not because we like the comfort of having some rules to follow. Obedience matters because we seek to please the one who love us. Further, we desire to be disciples of Jesus Christ and trust that God knows, better than we, a way of life that reflects the kingdom of God. Like all apprentices, we desire to be like our master and teacher. We desire to be Christ-like. It is God who shows us how. It is God who shows us the way to a deeply joyful life. It is God who shows us the way to a life that can be the light to the world. Obedience is the path to that life.

#### *The two ways*

Today's passage from Matthew's gospel is the closing portion to the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has had much to say about what it means to live in the kingdom of God. Now, in verses 13 & 14 of chapter, Jesus calls upon an old Jewish tradition that contrasts the way of the righteous with the way of the wicked; i.e., those who follow God's instructions with those who do not. Jesus knows that the path of discipleship is not always an easy one. Taking up a cross never is. He knows that the world will be calling his disciples away from their master. We shouldn't read these verses as they too often are – as some ratio of the "saved" (the few) to the "unsaved" (the many). Jesus is not speaking to the crowds that have followed him around. He has retreated up the hillside and is speaking only to his disciples. Jesus knows how hard is the path that they have chosen; he hopes the disciples do and are ready for it.

Thus, Jesus is not talking about doctrinal correctness, he is talking about obedience, an obedience that flows out of our trust in God. It is the path of obedience that is narrow; too many pay lip service to Jesus' teachings. The entire Sermon on the Mount is like a "training session" for his disciples. Jesus reminds them that without obedience, his teachings become no more than an impossible ideal.

#### *Foundations of rock and sand*

After setting out the "two ways" in v. 13 & 14, Jesus talks about those who will try to pull his disciples off the path of righteousness – those wolves in sheep's clothing. He goes on to remind them that empty words, even words like "Lord, Lord" don't cut it. It is about the doing. We are to understand God's will and do it . . . just do it!

Finally, Jesus turns to a parable about a wise man and a fool. Jesus and his disciples live in an arid region that didn't get a lot of rain. There were many large wadis (when I lived in Phoenix we called them "washes") that were dry most of the time, but would become rivers of dangerously fast-flowing water when torrential rains came. As compared with some of Jesus' parables, there is nothing unclear or ambiguous about this one. The wise man is the one who hears Jesus' words and "acts on them." He has built his house in the wadi on a foundation of rock. His house stands when the storms come and the floods come roaring down the wadi. The fool is the man who hears Jesus' words and "does not act on them." He

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<sup>1</sup>To use a traditional definition, "grace" is "unmerited favor." If you've earned or deserve it – it isn't grace. 81% of Americans thinks the Bible says: "God helps those who help themselves." It doesn't. The whole point of grace is that God helps those who can't help themselves – which is all humankind.

has built a house in a wadi and placed it on a foundation of sand. Little wonder that the fool is washed away in the first storm. On what foundation will we build? A simple question.

### *Loving obedience*

In the parable, building on rock consists of obeying Jesus' instructions. This, the apostle John makes clear in his letter: "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did" (1 John 2:3-5).

And the cornerstone of those commands is this: to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. John makes it very plain. The Christians who love their fellow believers walk in the light of Christ. Those who don't are still walking in the darkness. I'm sure that John would wonder how deeply committed a person is to Jesus if they are unable to love even their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Of course we are called to love everyone, even our enemies, but a life of love must begin at home – not necessarily those to whom we are tied by blood or law, but those with whom we share the Spirit of Christ.

May we be one in Christ, in life, and in love.

### The Sermon on the Mount

We find ourselves at the Sermon on the Mount once again. Sometimes it almost seems that all the biblical roads lead here, though they do not. All biblical roads lead to the cross.

This is the largest single block of Jesus' teaching in the New Testament, spanning chapters 5-7 in Matthew's Gospel.

The teachings spell out, often very directly, what it means to live a life under the rule of God. Jesus had more to say about God's kingdom than any other subject. In these three chapters, we have the fullest statement of what life in the kingdom is really like. And it is profoundly counter-cultural.

The Sermon on the Mount turns the world on its head. Up becomes down. In becomes out. Power becomes weakness. Jesus is *not* laying out some idealized picture of what life might be like someday when he returns. No . . . Jesus is setting out his expectations of his disciples; i.e., of you and me. We are a community formed by God and empowered by God's Spirit. The Sermon on the Mount is a sort of guidebook to life in this community.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Obedience . . . this is a tough subject for many Christians. Begin by making a list of your own thoughts about obedience. What words come to mind? Do you find yourself wanting to start making a list of rules? Many people want to make the Bible into just that . . . but it is not a book of rules or a book of right behavior. Knowing which moral choices God would wish us to make is often not straightforward. Even the Sermon on the Mount is not a list of do's and don'ts. Instead, Jesus points us toward what Dallas Willard calls the "habits of goodness." Jesus is training us in a curriculum of Christlikeness. What do you think Willard might mean by "habits of goodness?" What are some examples of such habits? How do we develop such habits?
2. Some people don't begin making rule lists when they hear the word "obedience," instead they want to talk about whether they must be obedient to be saved. The simple answer is no . . . but the larger truth is that the people of God strive to be obedient. Not because they "have to" but because they wish to. Salvation is both instantaneous and a process – a process of learning to be obedient, to walk in God's way, to develop the mind of Christ. What do you think this process is like? Where can we turn for help?

## Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p><b>Monday, Matthew 4:23 – 7:28</b> The entire Sermon on the Mount. Please read it in one sitting.</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, Matthew 7:12-28</b> The extended passage from Matthew on obedience and those who would lead us down the wrong path.</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, Luke 6:20-49</b> Jesus' "Great Sermon" from Luke; see esp. v. 46-49 on obedience</p>	<p><b>Thursday, Romans 12: 9-21; 13:8-10</b> What does love in action look like? The Law is summed up in the command to love.</p>
<p><b>Friday, James 1</b> James, Jesus' half-brother, writes about practical discipleship – love as action and obedience to the word.</p>	<p><b>Prayer List</b></p>

### Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

#### Monday Evening Class – now studying 1 Samuel

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

#### Tuesday Lunchtime Class – now studying Exodus

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

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### Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

#### Our Current Series:

*Simon the Rock: The Life and Witness of Peter*

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Scott's Weekly Bible Studies are available at [www.standrewumc.org](http://www.standrewumc.org). Just go to "worship" and then "sermons." You'll find the study with each week's recorded sermon. There is also a complete archive of the studies at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org)

### Sermon Notes

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