

4. In closing His discourse, Jesus drew out the appropriate implication of all that He had said (7:24-27). Having carefully described to the gathered multitude the nature and ethic of His kingdom, Jesus exhorted and warned them regarding their entrance into it. The sons of Israel – who were rightful heirs of the kingdom in terms of genealogical and covenant status – were not thereby guaranteed the kingdom of heaven; they had enjoyed singular privilege in salvation history, but they, like the Gentiles, had to enter through the narrow gate. So also, they, too, were gravely susceptible to missing that gate and entering through the more apparent and appealing wide gate. For all their distinction and privilege, when it came to actual entrance into the kingdom of heaven, the sons of Israel were in exactly the same position as the Gentiles. They would enter by means of true faith in Jesus Christ according to His gospel or they would not enter at all.

Jesus had candidly set in front of His hearers the one way into the kingdom and warned them about the dire consequences of attempting to enter by another avenue. He had been clear and unequivocal, and now they needed to act upon His words. He described entrance into His kingdom in terms of two gates, two paths, two trees and two claims, and the Lord concluded by identifying men's response and the outcome of it with two *houses* associated with two *builders* and two *foundations*.

- a. The first thing one observes about Jesus' similitude is that He made no distinction between the two houses *as such*. In fact, His silence regarding the houses implies that both were essentially the same in terms of their materials, structure, and integrity. And even though Jesus distinguished their respective builders as *wise* and *foolish*, He gave no indication that either was any more or less skilled in his craftsmanship or careful in his construction practice. That Jesus indicated no such distinctions was clearly intentional, serving to focus His audience's attention on the fact that the one thing differentiating the two houses is the foundation upon which they were constructed. It was their choice of foundation that rendered the one builder wise and the other foolish.
- b. Their respective foundations distinguished the two houses, and Jesus identified the one as *sand* and the other *rock*. The contrast in these two foundations is extreme: The former refers, not to soil that has some sand content, but to the sort of sandy surface one encounters at the seashore; the latter refers to a large rock outcropping (Mark 15:46) or, in this context, bedrock beneath topsoil. The one is impervious and immovable; the other is unstable and readily washed away.

The self-evident principle behind this similitude is that the integrity and steadfastness of any superstructure depends ultimately, not on the superstructure itself, but on the foundation it is erected upon. Thus skyscrapers in earthquake zones are often constructed on dynamic foundations that allow the building a degree of movement, thereby enabling it to absorb the vibration energy imparted to it by an earthquake. Without a properly designed and constructed foundation, the strongest and most perfectly built building will not withstand a large earthquake. So also, a foundation compromised by expansive soils will eventually compromise the entire house. Every superstructure depends on its foundation.

So, in Jesus' parable the integrity of each house is directly determined by the foundation it is constructed upon. In the one instance, the builder is deemed foolish because he erected his house on sand. Conversely, the other is regarded to be wise because he set his house on bedrock. In the case of the sandy foundation, the builder had nothing to anchor his house to and so could only set it on the ground. But the man who built on the rock was able to dig deep and firmly anchor his house to a foundation that could not be moved (cf. Luke 6:47-49).

- c. Each house was similarly constructed, but upon very different foundations. As long as things continued undisturbed, an observer likely would have noticed no difference between the two houses; both would appear to be equally secure. Only a true test of their integrity would reveal the crucial distinction between them, and Jesus introduced that in the form of a severe *storm*. When both houses were subjected to the same fury of wind, downpour, and rising waters, the one was able to prevail intact and unscathed while the other was utterly decimated. It wasn't simply moved off of its foundation; it collapsed to the ground.

Commentators have variously understood the meaning of the storm in the similitude, but the context supports the idea that Jesus was indicating metaphorically the judgment of the last day. This is substantiated by the other sets of pairs: two paths, one leading to final destruction; two trees, one being cut down and burned in the fire; two claims, one resulting in condemnation and banishment. So here, the storm that comes against the two houses results in the complete and final devastation of the one.

- d. Concerning the point of the similitude, Jesus' intent clearly wasn't to give a lesson on sound construction methods. As with all parabolic teaching, He was drawing upon an everyday situation well familiar to all of His hearers in order to make a spiritual point.
 - Whenever a person builds a house, he tacitly affirms his confidence in the foundation upon which he constructs it. For he builds his house with the expectation that it will function as a strong and secure refuge able to protect him from the elements and severe weather, and he knows such confidence is unfounded unless the foundation itself is sound and immovable. Therefore, no one with even the least amount of life experience would ever think of constructing a house on pure sand; a temporary shelter perhaps, but not a permanent dwelling. Anyone who would venture to do so is a fool indeed.
 - And yet multitudes do precisely that with regard to their spiritual situation.
 - 1) People who would never construct their physical home on a weak and unstable foundation don't give even the slightest thought to the foundation on which they are building their spiritual "house."

More often than not, people take an “out of sight, out of mind” approach. Like the careless, unconcerned fool who presumes the integrity of his home’s foundation without ever having seen it, so countless individuals assume the integrity and well-being of their spiritual condition without ever giving the matter even the least conscious consideration. Though they have no real reason for it, they rest in their confidence that all will be well in the end.

- 2) Many others consciously build their spiritual “house” (or other place of personal refuge and security) on a foundation, but not the foundation of rock Jesus was indicating in this passage. Whether they choose the foundation of religion or irreligion, *all such individuals actually construct their house on the one foundation that is self-righteousness.* (The atheist is every bit as self-righteous as the devout religionist). In this sense, there was no distinction between the pious Israelite listening attentively to Jesus and the godless Roman soldier who would mock, scourge and crucify Him.

As there are only two gates, two paths, two trees and two claims, so there are only two foundations and two final outcomes for all people. Whether or not he is conscious of it, every person attempts to build a refuge to withstand the things he believes will come against him – which is to say, each person seeks to insure his own well-being and security in this life and confidence for the life to come.

Every human being in every place and time builds his “house,” and yet only two foundations are available for doing so; each person must choose one or the other.

- The historical and salvation-historical context of the Sermon on the Mount – especially as the sermon reflects the core issue in Jesus’ confrontation with His generation – leaves no doubt that the foundation of sand corresponds to **self-righteousness** as man’s instinctive place of confidence and security. Regardless of how they might conceive their “house,” the project of constructing it, and the “storms” against which it must stand, all people naturally build upon a self-referential, self-righteous foundation.
- If the one foundation is self-righteousness, the other one is the **righteousness of God** that a person receives through His union with Christ. Thus Paul referred to this foundation as Christ Himself; He is the only true foundation that can be laid (1 Corinthians 3:1-11).

In contrast to all other men, the Christian has Christ as the foundation of his “house,” but the right foundation is only the beginning. *While it’s true that no house will stand that isn’t built on Him, it is equally true that simply laying the right foundation doesn’t insure a well-built house.* It is essential to begin with the right foundation, but, having done so, it is also necessary to properly construct the superstructure using the right materials assembled in the right manner.

Paul understood the critical importance of this truth and so pressed it upon the immature and wayward Christians at Corinth. A man may have begun with Christ, but that is not enough; it matters greatly how he builds on that foundation.

The natural mind instinctively perceives and embraces the wide gate and the path that lies beyond it and it is inclined to listen to those who promote that way. Without the effectual working of God's grace, every human being will find himself walking the broad path that leads to destruction. Along with his traveling companions, his journey will end with the shocking revelation that the claim in which he found such confidence is empty and useless.

Most frightening is that this will be the case for many who claim the name of Christ, not simply for those who have refused Him. *Again, it is crucial to recognize that Jesus was warning His hearers of the danger, not of outright rejection, but of misguided pseudo-faith.* In context, the fool who builds his house on the sand isn't the atheist, pagan, or practitioner of a non-Christian religion; he is the sincere follower of the biblical God who hears Jesus' words and then fails to "act upon them" by not embracing Him *in truth* in accordance with *His* gospel.

A person's profession may be orthodox and the practice and pattern of his life may be sound and praiseworthy, but unless they are founded on Christ Himself – that is, founded on saving faith in Him in accordance with the true gospel – they will not stand the final judgment. Like a well-engineered and flawlessly designed and constructed building, the visible edifice that is a man's life may be solid and impressive, but, without an equally sure foundation, it will be brought down with a great fall in the day when God's testing storm bursts upon it.

If a man would be a "wise builder," he must build on the foundation of rock that is Jesus Christ Himself. This work begins with him hearing the word of the gospel and responding to it in truth. The wise builder is the person who undertakes his labor by combining "hearing with faith" (Romans 9:30-10:21). But he must continue according to the way he began: Having laid the foundation of hearing with faith, he must build according to the same principle (Galatians 3:1-5).

There is only one true foundation that can be laid, but men can build on that foundation using "wood, hay, and straw" rather than "gold, silver and precious stones." In this instance, the foundation is sound and sure, but the superstructure raised on it is common, weak, and transient. Those who construct their "house" in this way will find the foundation enduring through the fires of divine testing, but what they have built on it will be consumed. They themselves will be saved, but not without great loss (1 Corinthians 3:12ff).

Thus Jesus' concluding words apply in some sense to all men – to those who know Him as well as those who don't. Those who trust in their own righteousness are warned away from their folly, but those who've laid the right foundation must also be wary that their initial wisdom doesn't become foolishness. Let each man take care how he builds.