

“Doing What is True and Good: A Cornerstone for Our Lives”
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The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the Lord’s doing.
And it is marvelous in our eyes (Psalm 118:22,23; Mark 12:10-11).

In all that the Lord does, He has the long-term happiness of every individual human being in mind. There is not one word of revealed truth that doesn’t have this ultimate goal. Each image, each law, each rational concept that He has given us looks to our happiness. On the last night of His mortal life, He told His disciples: “These things I have spoken to you that My joy might be yours, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). The sadness of His life is that too often His words have been ignored or rejected. The parable of the wicked vinedressers was directly addressed to the members of the Lord’s audience who had either disregarded or perverted the essential truths of the Old Testament and would soon be crying for His crucifixion.

In the parable the vineyard that the man planted represents the Lord’s Church on earth. Its qualities describe how the Lord has provided us with everything we need to lead happier and more useful lives. In the parable, the goal of the vineyard was the harvested and processed crop. The primary thing that the Church is supposed to produce within our lives is genuine charity or a wise kindness in our hearts, guiding our thoughts and influencing what we say and do. This wise kindness is what the Lord calls us to. Anything that stands in the way of this wise kindness He warns us against.

At vintage-time, the owner, who had gone far away, sent a servant to receive some of the fruit. This servant represents the Lord knocking at the door of our mind calling on us to do what is good, merciful and just. Many times each day, we have opportunities placed before us to make decisions about how we will serve others. The Lord comes to us with the hope that we will choose to do what is truly good. It is not uncommon that this choice is hard to make. Other thoughts argue against it in our mind. One of these is that God is apparently far away and unaware of what we’re thinking and doing. This idea and other thoughts, as it were, beat up on the thought sent to us by the Lord, and the result is a refusal to do what the Lord had hoped we would do.

The Lord’s parable specifically cites in one case that the people of the vineyard threw stones at the servant, wounding him in the head. These stones represent the justifications that a person can marshal to support intolerance, hatred, neglect, and cruelty. The Lord knocks at the door of such a person’s mind, sometimes through comments made by others, sometimes by gently introducing a thought into the person’s ideas, and rather than receiving it and yielding up the life of good that the Lord hopes for, a person can reject it and argue that it is wrong, irrelevant, or misguided. The doctrinal justification that the person musters, wounds the head of the servant, meaning the person rejects the essential call to do what is good in the present situation.

We all do this at various points in our life. No one enters adult life making the right choices spontaneously. No one discovers a single key early on and from then on never makes an unwise or unkind decision. The key question is what are the fundamental values that direct our lives? In

the teachings for the New Church these fundamental values are sometimes called our ruling love. This represents the core goal of our lives. This core goal subtly or directly influences all of our other values and choices. The son of the owner of the vineyard represents the Lord coming to us, not as the infinite and unknowable God, but rather His entrance into our lives as a loving Divine Human.

“God” can be a remote and ill-defined concept like the owner of the vineyard gone to a far distant country. Even evil spirits in hell can acknowledge “God” and more. In the teachings for the New Church we read:

[T]hose who had affirmed a faith divorced from charity were told to say the name Jesus. But they could not, even though they could all say Christ, and also God the Father. They were surprised at this, and inquiring into the reason, they found that they prayed to God the Father for the sake of the Son, and did not pray to the Savior Himself. For Jesus means Savior. They were further told to speak from their thought about the Lord's humanity and say, "Divine humanity." But none of the clergy present there could do so, though some of the laity could (*Apocalypse Revealed* 294:3-4)

It is the acceptance of the Lord's living presence in this world that fundamentally defines the core of our lives. This living presence is represented in the parable by the son of the owner coming to receive the vintage. He was instead killed. The vinedressers killed him in hopes that they would own the vineyard all to themselves. This represents a person rejecting the fundamental presence of the Lord. It represents a choice of a self-centered or world-centered and directed life. And this choice can be made under the guise of the most dedicated religious behavior as it was with the corrupt Pharisees.

This is why the Lord as he finished the parable then quoted from the Psalms saying:

The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the Lord's doing.
And it is marvelous in our eyes (Psalm 118:22; Mark 12:10-11)

Have you ever watched a stonemason at work? As he works, he is surrounded by a pile of stones from which he chooses the one he will next add to the wall he is building. After placing one, he looks over the possible stones and picks the one that appears to best fit his needs. As he picks through a pile, if he happens to lift one that he doesn't think will fit, he tosses it away, rejecting it. If he finds one that he doesn't think will fit anywhere because of its coloring or extremely difficult shape, he may pitch it to the far edge of the pile or further.

Once the wall is underway, the process of choosing a stone and putting it in place can be rather rapid. But if you happen to be present at the beginning of the wall, you will notice what care is given to the placement of the chief cornerstone. The placement of this stone determines not only two edges or sides of the wall but all the other parts of the wall as well. The placement of all other stones are influenced by their relation to its initial position. If it is correctly placed, then the rest of the wall can work off of its correct placement. If it is misplaced, the wall and potentially the entire building it is to support will necessarily be flawed as well.

Why does the Lord speak to us about stonemasons and of a rejected stone becoming the chief cornerstone? We are the builders of our lives. The values, ideas, beliefs that guide our lives are like stones. The choices we make and their implications, both short-term and long-term, are like the stones built into a wall. These choices determine the quality of our lives and our influence on others. At any point in our lives we are like a stonemason surrounded by stones that we can choose from.

What is the stone that is rejected? It is the fundamental truth about who we are in relationship to the Lord. It is all too easy to not include Him in our thinking. It is too easy to become focused on the here and now, on our own needs, on our own agendas of what is important. The Lord calls us above everything else to a love of Him and a love of our neighbor. This fundamental call of the Lord doesn't appear to fit very well into our own plans and goals. It is easy to reject. Part of our mind does not believe Him nor trust what He teaches. For many of us, it is not that we totally reject the Lord. We will fit Him in somewhere. Consider the following words that describe a qualified desire for God's presence in a person's life:

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please, not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. . . I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.

What this quotation reflects is a state of mind that doesn't want to reject the Lord totally but having Him as the chief cornerstone of life seems to be asking too much. The Lord looks with compassion at us in the state of mind in which we are inclined to think thoughts such as this. He knows that over and over again in each person's life it is inevitable that the chief cornerstone will be poorly chosen. Gradually He is working to lead us to a very different life; one in which a many-times rejected stone becomes the central value of our daily values, thoughts, and deeds. Can you think of one thing that you want to work on in the coming weeks that would be a renewed commitment to having a part of your life better receive the Lord? Perhaps you can think of a pattern of response that you too often have that is harmful such as anger or impatience. Or it could be one of the less healthy choices you too often make that you recognize isn't good for you or the people around you. If you can consciously work to make better choices in this area of life it will gradually bring about a change in your priorities and reactions.

The Lord would guide us, open our eyes, and help us to recognize the stone that should be the chief cornerstone of our life. May we do our part to follow Him, to reflect on the choices we make, to see the flaws within our values and ideas. May we turn to the Lord in prayer and in life that someday we can echo the words spoken by Him:

The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the Lord's doing.
And it is marvelous in our eyes (Psalm 118:22,23; Mark 12:10-11). Amen.

Lessons: Mark 12:1-11, *Apocalypse Explained* 417:12, *Apocalypse Revealed* 915:5

Mark 12:1-12

¹ Then He began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. ² Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. ³ And they took *him* and beat him and sent *him* away empty-handed. ⁴ Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded *him* in the head, and sent *him* away shamefully treated. ⁵ And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some. ⁶ Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ⁷ But those vinedressers said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ ⁸ So they took him and killed *him* and cast *him* out of the vineyard. ⁹ Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Have you not even read this Scripture: ‘*The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.*’ ¹¹ *This was the LORD’S doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes’?*”

Apocalypse Explained 417:12

“The stone of the corner” means all Divine truth upon which heaven and the church are founded, thus every foundation; and as the foundation is the ultimate upon which a house or temple rests, therefore it means all things. Because “the stone of the corner” means all things upon which the church is founded it is said “I will lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a proved stone, a precious cornerstone, of a foundation that is founded;” and it is called also “a stone for a corner” and “a stone of foundations;” and because “the stone of the corner” means all Divine truth upon which the church is founded, it also means the Lord in respect to His Divine Human; because all Divine truth proceeds from that; “the builders” (or architects) who rejected that stone, as is read in the Gospels, are those who are of the church, here of the Church at that time, which rejected the Lord, and with Him all Divine truth; for with them there was nothing but vain traditions drawn from the sense of the letter of the Word in which the truths themselves of the Word were falsified and its good qualities were adulterated.

Apocalypse Revealed 915:5

Since every doctrinal truth from the Word is founded on an acknowledgment of the Lord, therefore the Lord is called the Stone of Israel in Genesis 49:24, and the cornerstone which the builders rejected in Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10,11, and Luke 20:17,18. That the cornerstone is a foundation stone is clear from Jeremiah 51:26.

In many places in the Word the Lord is also called a rock. Thus He meant Himself by the rock when He said, “On this rock I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18, 19), and also when He said, “Whoever hears My sayings and does them is like a prudent man who builds a house and lays the foundation on a rock” (Luke 6:47, 48, Matthew 7:24, 25). The rock symbolizes the Lord in respect to the Divine truth in the Word.

Everything connected with the church and its doctrine relates to these two points, that one must turn directly to the Lord, and that one must live in accordance with the Ten Commandments by refraining from evils as sins. Thus everything connected with the doctrine relates to love toward God and love for the neighbor