

**BUILDING A SOUND FOUNDATION – by Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs**

**Lesson 1 – Matthew 7:24-29.**

*24 Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on the rock.*

*25 And the rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew, and they fell upon that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.*

*26 And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does them not, shall be likened to a foolish man, who built his house on the sand.*

*27 And the rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and the fall of it was great.*

*28 And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these words, the crowds were astonished at His teaching.*

*29 For He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

**Lesson 2 – Exodus 3:20-22.**

*20 And I will put forth My hand, and smite Egypt with all My wonders which I will do among them, and afterward he will let you go.*

*21 And I will give this people grace in the eyes of Egypt; and it shall be that when you go, you shall not go empty.*

*22 And a woman shall ask from her companion, and from her that sojourns in her house, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments;... and you shall plunder the Egyptians.*

**Lesson 2 (cont.) – Exodus 12:31-50 (parts).**

*31 And [the Pharaoh] called Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, Arise, go out from the midst of my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, serve Jehovah....*

*33 And Egypt urged the people, hastening to send them from the land; for they said, “We are all dying....”*

*35 And the sons of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed from the Egyptians vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments.*

*36 And Jehovah gave grace to the people in the eyes of the Egyptians, and they gave them what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.*

*50 And all the sons of Israel did as Jehovah commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.*

### **Lesson 3 – Arcana Coelestia 2588:16**

*That rational things and memory-knowledges are of service to those who are in the affirmative principle as means of being wise, was represented and signified by its being commanded the sons of Israel to borrow from the Egyptians vessels of gold, and vessels of silver, and garments.*

### **Lesson 3 (cont.) Arcana Coelestia 6913**

*"Vessels of silver," signifies memory-knowledges of truth; "and vessels of gold," signifies memory-knowledges of good; "and garments," signifies lower memory-knowledges corresponding thereto.*

### **Lesson 3 (cont.) Arcana Coelestia 6917:1**

*Be it known that in themselves these knowledges are not truths, neither are they falsities, but that they become truths with those who are in truths, and falsities with those who are in falsities, this being the effect of their application and use.*

### **Lesson 3 (cont.) – Apocalypse Explained 141:13.**

*By means of the knowledges...a man can gain wisdom; for knowledges are means of becoming wise, and they are also means of becoming insane. They are the means of becoming insane when they are falsified by being applied to evils and falsities.*

***“And the sons of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed from the Egyptians vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments”*** (Exodus 12:35).

Imagine for a moment the setting in which this scene took place. The children of Israel had been slaves and servants to the Egyptians for hundreds of years! They had all recently witnessed the incredible stubbornness of the Pharaoh, who repeatedly refused to let them go free. Even after facing all the horrible plagues that laid waste to his country, the Pharaoh still hardened heart time after time.

Now finally, after the gruesome final plague had wiped out all of the first born males in Egypt, the children of Israel were about to be set free. And they were given an unexpected bonus under the Lord’s guiding hand as they departed. They were told they could borrow – permanently – from the Egyptians their gold, silver, and clothing. What an unbelievable sense of joy and satisfaction this must have brought to them. Not only were they free from their captors, but they also could take whatever they wanted from them.

How we develop our minds on a sound foundation of knowledge and truth is the subject this morning. What does this command from the Lord about borrowing from the Egyptians really mean? How does it apply to everyday life? Are you borrowing from the Egyptians now?

At first glance, trying to answer these questions from the Word can be tricky. Twice before today’s story, the Lord had instructed the children of Israel to borrow from the Egyptians (Ex. 3:22, 11:2). He even went so far as to say, ***“You plunder the Egyptians”*** (Ex. 3:22).

But then later in Deuteronomy, the Lord frequently and specifically commands them NOT to borrow anything from the surrounding nations. ***“For Jehovah your God will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow”*** (Deut. 15:6, cf. 28:12). ***“You shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to Jehovah your God”*** (Deut. 7:25).

These passages seem somewhat contradictory, and beg the question – Should we borrow or shouldn't we? How are we to make sense of these commands the Lord has given us, when they appear to be diametrically opposite?

First, let's start with the basics. **'Egypt'** in the Word means the knowledge stored in our memory – all the information, facts, and scientific data – all the natural truths that we have learned and know (AC 2576:8). It is very appropriate for Egypt to represent natural truths or worldly knowledge. At the time of our story, Egypt was a center of knowledge in the world. They had miraculously constructed the pyramids, their hieroglyphics were an incredibly advanced form of language, and they also had some knowledge of the correspondences between this world and the spiritual world (AC 6917). The vessels of **'gold'** and **'silver'** and the **'garments'** symbolized the various degrees of memory-knowledges of good and truth that they were in possession of and were being transferred to the children of Israel for their use.

The Heavenly Doctrine makes an important point about knowledges in the Arcana Coelestia: *"With the evil the knowledges of good and truth are applied to evil uses, and with the good the knowledges of good and truth are applied to good uses; the knowledges are the same, but the application to uses effects their quality with each person"* (AC 7770:3). You see – the knowledges are the same. In themselves, they are neither good nor evil – but they are recipients or vessels for good or evil.

For example, take the knowledge of how to swing a hammer. Knowing how to swing one is neither good nor evil. When that knowledge is used in the building of a house to provide shelter for a neighbor or in the construction of a church to provide a place of worship to the Lord – then that knowledge becomes a vessel receiving good and an instrument for good.

However, when that same knowledge of how to swing a hammer is used to break a neighbor's window so we can steal their 75" TV, or to whack someone in the head who dares to cross us – then it becomes a becomes a vessel receiving evil and an instrument for evil.

Another example: Think of people with a sound knowledge of finance and the stock market. They could use that knowledge to acquire wealth for the purpose of serving the Lord and the neighbor or for the purpose of catering to their own selfish desires and greed.

And so the Heavenly Doctrine tells us, *“Knowledges are means of becoming wise, and they are also means of becoming insane. They are the means of becoming insane when they are falsified by being applied to evils and falsities”* (AE 141:13). The point the Lord is trying to get across is that the purpose or end for which knowledge is used is what makes all the difference (AC 1317, 2364).

This explains why sometimes the Lord commanded them to borrow from the Egyptians and sometimes prohibited them from borrowing. If in the literal sense the Lord commands them to borrow the vessels of gold and silver, then the gold and silver corresponds to knowledge that will be used for a good end. But if the Lord prohibits them from borrowing in the literal sense then the gold and silver corresponds to knowledge that will be used for an evil end or purpose.

Now this begins to get at the heart of our text this morning. Here we are dealing the command to borrow from the Egyptians. The acquiring of knowledge – natural truths – is being used in a positive way. *“This is why the knowledges of the Egyptians are called... ‘desirable things’”* in the book of Daniel (Dan. 11:43, AE 654:30).

Think about it. The acquisition of knowledge is essential in our understanding of the Lord’s Word. We cannot understand the parable of the mustard seed if we don’t know what a seed is. We cannot understand meaning of the Lord *“giving rain in due season”* if we don’t know what rain is or what a season is.

This is why Swedenborg was guided by the Lord to gain such an unbelievably large amount of knowledge about the things of this world, about science and nature. How could Swedenborg have had any real comprehension of heaven being in the form of and functioning as a Grand Man, if he had not first learned so much about anatomy and physiology?

How could he have written about the correspondence of natural things with spiritual things, if he had no knowledge of science and nature. Yes, the Lord commanded Swedenborg to borrow from the Egyptians too, and he borrowed a lot – you could even say he plundered them.

But just gaining knowledge for the sake of gaining knowledge is not useful in itself. Why does the Lord want us to gain knowledge? So that we can understand His Word and learn the way to heaven where we can dwell happily with Him. The Lord commanded the children of Israel to borrow gold, silver, and clothing from the Egyptians for the purpose of leaving Egypt. They were not to remain there, but were supposed to leave with haste! The gold, silver, and clothing were to provide the means for them to get to where? – To the heavenly land of Canaan.

It is the same with us. The purpose of acquiring knowledge is not so that we can remain in a worldly natural state. It is so that we see the Lord in all the details of His creation, to better understand His Word, and to learn the way to heaven, and live a good life.

So where do we acquire these knowledges? The Heavenly Doctrine tells us quite plainly: *“The foundations of truth...are two, one from the Word, the other from nature or from the truths of nature.... The foundation from the Word is for the universal heaven..., but the foundation from nature, for those who are natural.... But, still, these two foundations of truth agree with each other.... Therefore, since sciences have shut up the understanding, sciences may also open it; and the understanding is opened so far as people are in good”* (SE 5709).

Two foundations. Two sources from which we can acquire knowledge. Nature, all the sciences of world, this is Egypt. And the Word of God. Now which do you think is more important? Of course, the answer is easy. THE WORD! In fact, the Heavenly Doctrine tells us point blank, *“The Word is greater than any doctrinal teachings in the world and greater than any truth in the world”* (AC 9372:5). Likewise in Isaiah we’re told, ***“Woe to those who go down into Egypt for help..., but do not look to the Holy One of Israel and do not seek Jehovah. For Egypt is man and not God, and their horses are flesh and not spirit”*** (Isa. 31:1,3).

It is easy to say that the Word is obviously the more important and accurate source of truth and knowledge, but do our actions always demonstrate this fact? For instance, when you read a book like “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus;” do you fit the truths and insights in that book into the context of the Word, or do you find yourself trying to fit the Word into the context of that secular book. If you delight in Science, do you place the various scientific theories into the construct provided in the Word, or stuff the Word into those theories? If you enjoy education, do you view the various educational theories in light of the Word, or the Word in light of the theories? And so on. The point is that the Word should always be the measuring stick, against which all other truth and knowledge is measured, this is what leads to wisdom.

If we start with the affirmative principle towards the Word and believe the truths within simply because the Lord has said them, then all the knowledge we have acquired from the world, everything we have borrowed from the Egyptians can be used to confirm, illustrate, and enhance our understanding of the Word. This is the path to true wisdom, which will help us to see ever more clearly the way to heaven and the life of good we are supposed to be living.

But if we start with a negative or skeptical attitude towards the Word, and say that we will only be convinced of its truth once it is confirmed by scientific data or by facts of nature, then we will harden our hearts against the Word and in the end deny the Lord and make nature our God.

This concept was perfectly illustrated in the story of the children of Israel. After they had borrowed all the gold, silver, and garments from the Egyptians they headed towards Canaan. But along the way they often longed for the things of Egypt. Even after the Lord gave them heavenly manna they still longed for the fleshpots of Egypt. Then when Moses went up to receive the Ten Commandments, God’s Words, what did the children of Israel do? They took the gold they had brought from Egypt melted it down and erected a golden calf as their god instead. They treasured worldly knowledge above the truth of the Word and so ended up denying the Lord as their God.

But also remember, that after Moses came down from the mountain and they repented for their evils, then they took the gold from Egypt and used it to make the Ark, which served as a vessel for receiving and containing the Ten Commandments. And it was this same Ark with those Ten Commandments within, that later parted the Jordan and led them into the heavenly land of Canaan. You see, the worldly knowledge or natural truths when kept in their proper place become appropriate vessels for receiving the truth and good of the Lord's Word, and these will eventually guide you to heaven.

So, the Lord asks us to borrow from the Egyptians, even telling us to plunder them. He wants us to soak up all kinds of knowledge, science, history, geology, astronomy, carpentry, philosophy, education, music, etc. He wants us to learn all these things, because He knows that they can help to beautifully confirm, strengthen, and enhance our understanding of His Word and consequently our faith and belief in the Lord.

However, along the way He warns us that the acquisition of knowledge is not an end in itself. This is the meaning behind the teaching of building our house upon the rock. Notice, this story was the conclusion of the famous sermon on the mount, where the Lord conveyed and immense amount of knowledge and Divine Truth which provided a sound foundation for their lives. But the conclusion was that wise person must not only hear those words – but do them!

The pursuit of knowledge is meant to be the way we obtain vessels that receive the Lord's truth and good, and to ultimately build our faith soundly on the rock solid foundation of truth from His Word. If we prize the knowledge of this world more than the truth of His Word and merely are content with learning the truth but not living it, then we will stay forever captive in Egypt, constantly building our fragile faith on the shifting sands of human reason from merely worldly knowledge. And so the Lord tells us:

***“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on the rock.... But everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does them not, shall be likened to a foolish man, who built his house on the sand.” (Matthew 7:24, 26). Amen.***