

MORALITY ROOTED IN DIVINE LAW

Adapted from an editorial by the Rev. K. R. Alden

Some [seeds] fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.

Matthew 13:5-6

We see the part of a plant that grows above the ground; the Lord alone sees its roots. This is the power of the parable of the Sower. We see the external actions of our friends and neighbors, but the Lord knows their hearts. We see what they do, but He knows their intentions. He alone knows the real root of all their deeds.

It is a fact that seeds which fall upon a stony surface, which is lightly covered with soil, will spring up more quickly than seeds which fall into deep, rich soil. The reason for this is that the stones receive and store up a considerable amount of heat during the day, and when the seeds are moistened by dew at night and warmed from the stored heat in the stone, they germinate and grow rapidly. But because there is little soil, they lack roots, and so, when the sun comes up, they are scorched and wither away.

In the world there is much morality which is like this reception of the seeds upon stony ground. There are people who are good for the sake of being called good, but who have no deep religious convictions or belief in the Divine laws of the Word behind their goodness. The weakness of such goodness cannot be seen until the stress of life causes pressure for such a person. For then the seeds of truth that have commenced to grow will reveal the person's own evils to him. Then, if he is unwilling to shun these evils as sins against God, he becomes angry at the truth and is scorched by the heat of his own anger and self-love. Because he has no root in the truth of revelation from the Word, his goodness will wither away. For unless good is conjoined to truth, it has no roots that enter deeply into the spiritual mind and so cannot stand the burning heat of self-love.

In life we can see two kinds of morality: morality inspired by what others think of us and morality with deep roots in religious conviction. The trouble with the seeds that fell in stony places was not in their external appearance. Indeed, they sprang up even more quickly than the seeds which fell on good ground. Their failure was hidden from human sight. The roots were shallow and rock-bound. The warmth of love, represented by the sun, should lead people to deeds of self-sacrifice and daring. It should send life-giving roots deep into the heart of the earth. But when that love pours forth on someone who has been moral only for the sake of what others think, then the show of morality—the pretense of good character which had been paraded before others for the sake of self—will wither away. In the hour of trial such a person will be found wanting because his morality had no deep roots in religion, in the Word of God.

What do we mean when we say “morality with its roots deep in religion”? There is an illustration in the Lord giving the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel on Mount Sinai. The reason

that God gave them, and amid such awe inspiring circumstances, was not because people were ignorant of the fact that it was wrong to kill, commit adultery, steal, lie, or covet. His purpose was to show people that these were *Divine laws*. They were to be obeyed because there was a Divine command behind them. Now the Lord does not appear to us today in fire and clouds, but He has given us His Word so that we may know and obey His Divine commandments. The Word is to be the source of our morality, the source of the religious conviction that will hold our roots firm and strong.

Thus, morality that has its roots in religion provides standards that are independent of environment, principles that will not yield to expediency. Evils are to be shunned, not because they hurt our reputation, but because they are sins against God, against the way of life commanded in His Word. These are the roots that will hold our moral standards firm in the hour of temptation.