

Beatitudes

Michael Hatcher, Editor

2002 Bellview Lectures

Beatitudes

Michael Hatcher, Editor

Twenty-Seventh Annual
Bellview Lectures

Pensacola, Florida

June 8-12, 2002

Beatitudes

Copyrighted © 2002 Bellview Church of Christ
4850 Saufley Field Road
Pensacola, FL 32526

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission of the publisher.

Other Bellview Lectureship Books

Encouraging Statements Of The Bible

Sad Statements Of The Bible

Worldliness

Christian Fellowship

Leadership

Preaching God Demands

The Doctrine Of Christ Versus The Doctrines Of Men

Changes In The Church of Christ

God's Pattern For Christian Living

Current Crises Challenging The Church

The Church Triumphant

What Does God Authorize In Worship?

In Hope Of Eternal Life

Are We Moving Away From The Cross Of Christ?

IT IS ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL
TO DUPLICATE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL.

The material in this study represents a considerable investment of effort, skill, time, and finances from both the authors and the publisher. If this material is photocopied and circulated to avoid buying a book for each student, the publisher does not sell enough copies to support the publication.

PREFACE

All the lectureships in this series (this being the twenty-seventh) have been of vital importance to the world and the church. This one is no different. In a world where heartache, trouble, sadness, and such like reign, people need to be informed as to how to live a truly successful, joyous life. The Bible informs man how to live in such a way as to be blessed by God, thus possessing that type of life. This is why a study of the beatitudes is vital to so many in the world and even within the church. The principles studied in this book, if applied to one's life, will enable him to live that type of life which brings true joy and peace—a life that is blessed by God. The man who is blessed will be so no matter what his outward circumstances might be.

This needed lectureship would not be possible without the aid, support, and work of so many brethren. We appreciate those directors who have served this congregation and brotherhood in a faithful way. We also express our appreciation to the elders (past and present) who have served this congregation in leading her in the paths of righteousness both in word and example. These men, while not sinless, are fulfilling that work of feeding the flock and watching for wolves. They recognize truth and error and stop the mouths of the false teacher.

The members of this congregation lovingly submit to the oversight of her elders. Without the congregation's support, the outline of work which the elders set forth (including this lectureship) would not be possible.

The brotherhood owes a debt of gratitude to all the men who have written (and the speakers) for this lectureship book. These men have been selected because they have proven themselves to love the Lord, His church, and the Truth. They are men who will place themselves on the firing line and are willing to spend and be spent for the greatest cause in the world.

Appreciation is also extended to those who work on this book. Denise Mowery, the secretary for the Bellview congregation, spends a great deal of time formatting the book and checking for any mistakes. Gary Summers, preacher for the Pearl Street congregation in Denton, Texas, helps me out by giving the book a final proofing. While I make all editorial changes, brother Summers' help is invaluable to me and makes this book a more effective tool for good in the brotherhood. It is our prayer that this book will do a great good for the cause of our Lord.

Michael Hatcher, Director and Editor; March 20, 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Beatitudes	
Keith A. Mosher, Sr.	1
All Families Blessed In Abraham; Gen. 12:3	
Curtis A. Cates	12
The Blessed Man; Psa. 1	
Michael Hatcher	29
Blessed Is The Man Who Trusts In The Lord; Psa. 2:12	
Stacey Grant	42
Blessed Is The Man Who Is Forgiven; Psa. 32:1-2	
Jeff Archey	57
Blessed Is The Man Who Considers The Poor; Psa. 41:1	
Tim Smith	68
Blessed Is The Man Who Dwells In The Lord's House; Psa. 84:4	
Mark Mosher	77
Blessed Is The Man Whose Strength Is In Jehovah; Psa. 84:5	
David B. Jones	87
Blessed Is The Man Whom God Chastises; Psa. 94:12	
Paul Vaughn	100
Blessed Are Those Who Keep Judgment; Psa. 106:3	
Michael Light	108
Blessed Is The Man Who Feels The Lord; Psa. 112:1	
Toney L. Smith	117
Blessed Are Those Who Are Undeiled In The Way; Psa. 119:1	
Preston Silcox	126
Blessed Are Those Who Rebuke Sinners; Pro. 24:25	
Harrell Davidson	132
Blessed Are Those Who Wait On The Lord; Isa. 30:18	
John West	140
"Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit"; Mat. 5:3	
Don Walker	147
"Blessed <i>Are</i> They That Mourn"; Mat. 5:4	
Jason R. Roberts	157
"Blessed Are the Meek"; Mat. 5:5	
Lee Davis	167
"Blessed Are They Which Do Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness"; Mat. 5:6	
David P. Brown	178

“Blessed Are the Merciful”; Mat. 5:7	
Danny L. Box	193
“Blessed <i>Are</i> the Pure in Heart”; Mat. 5:8	
Stanley Ryan	204
“Blessed <i>Are</i> the Peacemakers”; Mat. 5:9	
Eddie Whitten	217
“Blessed Are They Which Are Persecuted for Righteousness’ Sake”; Mat. 5:10-12	
Joel Wheeler	228
Blessed Are Those Who Are Not Offended in Christ; Luke 7:23	
Ronnie Hayes	237
Blessed Are Those Who Are Watching; Luke 12:37-38	
Jason Rollo	248
Blessed Are Those Who Believe; John 20:29	
Rob L. Whitacre	263
Blessed Are The Givers; Acts 20:35	
Kenneth E. Ratcliff	270
Blessed Is The Man Who Endures Temptations; Jam. 1:12	
Wesley Simons	284
Blessed Is The Man Who Is A Doer Of The Work; Jam. 1:25	
Daniel Denham	296
Blessed Are the Readers and Hearers; Rev. 1:3	
Michael Shepherd	303
Blessed Are Those Dying In The Lord; Rev. 14:13	
Guss Eoff	311
Blessed Is He Who Watches And Keeps His Garments; Rev. 16:15	
Lynn Parker	320
Blessed Are Those Called To The Marriage Feast; Rev. 19:9	
Bobby Liddell	331
Blessed Are Those Of The First Resurrection; Rev. 20:6	
Clifford Newell, Jr.	347
Blessed Are Those Keeping The Sayings, Do His Commands; Rev. 22:7, 14	
James E. Rogers	357
Devil’s Beatitudes	
Gary Summers	372

Intentionally Left Blank

BEATITUDES

Keith A. Mosher, Sr.



Keith Mosher, Sr., and his wife Dorothy have been married for thirty-nine years. They have three children: Keith, Jr., Mark, and Karen, and five grandchildren.

He is a 1975 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching and has B. A., M.A., and M.Th. degrees from Southern Christian University and the Doctor of Ministry from Harding Graduate School of Religion.

He has worked with congregations in Mississippi and Tennessee. Keith speaks at gospel meetings and lectureships throughout the states. He has done mission work in Asia, Africa, and Russia. He is a full-time instructor at Memphis School of

Preaching and currently serves as Dean of Academics.

Keith has written two workbooks on Romans and Acts, a tract entitled “Can One Trust His English Bible?” and articles for various publications. He is a staff writer for *Bible Light* and has recently finished his second volume on the theme: *The Book God “Breathed.”*

PREFACE

Two years ago Michael Hatcher decided to assign the “sad” statements in the Bible as a theme for the Bellview Lectures, and last year he chose to have examined by the speakers “encouraging” passages. This year’s theme is a relevant follow-up to the latter two in that blessedness (the meaning of beatitude) is a direct result of inculcating all the teaching of Holy Writ into one’s life whether or not that instruction is negative or positive (Rom. 11:22). All sincere Bible students desire to know both that which God forbids and that which God allows so such student’s lives are balanced and **blessed** in service to God (cf., Tit. 3:1). Therefore, a debt of gratitude is certainly owed to my friend and brother, Michael, and to the great and good brethren at Bellview for not only holding such a series but also for persevering in the defense and propagation of truth. May God bless every member of this congregational beacon of hope in this dark world of the day.

INTRODUCTION

Allen wrote:

Our Lord begins the Sermon on the Mount with the word “blessed.” Some have translated the word as “happy,” but Carlisle insisted that “blessed” is better—lest the word “happy” be confused with that vague

something at which men grasp, and, grasping, miss. Jesus began by announcing, “I want to give you a happiness so deep, so lasting, so complete that you will be a blessed person.”

Right at this point, we are in danger of missing the real purpose of the Christian faith. Christians have talked so much about sacrifice, about service, and about acceptance of the will of God that leads to a cross, that often we have missed the truth that Christ’s purpose is to make people blessed. And how does this blessedness come to a life? Not by possessing something, nor by doing something, but rather in being something (7).

This study of *beatitudes* is intended as an expansion on Allen’s thought above that *blessedness*¹ and *happiness* are not synonymous terms (cf., Mat. 5:1-12). Other lectures in this series are individually assigned to a specific beatitude, but this essay is designed as a generic study of the term (singular or plural) itself.

In the beginning of this investigation the Old Testament and New Testament terms translated *blessed* will be reviewed. Second, a brief study will be made of the Oriental, Islamic, and Christian views of blessedness. Third, some thoughts will be suggested (from Scripture) on how one can become blessed, and, fourth, the subject of “worldly good luck” will be examined.

In the modern world people *ble*ss many things: other people, and even sports events. However, true blessedness is a divine principle not intended as a catch-word for insincere, worldly usage. The prayer here, then, is that this study will help all to enter into a new depth of understanding of the beautiful blessedness one can obtain with God.

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT TERMS

The most frequently used word in the Old Testament translated as “blessed” is *barak* (Young 97-98). A form of the latter word is also found as *blessing* (Young 99). In fact, the Jewish name, Baruch, means “blessed” (Tregelles 139).²

Interestingly, the hiphil Hebrew form of *barak* means to “bend the knees” (in order to kneel down) (Tregelles 142). But, the common kal or piel Hebrew forms can mean to bless or to ask for a blessing (Tregelles 142). The latter two thoughts of kneeling to offer a *blessing* (praise to God) come together at Psalm 95:6: “O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel [*barak*] before the LORD our maker.” The Hebrew idea, as seen in the foregoing verse, was that only a reverential mind could ask for a blessing from God which thought is constant throughout both the Old and New Testaments (cf. Jam. 1:12, 25).

Some passive forms of *barak* are used to indicate that God, as to His nature, is “blessed” (see Psa. 104:1; et al). In fact, Job’s wife is recorded as using the passive of *barak* when she told her husband to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9). The idea of *blessing* God is not to be conceived as man pronouncing some benefit on his Maker, but is to be understood as praising the Blessed One and invoking His name. One could, however, bless another person or ask for God’s blessing on another (Psa. 129:8; 1 Chr. 16:2). For example, dying parents asked for blessings on their children (Gen. 27:4, 7, 10; 48:9); priests petitioned God’s blessing on the people (Lev. 9:22-23a; Num. 6:23); and people interceded for people (Dan. 9:16-27).

Also inherent in the Old Testament idea of blessedness is the result that proceeded from divine favor. For example, God told Abram, “I will bless thee, and make thy name great” (Gen. 12:2-3; cf., Gen. 17:16; 22:17; 24:1; 30:27). Note the pronoun, *I*, preceding the blessing on Abram, for God **can** pronounce such on man. However, when men pleaded for God’s blessing, the phraseology used was, “Blessed *be* thou of the LORD” (1 Sam. 15:13; Ruth 2:10; et al). Perhaps *abundance* reflects the result of God’s blessing on anyone, even an inanimate thing (Exo. 23:25; Job 1:10; Psa. 65:11; 132:15; Pro. 3:33). Blessedness from God is beyond finite description—thus the idiom: “Oh, the blessedness,” for man can only stand in awe of the riches bestowed (cf., Deu. 33:13).

A second term found in the Hebrew that should get some attention is *ashar* (or *ashere*, “**very** blessed”) (Tregelles 842). This word is found only in a plural construction “where it has the force of an interjection” and could be translated, “O the happiness of the man” (Tregelles 842). (The reader should keep this idea of “oh, the blessedness” always in mind when translating any beatitude in either testament for the Greek and Hebrew ideas are similar.) Both *barak* and *ashar* thus can be conceived of as announcing good news and as exclamations of joy, because one is blessed by God in the highest, infinite, and most beneficial ways possible.

Only one Greek term is used in reference to the “beatitudes” but **two** words are translated “blessed” in the New Testament. The word used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and the term employed for the other New Testament beatitudes is *makarios* (Hauck 4:362-370). The other term is *eulegeeo* (compare the English *eulogy*) and means “to speak well of” another or, if used of Deity, “to praise” (Young 98).

Since only *makarios* is used for the “beatitudes,” *eulegeoo* will not be studied here.

Early Greek usage of *makarios* referred to the mythological gods and denoted a state of transcendent joy beyond care, labor, and death (Hauck 4:362). However, those early Greeks connected earthly possessions to *makarios* and by the word meant “to be rich.” Thus, there “developed in Greek a specific genre of beatitude to extol the fortune accruing to someone and to exalt this person on the basis or condition of the good fortune” (Hauck 4:362). Hauck adds:

Practical Greek philosophy breathes in them [beatitudes]. Orientated to earth, the Greek mind first draws its happiness from earthly goods and values. Thus parents are extolled for fine children; mothers for admirable sons (cf. Luke 11:27); the bridegroom for winning an excellent bride. But the bachelor can also be lauded for remaining unmarried. Praise is naturally accorded to those who have found the great happiness of love. It is accorded also to the wealthy whose possessions give them a good position in life, but even more so to those who also have a good understanding or are free from tribulations. If regard is used for inner values, he is extolled who has attained to fame, honor, and manly virtue (4:363-364).

How different from common Greek usage of that day are the beatitudes of Jesus and the New Testament writers. In fact, the special feature of *makarios* (and its cognates) is its references to the distinctive spiritual joy to the man in God’s kingdom (Mat. 5:1-12; cf., Rev. 14:13).

The infinitive, *makaridzein*, is found just twice in the New Testament. Mary, mother of the Messiah, is to be blessed by all generations (Luke 11:27), and the righteous who endure are to be blessed for eternity (Jam. 5:11).

The noun, *makarismos*, is used but three times in the New Testament: (1) in Galatians 4:15 blessedness is mentioned as the result of having received the message of salvation; (2) and in Romans 4:6, 9 reference is made to remission of sins. Thus, only saved persons are in a state of blessedness.

The form, *makarios*, is used for the most part in direct reference to the beatitudes of the gospel records (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and to the beatitudes found in Revelation. *Makarios* is, thus, a kingdom term and often an eschatological one. In fact, New Testament beatitudes often contain a contrast with a false estimation of the world’s idea of who is truly blessed. For example, no secular writer would have

thought one who emptied himself could be blessed (Mat. 5:3). But, New Testament beatitudes set forth the ideas that **all** secular goods and values are to be completely subsidiary to the one supreme good—the kingdom of God.

Also, New Testament beatitudes often contain paradoxes (e.g., Luke 6:20-22). For Christ's blessed man must **reverse** all human values. The Greeks thought that blessedness came from "knowing thyself," but Jesus said "deny thyself" (Mat. 16:24). Antithesis of the blessed man of Jesus' description is the self-serving, impenitent self-righteous (Luke 18:9). In fact, the final beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount refers to Christ's followers, paradoxically, to the blessing of being listed among the most honored of the prophets **because of persecution** (Mat. 5:10-12)!

For the beatitudes to figure so prominently in the Revelation also implies something about being blessed. There are seven (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14) five of which are pronounced from heaven itself and thus are indisputable authority that the truly blessed are those who watch, struggle, and persevere in faith. Such are blessed and counted worthy to enter the heavenly city (Rev. 22:14).

Perhaps Bauer's description of *makarios* will aid this study and help draw a conclusion about this term. The *makarios* man to Bauer is: "blessed, fortunate, and a privileged recipient of divine favor" (486). Too, one of the leading experts in New Testament Greek insists that his writing will:

Point up the basic difference between the two words "blessed" (*makarios* in Greek) and "happy." To put it briefly here, "blessed" refers to the one whose sufficiency comes from outside sources.... God-sufficient.... By contrast, the happy person depends on good fortune to keep him smiling. "Happy" comes from the word "hap," meaning "chance." It is therefore incorrect to translate the word *markarioi* (which we find repeatedly in the Beatitudes) as "happy" (Zodhiates v).³

One not blessed by the spiritual is taking a chance, therefore, in trying to be *happy*.

ORIENTAL, ISLAMIC, CHRISTIAN "BLESSEDNESS"

When the Chinese greet one another it is quite possible the salute will be: "I depend upon your happiness" (Parker 672). Why? Because the Oriental idea is that blessedness derives from an anterior existence into the present condition (Parker 672).⁴ That is, blessedness cannot

exist unless the spirits of the dead are consoled through sacrifice, prayer, and duty (Parker 672). Therefore, one's happiness depends upon the attitude of those who are "shadowing" (protecting) from some spiritual abode above (Parker 672).

Oriental, especially the Chinese, have never been able to conceive of conscious deity otherwise than in the shape of a man (cf., Buddha). Too, to the Oriental mind the soul's eternal abode is nothing more than a reproduction of this earth. Therefore, man should seek the "Great Plan" or "Five Blessednesses" of long life—wealth, serenity, love of virtue (i.e. self-satisfaction—K.M.), and object (death—K.M.). Chinese or Oriental blessing then is **materialistic** (as was that of the ancient Greeks mentioned above).⁵

The Islamic idea of blessedness, on the other hand, is **mystical** (MacDonald 677). MacDonald describes this mysticism by insisting that:

There is (besides the teachings of the prophets of Islam) a "minor inspiration (*ilham*) open to all mankind, and especially found in the *walis*, the saints" (literally friends, associates of Allah). It [the mystical blessedness] is called broadly, "unveiling" (*kashif*), and is a direct, individual perception of the unseen in ecstasy; the eliminating of a series of psychological conditions arising in the soul without apparent effort or cause (677).

Thus, the Islamic adherent must wait for a subjective moment to find blessedness or "path to Allah." MacDonald further describes the experience as an

immediate, unreasoned, and underived state of consciousness...called in Muslim theology *ahwal* or "conditions" which pass from mere feelings of joy and sorrow, elation or depression, through auditory and visual hallucinations to absolute ecstasy, where language fails and there comes a "passing away" (*fana*) from the self and a union with Allah (677).

The general term for the hallucinatory state is *wajd* (finding or perceiving) or "experiences."⁶ And, the last and loftiest state of *wajd* is love of Allah (MacDonald 678), which love is an absolute duty (*fard*) (MacDonald 678). Therefore, the true Muslim should be in love with death, for "the true lover does not shrink from the journey to the beloved."⁷ Therefore, the Muslim must joy in being killed on the path to Allah or blessedness, and if pressed about why he is still living, the Muslim will respond with: "Well, I am simply taking more time to

prepare for I love Allah in my mind and there is no weakness in anything I do” (MacDonald 679).

True Christian blessedness, however, is neither materialistic nor mystical. Jesus recognized that there is in man a higher than mere *happiness*; there is *blessedness* (John 10:10). The reward of such a life is peace here and a great reward in heaven (Mat. 5:12a). Even the Greeks had a word for worldly “happiness” (*eudaimoon*) but Jesus insisted on *makarios* (Bauer 319).⁸

ACHIEVING CHRISTIAN BLESSEDNESS

One asking of a worldly citizen concerning the conditions by which one would be happiest would probably not hear as an answer the eight principles which make up the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5:1-12). But would one hear those divine tenets if a Christian described happiness? According to Matthew 5:1, the ancient disciples were privileged to sit at the feet of God and to hear Him describe blessedness. Suppose we had been there that day. What would we have expected to hear as heaven’s primary step on the road to inner joy? God said, “Empty yourself!” How strange such a declaration must have seemed to Jesus’ followers then, and how strange such seems to most today.

Jesus also insisted that the forgiven person must **become** something called blessed or *makarios* which, in the text, is an adjective and could be rendered “blessedness of.” (Jesus did not speak in Greek but Aramaic, similar to Hebrew, and so the expression “Oh the blessedness of” seen in *ashar* studied above would be familiar to Him.) Therefore, Jesus said something like, “Oh the blessedness of those who are or do those things I am about to enumerate.” One might well conclude that the beatitudes are statements concerning the cause and effect of the spiritual life in Christ.

The laws of blessedness, then, are only for citizens of His kingdom and are foreign to those outside of Christ. Zodiates writes:

We do not repent so that we may be made blessed but that we may receive forgiveness of sins. Blessedness comes as a by-product, as a natural consequence. We do not mourn so that we may be made blessed; but, when we mourn for our own sins and the sins of others, blessedness in our own souls and possibly the souls of others is the natural result. A Christian is what he is, and does what he does, not for any ulterior motive, but through Christ and for Christ. In Christ we find our blessedness. It would be entirely contrary to the spirit of Christ and to the whole concept of His teaching to be and do certain

things for selfish purposes, that is, for our own blessedness. This is not the spirit of the Beatitudes. It is not, "I want to be blessed; therefore let me be humble or poor in spirit," or "I want to be blessed; therefore let me mourn, let me weep, let me be meek." All the spokes of my activity and being do not have my own life as their center, for the purpose of contribution to my own blessedness, but revolve around Christ; and it is in Christ that my blessedness and joy are found (5).

Achieving spiritual blessedness, then, requires a right motive as the beginning point. It is past time that this *advanced* generation understood one simple fact about personal blessedness. It is basically a divine quality and cannot be acquired apart from God. Therefore, the one actually seeking God by keeping His commandments will become blessed (1 John 5:3).

Unlike the Muslim, the Christian does not need to wait for death to find blessedness for the saint is a person blessed in this life and sometimes in spite of what life brings. No other religion, except for Christianity, offers such a philosophy of life, and therefore Christ's philosophy for life is also a philosophy of death. One's condition in the hereafter **is** determined by what one **is** here; that is, one's physical conduct here determines one's metaphysical destiny (Luke 16; Rom. 6:12). If one is miserable and sinful here, how can one expect blessedness hereafter (See Gal. 6:7)?

Since the blessedness described in the biblical beatitudes has as a first step, self-denial, Newton's quote comes to mind: "If more people would get a divorce from themselves, they might live happily with someone else" (Allen 8).

GOOD LUCK, OR BLESSEDNESS?

For too large a majority there are but two classes of people: those who are happy because they have good fortune and those who are unhappy because they have had ill fortune. The foregoing philosophy is that happiness is dependent on outward circumstances, and nothing is known of from any truth which will counteract what the world calls "bad luck."

However, Jesus said that the *makarioi* (blessed men) are affected very little by the outside world. Poor or rich, one impoverished of one's self is blessed (Mat. 5:3). Healthy or ill, one who mourns over one's sins is alive in Christ (Mat. 5:4). (Note the paradox of being directed toward tears and not laughter to true *happiness*.) Persecuted or praised, one not angry toward the world or God has inherited the earth (Mat.

5:5). Sad or happy in the worldly sense, the one who obeys God inherits the kingdom (Mat. 5:6). Deprived or delighted, the one who is unselfish is blessed (Mat. 5:7). Downtrodden or uplifted, the one whose mind is pure is close to God and is at peace with Him (Mat. 5:8-9), for only as men are at peace with God can they live at peace with one another. Pressured or persecuted, the one who is faithful is elated for no outside circumstance can hurt (Mat. 5:10-12).

There is no *luck* involved in being blessed. There is involved effort, study, prayer, dependence on God, and growth in spirituality. A Christian was seriously injured in an automobile collision, having suffered broken bones, severe cuts, and unconsciousness. When he became conscious the next day in the hospital, he asked the nurse what he was doing there. She replied that he should be very quiet for he had been in a terrible accident. “Accident?” replied the Christian. “There are no accidents in the life of a Christian. This is an **incident**.” In Cremer’s discussion of *ashar*, the Hebrew equivalent of *makarios*, he writes:

Blessedness is the state wherein one enjoys the favor and salvation of God. Earthly as is the manifestation of this blessedness, it is essentially more than this, it is the gracious and saving effect of God’s favor; but it is enjoyed only when there is a corresponding behavior towards God; so that it forms the hoped for good of those in this present life who are subject to oppression.... Inwardly it exists in the enjoyment of grace and fellowship with God, even where the outward condition does not correspond (777).

The Christian who can say he is blessed no matter what may happen from without has discovered more than happiness; he has discovered God.

CONCLUSION

The terms translated blessed in the Old and New Testaments, especially in reference to the “Beatitudes” are describing an inward, divine state—not mere, chance-filled, worldly happiness. Neither materialistic, as the Oriental believe, nor mystical as sought by Islam, true Christian blessedness is available in this life as the by-product of becoming God’s man.

Achieving true blessedness means seeking God by keeping His commandments. No worldly luck is involved.

“Disappointment—His appointment,”
Change one letter, then I see
That the thwarting of my purpose

Is God's better choice for me.
His appointment must be blessing,
Tho' it may come in disguise,
For the end from the beginning
Open to His wisdom lies.

“Disappointment—His appointment,”
“no good will He withhold”;
From denials oft we gather
Treasures of His love untold.
Well He knows each broken purpose
Leads to fuller, deeper trust,
And the end of all His dealings
Proves our God is wise and just.

“Disappointment—His appointment,”
Lord, I take it, then, as such,
Like the clay in hands of potter,
Yielding wholly to Thy touch.
All my life's plan is thy molding,
Not one single choice be mine;
Let me answer, unrepining—
“Father, not my will, but Thine”
(Zodhiates 20-21).

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Allen, Charles L. *The Beatitudes: An Interpretation*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1957.
- Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich. 2nd Ed. by Arndt and Danker. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Cremer, Herman. *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. Edinburg, Scotland: T and T. Clark, 1954.
- Hauck, F. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Ed. Gerhard Kittel. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978.
- MacDonald, D. B. “Blessedness, Muhammadan.” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Ed. James Hastings. New York, NY: Scribners, 1966.
- Parker, E. H. “Blessedness.” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Ed. James Hastings. New York, NY: Scribners, 1961.
- Young, Robert. *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, reprint 1973.
- Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Pursuit of Happiness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1966.

ENDNOTES

¹This essay uses the term, *blessedness*, as a synonym for *beatitude* or rather as a translation.

²Gesenius' "barak." See Jeremiah 32:12, 16; 36:4; 43:3-6; 45:1-2; Nehemiah 3:20; 10:7; 11:5.

³Note that Zodiates uses *happiness* in his book title however.

⁴The reason for ancestor worship originates in this most ancient of ideas.

⁵The discerning reader will note here why old-age is so venerated in Chinese society.

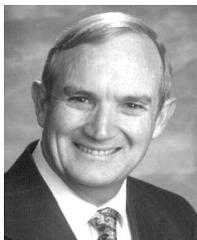
⁶One might compare the so-called religious *experiences* of modern Pentecostals to this subjective *condition* of Islam.

⁷Sixth book, fourth division of al-Ghazali's.

⁸Note that the term *eudaimoon* is **not** found in the New Testament.

ALL FAMILIES BLESSED IN ABRAHAM GENESIS 12:3

Curtis A. Cates



Curtis A. Cates is the son of a gospel preacher and has been preaching for over thirty years. For over twenty years, he has been engaged in training preachers. He also has a son who preaches.

He has degrees in Bible, English, Science, History, and Education from Alabama Christian College, Livingston University, and Samford University. He holds the Master of Theology degree from Southern Christian University and the Doctor of Education from the University of Alabama. He has done post-doctoral work at Abilene Christian University.

Curtis has served as Professor of Bible and English, Alabama Christian College; Vice President of Academics, Southern Christian University; and Dean of the College, Columbia Christian College (Portland, Oregon). He has been Director of the Memphis School of Preaching for the last nineteen years and continues to teach on the adjunct faculty in Bible and apologetics, Southern Christian University.

He speaks in gospel meetings, lectureships, and mission efforts including Southeast Asia. He has authored several tracts, numerous articles, and *The Second Incarnation—A Pattern For Apostasy and Worship: Heaven's Imperative, Or Man's Innovations?* He edits *Yokefellow* and the Memphis School of Preaching lectureship books, and serves as the president of the board of directors for *The Gospel Journal*.

He is married to Annette Bingham Cates, and they have two children: Curtis A., Jr., and Daniel Frazier.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is God's supernatural revelation to His offspring, mankind. It has often been termed, and appropriately so, **The Book**. It is absolutely unique, and one of the many characteristics which make it unique (and the religion revealed therein) is the fact that this book is the very Word of God (1 The. 2:13; Mat. 4:4). Another such characteristic of God's sacred revelation to man is that the Word was revealed through Old and New Testament prophets, who were His inspired spokesmen. Not only did He through them reveal the past and speak to the present, but He also foretold future events—predictive prophecy. The Holy Bible speaks of those events hundreds, even thousands of years before their taking place in meticulous and totally accurate ful-

filment of prophecy. In fact, that was the acid text of a prophet (Deu. 18:20-22; John 13:19; et al.). God's "men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). No wonder, then, the Messiah stated that "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35); it is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Inasmuch as man cannot foretell historical events or individual actions, inasmuch as only a supernatural Being can predict the future, and inasmuch as the Bible does foretell future historical events that would take place, therefore the Bible originated with and was revealed by a supernatural Being—the Almighty God of the Bible—and therefore the Bible-revealed religion (Christianity, unadulterated by the creeds and doctrines of men—Mat. 15:9, 13) is distinct from all other religions.

The Scriptures not only reveal the origin of the "heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (Exo. 20:9-11), including Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7ff), as well as the entrance of sin into the world (Gen. 3), the Scriptures also foretold of the coming of the Messiah, who would triumph over death, hell, and the grave and who would offer "himself without blemish unto God" to make possible man's redemption and eternal salvation with God in heaven (Heb. 9:14; John 1:29; Heb. 2:9; et al.). The apostle Paul made reference to this supernatural power when he wrote by inspiration in Galatians 3:8: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all the nations be blessed." Christ on many occasions made reference to the fact that the Old Testament prophecies spoke of Him (see Luke 24:44; John 5:39-40; 10:34-35; 13:18; 17:12). Peter and John told the Jews at the temple that their own prophet Moses had foretold the Christ, as had their other prophets; in fact, they stated it thus: "But the things which God foreshowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled" (Acts 3:18; cf., 19-26).

In our Lord's magnificent Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5-7), He began by teaching the Jewish multitudes what is commonly called the beatitudes (Mat. 5:1-12). *Blessed* means literally "to speak well of," and Christ wanted for all in His audience to be spoken well of by God. He laid out the principles by which His hearers (on this occasion the Jews who were present) could be pleasing to the Lord and thus be *blessed*. Otherwise, they would be unprepared to hear and heed the message of the Gospel of Christ and be saved thereby (John 1:11-12; Rom. 1:16).

The burden of this study is to show the significant connection between the Abrahamic promise found in Genesis 12:3: “And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” and the critically important and soul-saving truths revealed in the Sermon on the Mount, especially in the beatitudes. The prejudiced Jews of Christ’s day would miss the fulfilment of and the salvation available through the Abrahamic promise if they persisted upon building upon the sand of legalism and manmade traditions, which made void the Word of God (Mat. 15:6-9).

BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the creation of the heaven and the earth, God created man: male and female (Mark 10:6). He placed them in the beautiful, bountiful Garden of Eden and commanded them to dress and keep the garden. God also, having made them in His image (as free moral beings):

Commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:15-17).

In the garden was every fruitful tree for food, since Adam and Eve were flesh and bone as we are (2:23), along with the tree of life, the veritable fountain of youth to keep their flesh from deteriorating and dying, which would allow them to eat and live forever (2:9; 3:22). They were also commanded to fill the earth with offspring (1:27-28).

Into this paradise of God especially prepared for His human offspring came (no doubt at early opportunity) the Satan, with venom and hatred against God and with deceit, subtlety, and murderous intent toward God’s precious children. His bold accusation toward God, his vicious lying false doctrine, and his diabolical use of the three avenues of temptation (lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and the vain glory of life—cf., 1 John 2:15-17) deceived the woman, and she “did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat” (Gen. 3:1-6). Because sin (violation of God’s law—1 John 3:4) separates from God (Isa. 59:1-2), because God is “of purer eyes than to behold evil” (Heb. 1:13), because He cannot overlook even one unrequited sin, but every sin must be punished (Nah. 1:2-3), “therefore Jehovah God sent him forth from the garden of Eden” (Gen. 3:23). The “wages of sin is death,” Paul affirms (Rom. 6:23). Man committed/commits spiritual suicide; therefore, because the principle is life for life (Gen. 9:4-6), the

penalty for sin is eternal separation from God (2 The. 1:6-9). The lake of fire, Hell, is termed the second death (Rev. 20:13-15).

When the penalty for the transgression of Adam and Eve was an imminent, violent death, the second person in the Godhead stepped in and voluntarily, vicariously “offered himself without blemish” to die for Adam and Eve—and for you and me, dear reader (Heb. 9:14). He offered Himself to die for the “redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant” (9:15) as well as for the transgressions under the new covenant, the law of Christ. Thus was God’s mercy able to rejoice against His justice. Christ would be that “Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). With the shedding of the blood of innocent animals to adequately clothe Adam and Eve and with the animal sacrifices throughout the Old Testament, the sacrifice of Christ was shown in type and shadow.

As noted earlier, Moses wrote of the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. Christ pointed out that very fact to the unbelieving Jews:

Think not that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, *even* Moses, on whom ye have set your hope. For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; **for he wrote of me**. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (John 5:45-47).

The earliest prophecy concerning the coming of the only begotten Son of God was written by Moses in Genesis 3:15. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God immediately began moving toward Calvary. He told Satan, “and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Throughout the ages, there has been conflict between good and evil, between mankind and Satan, between righteousness and wickedness; sin has certainly brought bitterness, misery, suffering, and death. Think of the conflict between Abel and Cain, the evil which brought about the universal flood, the prideful rebellion of those at the tower of Babel, the sexual perversion which vexed the soul of righteous Lot (2 Pet. 2:7), Satan’s smiting of the innocent Job (Job 2:7), the rigorous servitude of the Hebrews under the Egyptians (Exo. 1:13-14), all leading up to the conflict between Satan and Christ. This is the first prophecy of the redemption of mankind by the One who was “from above,” “not of this world” (John 8:23); the other predictive prophecy of the Scriptures but enlarges and details the supernatural revelation

here, given immediately after man's sin and constituting the entire hope of the Old Testament in germ.

When God stated that *her seed*, the seed of the woman, would bruise Satan's head, He was prophesying the virgin birth of Christ. The apostle Paul spoke of this very prophecy's fulfilment when he wrote, "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. 4:4). Other Old Testament prophets confirmed the future virgin birth of Christ, the how, and the when of the incarnation. Isaiah predicted: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14), "God with us" (Mat. 1:18-25). The virgin birth was the **only way** in which God could tabernacle in the flesh, Himself being "called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6-7). He was born of Mary (who gave Him flesh), but He was begotten of God by the overshadowing of Mary by the Holy Spirit.

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

Speaking of the Messianic Age, the prophet Jeremiah wrote that Jehovah hath created a new thing in the earth: "A woman shall encompass a man" (Jer. 31:22). There would be nothing new about woman giving birth to a man-child; there would be nothing new about a woman hugging a man. Such has taken place since creation. However, for a virgin to give birth to a child, a man-child without the agency of a man—the virgin birth—would be absolutely new.

The ministers of Satan, those influenced by him to do evil (John 8:39-44), "children of the devil" (1 John 3:10; cf., 2 Cor. 11:13-15), both Romans and Jews (Psa. 2:1-2), would bruise the heel of the only begotten Son of God by crucifying Him on the cross; however, by the resurrection from the dead, Christ would lay the blow to the head of the Serpent from which he could never recover, thereby proving Himself to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4)—the analogy being a man crushing the head of a serpent under his heel, though himself receiving a stone-bruise in the process. The forces of Satan and Hades could not hold and triumph over the Messiah (Mat. 16:18); Christ entered into death, Satan's house as it were, spoiled his goods, and bound the strong man, Satan (Mat. 12:29). By so doing, He would set free through the truth, spiritually, those who had been bound by the strong man, Satan (John

8:31-36). “The prince of this world hath been judged” (John 16:11); his power has been drastically limited and destroyed in the lives of those who are obedient to the Word of God, their souls freed from the bondage of sin and from eternal separation from God the Father (Heb. 2:14-15). However, Satan shall ultimately be “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:10), along with any “not found written in the book of life” (20:15).

THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISE

Whereas one could designate the first part of Genesis, the book of beginnings (Chapters 1-11), as “Ruin through Sin;” he could appropriately designate the second part (Chapters 12-50), as “Remedy through the Promised Seed” (Camp). Stephen stated:

The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy land, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Haran: and from thence, when his father was dead, *God* removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell: and he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: and he promised that he would give it to him in possession, and to his seed after him, when *as yet* he had no child (Acts 7:2-5).

It was in Haran, Moses wrote, that God elucidated on the promise of Genesis 3:15; the seed of woman also would be the seed of Abraham.

Now Jehovah said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country [Haran], and from thy kindred [who were idolaters, Josh. 24:2], and from thy father’s house, unto the land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families [nations] of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3).

This great theme, that through the seed of Abraham all nations would be blessed, permeates and is central to Moses, the prophets, and the New Testament; it is indeed the hope of human redemption, the very basis of that redemption.

Here in Genesis 12, God promises to make of Abraham a great nation, speaking of his fleshly posterity, Israel. He also promises to give his fleshly posterity a land (12:7). Note that these promises were not to the *nations*, were not spiritual in nature (cf., 13:14-17; 15:18). Abraham would inherit the land of Canaan not personally but through his

numberless seed, his fleshly descendants. The land promise was indeed fulfilled, inasmuch as the nation of Israel possessed the land of Canaan (Jos. 21:43-45), the infidel system and theory of premillennialism to the contrary notwithstanding. “There failed not aught of any good thing which Jehovah had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass” (21:45). If those promises to Abraham are not now a part of history instead of prophecy yet to be fulfilled, then words mean absolutely nothing, and nothing was fulfilled by Abraham’s fleshly descendants’ departure of Egypt and possession of Canaan; those events were but folly. However, observe further that Stephen forever nails down the **time** when God’s land promise was fulfilled: speaking of the events in Egypt he wrote, “But as the time of the promise drew nigh which God vouchsafed unto Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt” (Acts 7:17). If the land promise is yet to be fulfilled, *nigh* has covered 3,500 years and is still counting—a totally absurd averment by those who would have Christ coming back in person and literally reigning on earth a thousand years! Inspiration, the Bible, is its own best interpreter; people are best advised not to contradict Stephen’s inspired affirmation that the promise was fulfilled in Israel’s conquest of Canaan!

Distinct from the nation and land promise to Abraham regarding his fleshly posterity is the promise: “And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). This *seed* is further mentioned in Genesis 22:15-18:

And the angel of Jehovah called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore. And thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Now, is *seed*, through whom all nations would be blessed, singular or plural? Paul in his inspired writing tells us, “Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of **one**, And to thy **seed**, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). Note also that God changes from the first *seed* in Genesis 22:17: “I will multiply thy seed as the stars [plural]” to the second *seed* in 22:17: “And thy seed shall possess the gate of **his** [singular] enemies,” showing that *seed* in verse 18 is also singular. The promise of Genesis

12:3 is spiritual and would be fulfilled in Christ, which He accomplished when He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

ABRAHAMIC PROMISE NOT FULFILLED IN THE LAW OF MOSES

The Hebrews writer affirmed that “apart from shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22), the reason being that there must be life for life, and the life is in the blood. As noted earlier, animal sacrifices began being offered in the Garden of Eden, continued throughout the patriarchal dispensation, and then were a very integral part and vital part of the law of Moses. It was the belief of the majority of Jews of Christ’s day that they were saved by the law of Moses and by the fact that they were fleshly descendants of Abraham. “They answered unto him, We are Abraham’s seed, and have never yet been in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?” (John 8:33). “They answered and said unto him, Our father is Abraham. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (8:39). In rejecting Christ, they rejected God as well as Abraham; their father was the devil, Christ said (8:44).

The Jews needed to realize, though, that the law of Moses was only “a shadow of the good *things* to come, not the very image of the things,” for the law

can never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect them that draw nigh. Else would they not have ceased to be offered? because the worshippers, having been once cleansed, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those *sacrifices* there is a remembrance made of sins year by year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins (Heb. 10:1-4).

The blood of animals was but typical of the blood of the Lamb of God, the God-man, Jesus the Christ, the only blood which can atone for the sins of mankind (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13-14; Rev. 1:5). The blood of those animal sacrifices which began in Eden and continued at the tabernacle and at the temple, where the blood flowed like rivers, could forgive sins only in promise, pointing to Christ’s sacrifice once for all at Calvary. Therefore, every year, every sin which those Jews had ever committed came back upon them, at which time there had to be a renewed penitence; they certainly were laboring and heavily laden. Only the blood of the precious Son of God could free them from that grievous burden (Mat. 11:28-30). The Hebrews writer goes on to say:

Wherefore when he [Christ] cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not [accept], But a body [the virgin birth] didst thou prepare for me; In whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hadst no pleasure [they could not meet the demands of life for life]: Then said I, Lo, I am come (In the roll of the book it is written of me) To do thy will, O God. Saying above, Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein (the which are offered according to the law [the law of Moses]), then hath he said, Lo, I am come to do thy will. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second [the law of Christ]. By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:5-10).

Contrast the fact that sins under the law were forgiven only in promise, whereas by the blood of Christ in the new covenant: “their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (10:17).

But someone objects: “Was not the law of Moses a part of the Abrahamic promise?” The answer is “No,” and that is Paul’s very point when writing to the Galatians, some of whom were described thus:

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that, if ye receive circumcision [return to the law of Moses], Christ will profit you nothing. Yea, I testify again to every man that receiveth circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace.... Ye were running well; who hindered you that ye should not obey the truth? (Gal. 5:2-4, 7).

What, then, was the relationship of the law of Moses to the Abrahamic promise? **First**, “Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal 3:16). **Second**, the law of Moses came 430 years after the promise was given to Abraham but did “not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect” (3:17), thus not a part of the original promise to Abraham to bless all nations through his seed (singular), Christ. **Third**, had salvation, *inheritance*, come through the law of Moses, “it is no more of promise: but God hath granted it to Abraham by promise” (3:18). If salvation were by Moses’ law, then God’s promise to Abraham would have been contradicted, nullified, and violated, God would have ceased to be God, and salvation would have been apart from the blood of Christ, which is impossible. But, why the necessity of the law of Moses?

Fourth, “What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made; and it was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator” (Gal.

3:19). Notice that the law of Moses was *added* because of man's rebellion and sin (cf., Rom. 1:18ff); Paul stated in Romans that the law was added that "sin...might be shown to be sin...that through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful" (Rom 7:13). Man had to become very much aware that all accountable beings are sinners, even the Jews; God's own people did not want to admit they were sinners requiring God's saving grace; they certainly did not want to admit they depended upon the promised Messiah, to whom their own law pointed and who was the purpose, or end, of the law of Moses. The law of Moses *was added* to the Abrahamic covenant, or was similar to a codicil, or supplement, to a will—not a part of the original Abrahamic promise to bless all nations through Christ.

Fifth, the law of Moses was but temporary: "till the seed should come" (3:19). It was never designed to be permanent. (This is made clear also in any number of other passages, such as Romans 7:1-4; Col. 2:14-17; 2 Cor. 3; Gal. 4:21-31; Mat. 5:17-18; Heb. 7:11-12; et al.) The law of Moses was fulfilled by Christ and was nailed to the cross; thus, when the nails were driven into the hands and feet of Christ on the cross, the door of access to God through Judaism was nailed shut, and no amount of *theologians*, whether Jew or Gentiles, can go back 2,000 years, remove those nails, and take Christ off the cross! Those who would justify their false doctrines and unauthorized practices by the law of Moses have fallen from grace and renounced Christ (Gal. 5:4; Heb. 10:26-31).

Sixth, the law of Moses could not *make alive* (Gal. 3:21), it could not bring about *righteousness*, make man righteous in the sight of God. It could point out sin, but it could not forgive sin, else Christ would not have had to die. "The letter killeth [the law of Moses], but the spirit [the law of Christ] giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6).

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-4).

Seventh, the law of Moses, which "shut up all things under sin" (Gal. 3:22) and "kept in ward [prison]," pointed to the time when Christ would make them free from the taskmasters of sin (Mat. 11:28-30; Gal. 3:23). "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free...."

If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:32, 36).

Eighth, the law of Moses was a “tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come [the system of faith, the gospel], we are no longer under a tutor [or schoolmaster—KJV]” (Gal. 3:24-25). The Greek (*paidagogos*) speaks of the law of Moses actually as a servant who had the responsibility to take the children from the parents and convey them to the teacher. He had responsibility out of school hours, not during the time when they were being taught. The law of Moses was composed of types and shadows pointing to Christ, to redemption in Him, to His church, and to all spiritual blessings in Him (Col. 2:16-17—indeed, the law of Moses pointed to the Christ, the Master Teacher and Savior of those who serve Him. Indeed, “For ye are all sons of God, through faith [the system of faith], in Christ Jesus”—Gal. 3:26, that is, all who have been “baptized into Christ”—Gal. 3:27).

Ninth, only those who have thus exercised the obedience of faith are the spiritual children of Abraham. Note:

There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one *man* in Christ Jesus. And if ye are Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:28-29).

So, during the Christian Dispensation, the only way to be children of Abraham (thus, saved) is to be immersed in water into Christ for the remission of sins.

THE JEWS AND THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISE

The attitude of the Jews, with exception of course, was summarized by John as follows: “He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not” (John 1:11). Christ made it clear to the Pharisees and scribes:

If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I heard from God: this did not Abraham.... Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad (John 8:39-40, 56).

The Pharisees “made void the word of God because of your tradition... Teaching as *their* doctrines the precepts of men” (Mat. 15:6, 9); they would be uprooted come judgment day (15:13). Jesus warned: “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Mat. 16:6); He also knew that “he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many

things of the elders and chief priests and scribes [the Sanhedrin], and be killed, and the third day be raised up” (16:21). The prideful scribes and Pharisees were termed *hypocrites* by the Lord; “because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter” (Mat. 23:13).

The Jews had as their father in the flesh the one to whom God made the promise, Abraham (Gen. 12:3), and it was to them 430 years afterward that God gave the law of Moses, which pointed to the Christ. However, they rejected the one to whom the law pointed. Paul’s words are most revealing:

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness [who were not given the law of Moses directly and did not have the great advantage of the Jews], attained to righteousness [that righteousness in Christ to which the law pointed], even the righteousness which is of faith: but Israel, following after a law of righteousness [they were given the law of Moses], did not arrive at *that* law [that is, they did not arrive at the system of righteousness through Christ Jesus]. Wherefore? [Why not?] Because *they sought it* not by faith, but **as it were** by works [The law of Moses was a law of faith, and its ordinances and prophecies were designed to produce faith in the coming Messiah; however, they treated it as a law of works—note the “as it were”—and taught and held that they could be saved by works alone, legalism. A law of works has never been given by God, and a law of works has never saved anyone, else Christ would not have had to die]. They stumbled at the stone of stumbling; even as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence: And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame (Rom. 9:30-33).

The Jews rejected the very *seed* of the Abrahamic promise, the “stone of stumbling,” Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16). Did not Peter and John accuse them of the same in Acts 4:10-12?

Now, someone will say, “What does all of this have to do with the beatitudes?” We must remember that Christ “knew all men, and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man” (John 2:24-25). He knew that the Jews, His audience in the Sermon on the Mount, and the Jewish leaders of the day were trusting in the Abrahamic blood that was coursing through their veins; in the law of Moses, sans faith in the coming Messiah; and in their man-made traditions; they rejected the Abrahamic promise and the *seed* through whom the nations would be blessed.

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptizer, prophesied by the Holy Spirit and blessed God, praising God for bringing redemption and raising up “a horn of salvation for us In the house of his servant David.... To show mercy towards, our fathers, And to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he spake unto Abraham our father.” He spoke of his son John, whose work it was to

go before the face of the Lord to make ready his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people In the remission of their sins, Because of the tender mercy of our God, Whereby the dayspring from on high shall visit us, To shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death; To guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:67-79).

John’s message was that through Christ “all flesh [all nations] shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6). His message, as was Christ’s, was, “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat. 3:2). But notice, dear reader, in that connection another vital part of John’s message, often missed:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said unto them, Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (Mat. 3:7-9).

Christ preached the same message, trying to urge the Jews to believe the message of the Abrahamic promise and the prophecies of the law of Moses:

Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent [of rejecting the message of their own law] ye, and believe in the gospel [which was preached unto Abraham and would be fulfilled in Christ] (Mark 1:14-15; cf., John 14:1).

Dear reader, are you beginning to grasp the motivation for the giving of the beatitudes to these unbelieving Jews?

THE BEATITUDES AND THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISE

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ was exposing the false teaching of the Jewish leaders of His day as well as their rejection of the Abrahamic promise. For example, the law of Moses never taught such perversions of God’s moral, universal laws as; “One can hate his brother as long as he does not kill him,” or “One can lust after a woman as long as he does not commit the overt act of adultery,” or “One can

hate his enemy but not his neighbor,” etc. These were the perverted doctrines of the Jews, not the law of God; Christ was teaching them that they had to go back and start believing the message of the law of Moses, for it testified of Him. “Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me; and ye will not come to me, that ye may have life” (John 5:39-40; cf., 5:38). (Because the beatitudes are being exegeted in detail in other chapters, they will be only briefly discussed here in connection with the Abrahamic promise and the promised seed, Christ the Messiah.) Please observe again *blessed*, “to speak well of,” at the beginning of each beatitude; can you see a connection with Genesis 12:3, with the promise of all families of the earth being blessed through Christ? Indeed!

One, those Jews (and anyone else) who thought they had all the answers, were lifted up with pride. These were men who trusted in the law of Moses (lacking faith in Christ) and who trusted in their own creeds, traditions, and prejudices. They would never submit to the teachings of Christ and thereby enter the kingdom of heaven, the church, which would be built by Christ upon the fact of His deity; thus, their being saved through the Abrahamic promise required their being willing to humble themselves, empty themselves of their prejudices, and listen to Christ and to His Word (cf., Acts 13:46).

Two, to find forgiveness in Christ, the Jews would have to mourn over their sins, which required forgiveness by Christ (John 8:31-39). “Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation” (2 Cor. 7:10), but those refusing to repent perish (Luke 13:1-5).

Three, to follow Christ, whom most of the Jews and the world reject, would require great meekness, strength under control. And, it would require one to control his own spirit. But, the reward is to “inherit the earth” (Mat. 5:5). How would recipients of the *seed* promise inherit the earth?

as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things (2 Cor. 6:10).

For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, *even* Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17).

Four, the righteousness promised in the Abrahamic promise and in the law of Moses was/is available only through Christ. Thus, only those

who hungered and thirsted after the salvation in the Messiah would be filled. Those Jews who rejected the message vouchsafed to them would never attain unto that righteousness (Rom. 9:31-32), being thus

ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law [of Moses] unto righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:3-4).

The message is the same today.

Five, the Jews had to pity and show mercy to others for God to have mercy upon them (Mat. 5:7). How often in the Old Testament did God through His prophets upbraid the Jews, especially the leaders, for a lack of pity upon the downtrodden, the fatherless, and the widows? Christ condemned the Pharisees for a lack of mercy (Mat. 23:23). They kept the lost from the kingdom (23:13), prepared people for hell (23:15), and were full of extortion (23:25); how could they receive mercy?

Six, as noted earlier, the Jews were perverted in religion, which inevitably happens when people abandon revelation and inspiration. Regarding their precepts, doctrines, and sects, our Lord stated that "the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth out of the heart; and they defile the man" (Mat. 15:18). It always ends in vain speculation and vain imagination (Rom. 1:18-21). They would have to abandon their traditions and unbelief if they would know the truth, obey it, have fellowship with God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-19), and see God ultimately in heaven. They would have to become pure in heart (Mat. 5:8). Note Paul's affirmation:

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:17-18).

Were the Jews prepared to receive the teachings of Christ and obey the gospel of the kingdom as they were? Indeed not; thus the need of these tremendous teachings of Christ!

Seven, since Christ is the Prince of Peace, reigning over the peaceable kingdom, one must get into Christ to have peace from the taskmasters of sin, in peace with God the Father, and in peace with himself. In the kingdom of Christ, Isaiah prophesied: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child

shall lead them” (Isa. 11:6). No one would hurt or destroy or devour in God’s holy mountain, the church (11:9). There would be no place for the mean, vicious, and selfish among the *blessed* recipients of the Abrahamic promise; only those who have the spirit of physical and spiritual peace, peacemakers, need apply.

Eight, Christ was much aware that His followers would be persecuted, for they would not be of this world. From the time of Abel, the faithful had been grievously mistreated, and He Himself would be killed out of envy. The world and its prince, Satan, often seek not to live in peace with nor to appreciate those who stand for the truth. The Jews would be one of those persecuting powers of both Christ and the church. Satan does not like it when the words of righteousness and Christian soldiers storm his spiritual domain. However, our Lord counted it joy to suffer and die that we might be saved (Heb. 12:1-2), and the apostles were “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name” (Acts 5:40-41). “Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Being recipients of the Abrahamic promise far outweighs the sufferings for Christ we are called upon to undergo (1 Pet. 4:15-16).

CONCLUSION

When the writer sees *blessed* in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, in connection with salvation in Christ, he automatically thinks of the Abrahamic promise. For example, think of the “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ” (Eph. 1:3), or “blessed with the faithful Abraham” (Gal. 3:9), or “this man shall be blessed in his doing” (Jam. 1:25), or “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord” (Rev. 14:13), or “Blessed *are* they that do his commandments” (Rev. 22:14—KJV). This list is far from exhaustive; reward yourself by an in-depth study of this thread, the Abrahamic promise, which is the center and circumference of the Sacred Oracles and the foundation of your hope.

Do you have the faith of Abraham, dear reader? Abrahamic faith was made perfect, completed by, his obedience to God. Only then was God’s grace able to flow to him (Jam. 2:21-26; Rom. 4:16). Only by the obedience of faith, which submits to Christ’s command to be baptized for remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:26-27), can you be a child of Abraham and heir of that spiritual promise made to this faithful patriarch. Do not be as most of the Jews, who thrust the

truth from them and judged themselves “unworthy of eternal life” (Acts 13:46).

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

Camp, Franklin. Classnotes taken by the author on “Romans.” Shades Mountain Church of Christ. Birmingham, AL: 1960s.

THE BLESSED MAN

PSALM 1

Michael Hatcher



Michael Hatcher was born in Pensacola, Florida, the son of a gospel preacher. He is married to Karen (Savage), and they have two sons. He has done local work in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and is presently working with the Bellview Church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida. He has spoken on several lectureships, gospel meetings, to youth groups, and has done radio and television work. He also taught in Texomaland School of Biblical Studies in Denison, Texas, and was the educational director at State Street Church of Christ in Bristol, Virginia.

Michael directed the North Texas Lectureship and currently is director of the Bellview Lectures. He has written articles for several brotherhood publications and a weekly newspaper (from 1987-1994). He was the associate editor of the *Shield Of Faith* and now is editor of *Defender*, the *Beacon*, the Bellview Lectures book, and is on the Board of Directors for *The Gospel Journal*. He is co-author of a book, *Hatcher/Schweitzer Exchange*, an exchange of letters with a Lutheran minister on the subject of Total Hereditary Depravity and other subjects, and had a debate on the subject of instrumental music in worship with Baptist, Bob L. Ross. He is an instructor at Spring Bible Institute, Spring, Texas.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, this is one of the favorite of the psalms recorded for our benefit. This psalm serves as a suitable introduction to the book as it serves as a summary of all the psalms. It wonderfully presents to us two ways of life. It describes the wicked and the righteous, the God-centered life and the self-centered life. There is a clear and distinct line drawn between the two ways. Jesus shows this clear distinction when He said, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Mat. 12:30). It thus presents two classes of people and the way in which they walk.

This psalm also reveals to us the two destinies of these two ways of life. Jesus presented these two ways and destinies when He said:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Mat. 7:13-14).

Thus, in this short psalm we have the contents of the entire Bible (at least in principle) set before us. Prior to actually studying this psalm, let us look at the poetry of the Bible as a background for both this psalm and the other psalms which will be studied in this series on the Beatitudes.

BIBLICAL POETRY

Oriental poetry, which includes Hebrew or Biblical poetry, is very different than the type of poetry to which we as Americans are accustomed: Western poetry. As a result, many never see the beauty of biblical poetry. Our poetry consists primarily of rhyme and meter while biblical poetry consists mainly of parallelism (sometimes called thought-rhyme). Let us consider the differing types of Parallelisms.

First there is Synonymous (also called Cognate) Parallelism, in which two lines say the same thought in differing words. The second type is Antithetic Parallelism. In this type the two lines give the opposite thoughts or contrast each other. Often one is stated in positive terms while the other is in negative terms. The third type is Synthetic (also called Constructive or Compound) Parallelism. In this type, the second line advances the thought or gives additional information to the first line. These first three are most widely known, but they are not all of them.

A fourth type of Parallelism is Chiasmatic or Introverted. In this the two lines contain two corresponding phrases in different words, but the order of the second line is reversed from the order of the first line. This is often demonstrated by using *a-b-b-a* form. The first line consists (and in the order) of *a-b*, the second line reverses the order so it appears as *b-a*. In this the *a*'s are synonymous and the *b*'s are synonymous, but the *b*'s are antithetic to the *a*'s. The next type is Emblematic Parallelism. This form uses a simile or metaphor to convey the thoughts. The last type of Parallelism is Climactic, Stairlike, or Gradation. In this the thought of the first line is completed in the second line. In this type, the first line is incomplete without the second line.

These are the six basic forms of Parallelism. However, we have only mentioned the basic form dealing with two lines only. When dealing only with two lines and nothing more it is additionally called Internal, thus Synonymous Internal Parallelism. However, the Parallelism of the Bible can consist of more than two lines, in which it is then called

External or Progressive (i.e. Synonymous External Parallelism or Progressive Synonymous Parallelism).

One other form is worthy of mention in this short survey of Biblical Poetry: Acrostics. An acrostic is where each succeeding line, verse, or series of verses begin with the next succeeding letter of the alphabet. The longest and best known in the Bible is Psalm 119. Since the Hebrew alphabet has twenty-two letters, if a psalm has 22 verses or a multiple thereof, then it is a good possibility that it is an acrostic.

The first psalm presents an example of some of these types of Parallelism (in mentioning these I will not add the External or Progressive aspect to the basic forms and give just the basic form). There are two major sections, verses 1-3 dealing with the way of the godly then verses 4-6 dealing with the way of the ungodly. Thus, verses 4-6 are Antithetic Parallelism to verses 1-3. Then, within these two major sections there are more parallelisms. In verse one we have Synthetic Parallelism as each phrase advances the thought of the previous one. In verse two we either have Synthetic or Synonymous depending on how one views the two statements. Then in verse three we again have Synthetic Parallelism (could possibly be Chiasitic). Verse three also is Emblematic Parallelism using the simile of a tree prospering. We should also see the Antithetic Parallelism between verses one and two. Verse one presents the blessed man from a negative standpoint and verse two from a positive standpoint. Then verses two and three show us another example of Synthetic Parallelism, with verse two showing what the blessed man does to verse three, giving us what the blessed man becomes. This should suffice as an example (the same things could be done with verses four through six) of how the poetry in the Bible works.

WAY OF THE GODLY

Separation

The Psalmist informs us that the way of the godly will first be the way of separation. There are some things which the godly man **must** shun if he is to be blessed by God. We see a progression of thoughts in this separation as the Psalmist begins with a separation from the “counsel of the ungodly.” The blessed man stays away from the advice or purpose of those who are not following the ways of God. When we listen to the advice of the ungodly, it will only lead to sorrow within our life. Eve learned this the hard way when she listened to Satan. Satan enticed her by saying:

Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:4-5).

Eve

saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Gen. 3:6).

Since both Adam and Eve succumbed to the evil advice of Satan, they were cast out of the Garden of Eden and from their fellowship with God, and were cursed (Gen. 3). However, others did not learn to listen to good advice and instead, like Eve, took the evil advice of the ungodly. Absalom rejected the good counsel of Ahithophel and accepted the evil advice of Hushai, leading to his downfall (2 Sam. 17). Rehoboam rejected the wisdom of the older men to take the evil advice of the young men who grew up with him, leading to the division of the kingdom (1 Kin. 12).

Today there are many ungodly people trying to tell us how to live. They counsel to do your own thing or do what feels right to you. Many urge us to seek nothing but what brings us pleasure in life. We have friends and often family who encourage sinful actions. The Bible describes the situation of those who take the evil advice of others. Jeremiah shows that we go backward instead of forward when we take evil counsel: “But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels *and* in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward” (Jer. 7:24). The psalmist informs us that God makes their devices of none effect: “The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect” (Psa. 33:10). Isaiah places a woe upon those who take evil advice: “Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin” (Isa. 30:1). We must learn to take God’s advice, not man’s. After the psalmist states that God brings evil counsel to naught, he adds that “The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (Psa. 33:11).

The blessed man must also separate himself from “stand[ing] in the way of the sinner.” This is a staying away from evil associates. Paul teaches us: “Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33—ASV). We must be careful about those with

whom we are friends. When we constantly associate (stand in the way) with those who are evil, it will affect us in a negative way. The friendship or fellowship of Christians is to be other Christians; yet we associate with those who are not Christians for the purpose of converting them. The non-Christian's lifestyle is such that those who are Christians will not be able to remain close friends with them. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam. 4:4). We as Christians are to be separate from the world. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:17). The Christian's close association, friendship, and fellowship is to be other Christians. Jesus prayed for the unity of all those who believe: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). This way he does not pick up the evil thoughts and thus the way of the wicked.

The blessed man does not sit in the seat of the scornful; he does not fellowship with those who scoff at sacred things, nor become a scoffer of them. The idea of a scoffer is one that speaks reproachfully against something. Jesus taught, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Mat. 12:36-37). Paul states to "let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29). Sadly, in our society those who scorn righteousness and righteous speech have become influential. Through the years they have broken down the standards of decency, including our speech, with the result that evil communication abounds, and often even the speech of Christians is not what it should be. Those who are scorers, instead of receiving blessing within their life, will receive the condemnation of God. "Judgments are prepared for scorers, and stripes for the back of fools" (Pro. 19:29). "For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off" (Isa. 29:20).

Satisfaction

While verse one shows what the blessed man is not, verse two shows us what the blessed man does. The blessed man has an appreciation of God's Word, which brings satisfaction to his soul. The blessed man delights himself in God's Word. The Psalms often speak of delighting ourselves in His Word.

Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart (Psa. 37:4).

And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved... Their heart is as fat as grease; *but* I delight in thy law.... Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law *is* my delight.... I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law *is* my delight (Psa. 119:47, 70, 77, 174).

God's Word is where one finds his joy. When we find our joy and delight in God's Word, then we will spend time digesting the truths found therein. He has turned down the counsel of the ungodly and, thus, can rejoice in God's Law. When we allow ungodly thoughts to take root in our mind, then we will not have a delight in the Scriptures.

By the actions of many, they prove they do not have a delight in God's Law. When sermons go a little *overtime*, one can see them squirming to get out. Going *overtime* would not disturb the one who delights in God's law in the least. The desire of many to shorten the sermons shows they no longer delight in Scriptures. We also observe this by seeing how often someone reads his Bible.

When one delights in the Law of God and finds his satisfaction there, then he appropriates that Word to himself by meditating upon it. Meditation has fallen upon difficult times lately because of the abuse of it. Often when meditation is mentioned, our minds think of transcendental meditation: the person sitting on the floor with his legs folded, his arms out, his fingers in a circle, and he is humming "ohm." The Hebrew word translated *meditate* has the basic meaning of "a low sound" (Harris 205). Harris goes on to mention that used in a positive way that "perhaps the Scripture was read half out loud in the process of meditation" (205). Thus, it is indicating someone who has his mind centered upon the Bible. He is thinking about, concentrating, focusing his mind upon the Word of God.

The blessed man meditates on God's Word day and night. God instructed Joshua:

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success (Jos. 1:8).

The blessed man knows the Word and has hid the Word in his heart so he knows and thinks about it on a continual basis. Hartley wrote:

Meditation takes place any time of the day or night (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2). It produces inward strength and joy (Ps. 63:5). The object of meditation is particularly the law with its precepts (119:15), statutes (v 48), testimonies (v 99), and promises (v 148). The glorious splendor of God's majesty, along with His wondrous works or miracles, is also the content of meditation (143:5; 145:5). Meditation takes place in the heart, the seat of the emotional and rational life. Therefore, the psalmist prays that the meditation of his heart will be acceptable in God's sight (19:14; 104:34), i.e., he wants his inner thoughts to approach the standard God approves (305).

Wiersbe points out:

The people God blesses not only read the Word daily, but they study it, memorize it, and meditate on it during the day and night. Their mind is controlled by the Word of God. Because of this, they are led by the Spirit and walk in the Spirit. Meditation is to the soul what "digestion" is to the body. It means understanding the Word, "chewing on it," and applying it to our lives, making it a part of the inner person.

Stability And Prosperity

Stability and prosperity is what the conduct of verses one and two produce. This **stability** is portrayed by the figure of a tree planted by the water. This is not a tree that simply grows in the wild, but this is "one that has been carefully *cultivated*; and for the proper growth of which all the advantages of soil and situation have been chosen" (Clarke). Thus, the root system is well developed and will provide stability no matter what situations might arise, even during times of severe drought. The world and ungodliness cannot provide a good stable environment, it is like the shifting sand which provides nothing to build upon. Our Lord presented the stability of His Word at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds

blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Mat. 7:24-27).

In addition to being stable, the blessed man (the man who delights in the law of Jehovah and meditates therein) will be **fruitful**. A person cannot be truly fruitful without a good rooting system. Without our roots going down deep into God's Word (hearing His Word and doing it) there will not be the type of fruit which pleases God. In the parable of the sower Jesus teaches that when the seed (which is the Word of God) falls into the good ground, it "brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold" (Mat. 13:8). Paul aptly describes the type of fruit we will possess when we are following the Word of God (being led by the Spirit) when he writes, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23). Peter also depicts that fruit in what we generally term the *Christian graces*:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ* (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

The shifting sand of ungodliness will never produce this type of life.

This fruitful life comes because we have centered our mind upon God's Word. It is not simply a matter of trying to change one's life; one must first change his thinking. Verse two is that which changes the mind; then he becomes stable and prosperous. Paul teaches us to be transformed from this world but that transformation comes by the renewing of our mind.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

When we think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtue, and praise (Phi. 4:8), then we will be blessed by God to be stable and prosperous.

Then the blessed man is also portrayed as **flourishing**, his leaf will not wither. There will always be a freshness and vitality of life. Jesus

told his apostles, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are life” (John 6:63). There is a power in the Gospel which will give us life. The Gospel is God’s power to save (Rom. 1:16) and in those Words there is life.

For the word of God *is* quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

The reason the Gospel has life in it is that Christ is the author and giver of life. “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10). The Christian (the one who separates himself from wickedness and delights in and meditates upon God’s Law) will have the abundant life: the blessed life in the here and now and eternal life in the hereafter.

WAY OF THE UNGODLY

The ungodly are not blessed by God. They will not be stable, fruitful, and flourishing because they have nothing to build their lives upon. While the godly have the solid rock of Jesus Christ and His Word, the ungodly have rejected Him and His Word. Nothing else provides a blessed life; thus when they reject Christ and the Gospel, they have nothing to build upon.

Sure Rejection

There is a separation between the godly and ungodly, just like between the wheat and chaff. The wheat is good and profitable, but the chaff is worthless and good for nothing. Thus, the chaff cannot be allowed to remain with the wheat—there is a separation that takes place. This separation should be recognized in this life, but often we do not acknowledge it (cf., Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:14-17; Jam. 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17; et. al.).

On the last great day when we all stand before God in judgment, He will separate the godly from the ungodly. Jesus gives a scene of that judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. Notice verses 32-33 in particular:

And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the

goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Those who are described as goats by the Lord are the same ones who are the chaff in this psalm. Man will not be able to deceive God about the way in which he has lived his life.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Gal. 6:7-8).

We will receive as we have lived. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). John the Baptist declared that Jesus would “burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Mat. 3:12). That one who has lived an ungodly life will be divided from the righteous.

The ungodly will be driven by the wind. This shows the instability of the ungodly as they live in this world. We see a sharp contrast between the tree planted by the rivers of water and the chaff which the wind drives away. The ungodly are swayed by anything and everything which comes along. They have no stability but rest their lives upon the changing circumstances of life. Again notice the contrast made by our Lord at the end of the Sermon on the Mount:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Mat. 7:24-27).

All the philosophies and wisdom of man cannot lead one to the right way; it will always produce instability. Jeremiah correctly points out: “O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” (Jer. 10:23). The only foundation for one’s life is our Lord and His Word: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Peter quotes Isaiah and says:

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall

not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe *he is* precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed (1 Pet. 2:6-8).

Shameful Reproach

There is a time coming when the ungodly will reap what he has sown in this life. Since there is no foundation for his life (he has rejected the foundation which God “made the head of the corner”), he will not stand in the judgment. This does not mean that he will not be judged, for all men will stand before God and be judged by Him. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12).

When all men stand before God in judgment, those who have lived ungodly will be found wanting—their lives will not measure up to the standard of God’s Word. The result of living ungodly is an eternal separation from God, being eternally condemned. In that scene of the judgment which Jesus gives in Matthew 25:31-46 He points out that punishment coming for the ungodly:

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (Mat. 25:41, 46).

They will not stand with the righteous. To the Romans Paul would write, “But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath” (Rom. 2:8). To those who live for themselves instead of building upon that good foundation, Paul said, “Whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is* *their* belly, and whose glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Phi. 3:19). Paul describes it to the Thessalonians by saying:

Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 The. 1:6-9).

Those ungodly will not meet with the congregation of the saints. The church is not to allow sin to remain in the camp. When a man committed immorality in Corinth, Paul instructed the church that they needed to put away from among yourselves that wicked person, to purge him out delivering him to Satan (1 Cor. 5). Notice some of the admonitions in the Scriptures to keep the church pure.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them (Rom. 16:17).

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them* (Eph. 5:11).

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.... And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed (2 The. 3:6, 14).

A man that is an heretick [factious man] after the first and second admonition reject (Tit. 3:10).

The godly should not allow the ungodly to remain in the congregation of the righteous.

TWO WAYS CONTRASTED

This last verse (6) presents to our minds, in summary form, the two ways and destinies (see introduction). Jehovah knows the righteous. *Know* carries with it much more than simply mental understanding; it carries the idea of approval. God set forth the way in which we are to walk and live. Paul wrote, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Those who walk in that way are known by God and are approved by Him. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine" (John 10:14). Paul tells his son in the faith, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19).

The ungodly have turned to their own way instead of following the way approved of God. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). These individuals will perish because God's face is against them. "For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the

righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil” (1 Pet. 3:12). As a result of God’s face being against them, He does not know them as He does the righteous.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never **knew** you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat. 7:21-23).

CONCLUSION

What a great contrast from the first word to the last word: *blessed* to *perish*. The difference between these two words is the difference in the way one lives as opposed to the other. The emphasis of the psalm is to show how one can be blessed—delighting in God’s Law and meditating upon it. He likewise presents the reason we should walk in His way (according to the Law of God) in both reward and punishment—heaven and hell. The man walking in His ways will be blessed in time and eternity. Let us love God’s Word and meditate upon it so we will receive that blessed life and escape the punishment awaiting the ungodly.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Clarke, Adam. *Clarke’s Commentary: Psalms*. Electronic ed. Logos Library System. Clarke’s Commentaries. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999.
- Harris, R. L. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 1980. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999.
- Hartley, J. E. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. 1979-1988. Ed. G. W. Bromiley. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001.
- Wiersbe, W. W. *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*. Electronic ed. Logos Library System. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993.

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO TRUSTS IN THE LORD PSALM 2:12

Stacey Grant



Stacey W. Grant was born and reared in Brunswick, Georgia. He entered the U.S. Air Force in 1982. In 1987, while stationed at Robins Air Force Base in Georgia, he obeyed the Gospel. Stacey graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching, Memphis, Tennessee, in 1994. He has preached the Gospel and spoken on lectureships in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee. Stacey is currently working with the Central Church of Christ in Milledgeville, Georgia, which he helped establish in 1995.

INTRODUCTION

The foundation or sustaining force of every meaningful relationship is trust. A marriage cannot succeed without this important element. A genuine, lasting friendship continues via trust. Children trust their parents for protection, guidance, and provisions. In every case, trust is **earned**. According to *Webster's*, the intransitive verb *trust* means: “to have trust or faith; place reliance; be confident; to hope; as a transitive verb: to believe in the honesty, integrity, justice, etc. of; have confidence in, to rely or depend on [trust them to be on time].”

With the above definition in mind, the author is reminded of two of his favorite hymns and how they relate to this study. One is amply titled “Tis So Sweet To Trust In Jesus”:

Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take him at His word,
just to rest upon His promise, just to know, “Thus saith the Lord.”

O how sweet to trust in Jesus, just to trust His cleansing blood,
just in simple faith to plunge me 'neath the cleansing flood.

Yes tis sweet to trust in Jesus, just from sin and self to cease,
just from Jesus simply taking life and rest, and joy and peace.

I'm so glad I learned to trust Thee, Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend;
and I know that Thou art with me, wilt be with me to the end.

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him! How I've proved Him o'er!
 Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust Him more!

The other is titled "Trust And Obey":

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His word,
 what a glory He sheds on our way!

While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
 and with all who will trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,
 but His smile quickly drives it away;
 not a doubt or a fear, not a sign or a tear,
 can abide while we trust and obey.

Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,
 but our toil He doth richly repay;
 not a grief nor a loss, not a frown nor a cross,
 but is blest if we trust and obey.

But we never can prove the delights of His love
 until all on the altar we lay;
 for the favor He shows, and the joy He bestows,
 are for those who trust and obey.

Then in fellowship sweet, we will sit at his feet,
 or we'll walk by His side in the way;
 what He says we will do, where He sends we will go,
 never fear, only trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way
 to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Trust in Jehovah is the theme of this study. The rest of this study is dedicated to why all men should and why some do not trust in Jehovah.

THE SECOND PSALM

The second Psalm sets the tone for this study. It reveals the types of attitudes that prevent some men from bowing down to the Lord and His Anointed. Inherent in its message is Jehovah's response to these ungodly attitudes and His ultimate victory over them!

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decreed: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him (Psa. 2:1-12).

This Psalm is attributed to King David (Acts 4:25) and is called the second Psalm (Acts 13:33). Concerning its message one scholar wrote:

It coincides also in other respects with Ps. i., but still more with Psalms of the earlier time of the kings (lix.9, lxxxiii.3-9) and with Isaiah's prophetic style. The rising of the confederate nations and their rulers against Jahve and His Anointed will be dashed to pieces against the imperturbable all-conquering power of dominion, which Jahve has entrusted to His King set upon Zion, His Son. This is the foundational thought, which is worked out with the vivid directness of dramatic representation. The words of the singer and seer begin and end the Psalm. The rebels, Jahve, and His Anointed come forward, and speak for themselves; but the framework is formed by the composer's discourse, which, like the chorus of the Greek drama, expresses the reflections and feelings which are produced on the spectators and hearers (Delitzsch 89).

A faithful Gospel preacher who has passed on to his reward had this to say about this great psalm:

There is in this psalm the Messianic tone. It is prophetic, pointing to Christ and His kingdom's establishment in spite of opposition. When one reads with this in mind, it becomes all the more foolish for men to oppose God. Also, men were without excuse in not knowing God's plan when Christ came (Clark 1:366).

Concerning the identity of the *Anointed*, one may say the reference is dual in nature:

It may, however, be a king of the time, who is here regarded in the light of the Messianic promise, or that King of the future, in whom at a future period the mission of the Davidic kingship in the world shall be fulfilled: at all events this Lord's Anointed comes forward with the divine power and glory, with which the Messiah appears in the prophets (Delitzsch 5:89).

Known as a "Psalm of Voices," a faithful servant of the past outlined this beloved Psalm in this fashion:

Among other things, this is a "Psalm of Voices." There are several speakers, and what they say is quite revealing. Though we live in a world where we are bombarded by voices, we would do well to hear what is said here.

I. THERE IS THE VOICE OF ASTONISHMENT (vs. 1-3).

A casual reading will show that the speaker is astonished at some things that are happening. It seems beyond all the bounds of reasoning that such as he describes should occur. Why men would dare what they are doing amazes the writer. He is astonished at several things, and we shall try to note some, such as:

A. Antagonism (v. 1).

This shows itself in the foolish rage and false reasoning of the people he speaks of. Their attitude is one of anger and rage. They are unreasonable. It is interesting to note that the word for imagine here is from the same word as mediate in Psalm 1:2. One thing is of God, the other of nonsense. The latter one thinks of plans that will not work. So the writer is astonished and asks why people do as they do.

B. Arrogance (v. 2).

The antagonism of verse one will show itself in a number of ways, but one will be seen in the arrogance of verse two. Look at the positions these people take. They set themselves, which is equal to setting themselves up in places they have no right to. They feel self-sufficient. Arrogance also shows itself in the plans they adopt. You see, their position and plans are against the Lord and His anointed. Surely, one must be proud and puffed up to dare do this.

C. Assumptions (v. 3).

Not only is he astonished at the antagonism and arrogance, but look at the assumptions of these people. They declare that they will have liberty. They don't want God's restraints. They want to be free to live lawless lives. They assume that they could do such. But, that crowd is still alive with one "lib" movement after another. They want to cast away the restraints also, and such ought to arouse voices of astonishment.

II. THE VOICE OF AUTHORITY (vs. 4-6).

In spite of what kings, judges, and others may assume or say, there is One who has the last word. He is God. When the One who is really in control speaks, we see His:

A. Derision (v. 4).

Though they see themselves on earth to oppose Him, God still sits in control in heaven. He, as it were, laughs at the puny efforts of man to snatch control. His will is sovereign, and nobody will be able to unseat Him.

B. Displeasure (v. 5).

He will show His displeasure by his wrath and these men like Pilate, Herod and others cannot hope to escape.

C. Determination (v. 6).

The way of the Lord is settled and men are not going to stop it. God would set up His kingdom when Christ came regardless of the Jews. Their reception or rejection of Him was not the determining factor. God has a determinate counsel. His word is sure and settled, and men are not going to undo it.

III. THE VOICE OF AFFIRMATION (vs. 7-9).

The King declares his position in spite of what those who are in rebellion may do or say. The king who is set on the throne by God speaks of His:

A. Person (v. 7).

He lets us know who He is. He is none other than the Son of God. He lets men know that God said that is who He is. He identifies Him as such. Paul uses this verse and refers to the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:33). Also, he says He is declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). So we don't have to wonder who He is who was to be king.

B. Position (v. 8).

He would be over the heathen, even those that rage, and His reign would be universal.

C. Power (v. 9).

Since He is supreme and has power, it is foolish for anybody to oppose Him. Those who set themselves up are no match for God and His Anointed.

IV. THE VOICE OF ADMONITION (vs. 10-12).

The writer, by the Holy Spirit, appeals to those who oppose the Lord and His plan. They should know such is foolish and unworthy. His appeal was that they might properly:

A. Exercise the mind (v. 10).

They need to do their own thinking and get their information from the right source. If only they would be instructed by those who would give proper counsel. Wasn't this what the Jews did not do when in ignorance they put Jesus to death?

B. Exert the will (v. 11).

They should determine that they are going to serve God with reverence rather than rebellion. Such service is bound to produce joy.

C. Express their submission (v. 12).

To kiss the Son is equal to showing submission to Him rather than rebellion. Such a person would never think of throwing off the chords that bind him to the Lord.

Conclusion: The question of verse one would never have to be asked if people would listen to the voice of authority and accept the affirmation and admonition of the voices of verses four through twelve (Clark 1:366-368).

Yet, another commentator gave this rendition of this Messianic Psalm:

- Psalm 2
REBELS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!
- I. GOD'S GUILTY SUBJECTS (2:1-3)
 - A. The Formality of their Rebellion (2:1)
 - B. The Force of their Rebellion (2:2)
 - C. The Focus of their Rebellion (2:3)
 - II. GOD'S GREAT SCORN (2:4-6)
 - A. He Speaks in Derision (2:4)
 - B. He Speaks in Displeasure (2:5)
 - C. He Speaks in Determination (2:6)
 - III. GOD'S GLORIOUS SON (2:7-9)
 - A. His Sonship (2:7)
 - B. His Sovereignty (2:8)
 - C. His Severity (2:9)
 - IV. GOD'S GRACIOUS SPIRIT (2:10-12)

THERE ARE FOUR SPEAKERS in this psalm. That is its key. David, the Psalmist (2:1-3), whom God promised that one day his son and Lord would sit upon his throne ruling the tribes of Israel and all the nations of mankind. Yet, looking down the corridor of time he sees the opposite. He sees the nations massing in rebellion against the Lord's anointed. Like many another saint, puzzled over this seeming inconsistency, he asks the age-old question, why?

God, the Father (2:4-6), answered David's question with a peal of laughter. The rebellion of the nations is ludicrous from the standpoint of Heaven. When men united against God's Son at His first coming all Heaven wept; when they unite against Him at His second coming all Heaven laughs.

God, the Son (2:7-9), assures David that He indeed will reign. He is already acclaimed on high as God's beloved Son, so David need have no doubts about the ultimate outcome.

God, the Holy Spirit (2:10-12), upholds the sovereign claims of Christ and has a warning for the nations. It is not too late to lay down the arms of rebellion, but they had better submit—or else.

That is how this interesting psalm, which introduces the second great theme of the Psalter, unfolds. The first psalm underlines the law; this one underlines prophecy. And what prophecy! It carries us on to the end times and brings into focus the ultimate triumph of Heaven over earth.

The psalm, as we have seen, divides into four equal parts, each part with a separate speaker (Phillips 1:22-23).

According to Psalm 1, the godly man delights in the law of the Lord; he meditates therein day and night. *Meditates* is the same as *imagine* in Psalm 2:1. Ungodly men use their imagination to find ways to dishonor Jehovah. The reader is reminded of what the Scriptures say about those living in the days of Noah:

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart (Gen. 6:5-6).

Vain means “worthless” (v. 1). Those who imagine or meditate on or plot ungodly acts are as guilty as one charged with first-degree murder! Premeditated murder, in most states, carries the punishment of the death penalty, and rightly so.

WHY DO THE HEATHEN RAGE?

Heathen refers to the Gentile nations, those to whom the Scriptures reveal did not receive special/written revelation from God:

Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (Eph. 2:11-12).

Both Testaments reveal that in spite of the Gentiles not having received written revelation, God manifested Himself to them. The epistle addressed to the Romans cites this irrefutable fact. Romans 1:18-32 exposes the Gentiles spiritual condition prior to the Gospel age:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour

their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient (Rom. 1:18-28).

The verdict: Guilty! Why so? They chose to expel Jehovah from their thoughts and everyday life. All men possess what is referred to as the sense of *ought*, a built-in sense of things proper. Morality may differ in degree, but the basis is found in **every** society (Haley 24). In essence, the Gentile could have found Jehovah if he were seeking Him. Consider the following historical evidence:

“For God manifested himself to them.” In various ways along down the ages God had manifested himself to the people of the earth. He had made an extensive revelation of himself to the Jews; that is easily seen. But what of his manifestations to the other peoples of the earth? In selecting the children of Israel for a special purpose, did God deliberately reject the other peoples? Did he leave them without any light, and that, too, because he did not want them to have any light? Could any one have such thoughts concerning Jehovah? Is that the idea we have of the One whom we worship as our heavenly Father?

The people of every nation find a common ancestor in Noah. Noah stood in great favor with Jehovah. Both before and after the flood God talked to Noah. By means of the flood God revealed to Noah and his family in a very striking way his hatred of sin, his justice, his power, and his providence. Those descendants of Noah who went into idolatry had first to reject what they knew of God. Later God manifested himself to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, and to Joseph. Many people would learn of the one God through these great men. Then God manifested himself to the Egyptians and to the children of Israel in a wonderful way when he brought Israel out of bondage. God intended that these wonderful miracles wrought in the deliverance of Israel should teach all nations, as is clearly shown by what he said to Pharaoh; “But in every deed for this cause have I made thee to stand, to show thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth” (Ex. 9:16). That these miracles were told among the nations is indicated by what Rahab of Jericho told the spies. (See Josh. 2:10-14). Jonah carried the knowledge of Jehovah to the capital city of the Assyrians, and brought the king and the whole city of Nineveh to repentance and to a confession of Jehovah. When the kingdom of

Israel was carried into captivity by the Assyrians, they were scattered about through that vast kingdom. Among them would be found some who were faithful to Jehovah and who would carry the knowledge of Jehovah where they were placed. Then, after Babylon gained the mastery of that whole country, they carried the kingdom of Judah into captivity. Among these were many faithful men and women who carried the knowledge of Jehovah to all the provinces of that vast empire. Daniel and his companions were such active servants of Jehovah as to cause Nebuchadnezzar to make a decree concerning Jehovah, and publish it throughout his kingdom. Later Darius made a similar proclamation. When the time came for the Jews to return from this captivity, Cyrus made a proclamation in which he announced that Jehovah had given him his great dominion and had charged him to build Jehovah a house in Jerusalem (Whiteside 26-28).

Gentiles lived by what is referred to as the Law of Conscience:

But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) (Rom. 2:10-15).

THE JEWISH PROBLEM

Romans 2:19-29 condemns the Jew for not honoring the written Law, the Law of Moses, or the Old Covenant:

Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God (Rom. 2:23-29).

THE VERDICT

Romans chapter three indicts both Jew and Gentile who lived prior to the Gospel age. Whether through the Law of Conscience or the Law of Moses, righteousness could have been attained. One cannot find that for which he is not seeking. Paul then states the summation of the charges against the accused: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Today, only through the Gospel can one be declared righteous. All men must hear the Truth to have the opportunity to become saved (Mark 16:15-16). The theme of the epistle addressed to the saints in Rome is: “How can a man be justified?” Paul gives the clear answer: “Only through the Gospel” (Rom. 1:16).

IN GOD WE TRUST?

Rebellion towards those matters, which are Heavenly approved, has led this nation away from the godly principles upon which it is founded. Also, all forms of media are predominately anti-God. Take for example Hollywood’s obsession with homosexuality, which is not *gay* by any stretch of the imagination. Sodomites are touted as normal; big media’s agenda to induce Americans into believing that a large percentage of the population is either lesbian, homosexual, or bi-sexual is lucidly apparent. Individuals endowed with *higher* intelligence look down on us Bible believers as those possessing archaic views pertaining to human sexuality. New words were coined to describe, more than likely supporters of the Bible, those who oppose homosexuality. Webster defines *homophobia* as “**irrational hatred or fear** of homosexuals or homosexuality (emph. SWG).” *Irrational* as per Mr. Webster means “lacking the power to reason; contrary to reason; senseless; unreasonable; absurd.” There you have it, the academic elitists have spoken. *Irrational*, of course, is anyone who would commit a violent offense against a homosexual. “Love the sinner, hate the sin,” is more than mere words: it is Bible. Love motivates one to share with the offender the life-changing message of the Gospel.

Liberal politicians, big media, and the academic elitists are bed-fellows with the psuedo-scientists who propagandistically profess: “biology ‘proves’ that one can be/is ‘born’ a lesbian, homosexual, or bi-sexual.” Sadly, and confusingly, some of the *scientists* who promote the aforementioned, despicable view *profess* belief in God. Conclusion:

God is the Author of the **genetic code or DNA** which *programs* some to be born homosexuals, lesbians, or bi-sexual.

The oft-used cliché: “you can have your cake and eat it too,” applies to those who argue in favor of *homosexual* Christians. Sodom and Gomorrah have been resurrected in the form of *gay* churches and *clergy*. “Love is the theme of the Bible, not condemnation or judgment,” the advocates and adherents aver. Quite to the contrary of “political correctness,” the one who trusts in God’s Word declares, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11). He also refuses to be led by Hollywood’s Satanic onslaught, for he proclaims his confidence in the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures by declaring, “Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105). He accepts and teaches what the Lord says concerning this subject:

Have ye not **read**, that he which **made them** at the beginning made them **male and female**, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? (Mat. 19:4-5).

He rejects the notion of *life* partners (the new wave of attacks on the biblically defined family); he joyfully meditates on “thus saith the Lord”; he calmly reminds others that the Lord is always in control (Mat. 28:18).

A sobering thought relative to man’s futile attempt to usurp Jehovah’s throne must be noted here:

Modern man is like the French revolutionist who had helped storm the Bastille. He had scaled the Cathedral of Notre Dame, torn the cross from the spire and dashed it into fragments on the pavement of Paris far below. He said to a peasant: “We are going to pull down all that reminds you of God!” “Citizen,” was the calm reply, “then pull down the stars!” As though man, who has successfully orbited some hardware in space, using material God has supplied, and who has out a feeble footprint on the moon—as though man can compete with a God who has orbited a hundred million galaxies! As though man, who has solved some of the subtleties of the atom, and managed to scare himself half to death in the process, can compete with a God who stokes the nuclear fires of a billion stars! No wonder He that sits in the heavens simply laughs. Man—for all his technology and talents, for all his science and skill, for all his inventions—is still man—mere mortal man. And God is God—eternal, uncreated, self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, infallible, holy, high, and lifted up, worshiped by countless angelic throngs. God laughs at men for being

such fools. “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the lord shall have them in derision” (Phillips 1:25).

All of America’s currency states: “In God we trust.” In reality, God seemingly is the object of much of this nation’s scorn. America would do good to heed these supremely salient passages: “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin *is* a reproach to any people” (Pro. 14:34). Again: “Blessed *is* the nation whose God *is* the LORD” (Psa. 33:12).

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

The plight of the four Hebrew boys is one worthy of consideration. Their trust in Jehovah is both legendary and encouraging. Thousands, if not millions, of sermons have been preached to honor their memory and to encourage the downtrodden. In no wise can this author improve upon what has been said about these great soldiers of faith.

Daniel and his friends saw and experienced many things:

The Negatives

- They witnessed the moral decay of their homeland.
- They witnessed the absence of righteousness among many of their leaders and fellow citizens.
- They witnessed the violent death of some of their family and friends.
- They witnessed the destruction of their homeland at the hands of heathens.
- They could have witnessed women being violently raped.
- They could have witnessed children become orphans.
- They were made prisoners of war.
- Their rights to become husbands were stripped.
- Their rights to become fathers were violated.
- Their enemies attempted to change their native tongue.
- Their captives attempted to change their godly given names to those honoring pagan God.
- Daniel’s Hebrew name means “God is my Judge”; the pagan name given him means “Bel will protect.”
- “Haniah” means “God is gracious”; his pagan name means “inspiration of the sun.”
- “Mishael” means “God is without equal”; his ungodly name means “belonging to Aku.”
- “Azariah” means “God is my Helper”; his Babylonian name means “servant of Nebo.”
- They were challenged to compromise their beliefs.
- Their lives were threatened for not bowing to a pagan god or mere man in worship.
- They were surrounded by a host of ungodly influences.

- Daniel appears to have remained in exile until his death; if he were of royal blood (Dan. 1:3), he went from being a prince to a prisoner.

Positives

- Daniel, being a prophet and contemporary of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, was spiritually prepared for the collapse of his beloved homeland.
- It is implied by their actions that someone (parents, relatives, etc.) taught them per the commands of Deuteronomy 6:4-6.
- They honored the Lord through their diet (Dan. 1:5-15).
- Because of their faithfulness, in spite of their difficulties, God blessed them in special way (Dan. 1:17-20).
- Daniel sought the assistance of the faithful, and, of course, the Lord during difficult times (Dan. 2:12-25).
- His circumstances led him to pray with those of like precious faith (Dan. 2:17-23); he was a man of prayer (Dan. 6:1-11).
- He shunned not to renounce the futility of the false teachers around him (Dan. 2:26-27).
- He shunned not to reveal Jehovah to the highest officer of the most powerful nation on earth (Dan. 2:28).
- He revealed the omniscience and omnipotence of Jehovah to the pagan king (Dan. 2:29-45).
- He was instrumental in leading the pagan king to acknowledge Jehovah's supremacy (Dan. 2:46-47).
- His trust in Jehovah resulted in his being rewarded graciously by a pagan government (Dan. 2:49).
- His God given wisdom yielded great influence among the heathens around him (Dan. 2:49).
- He used his influence to assist other believers (Dan. 2:49).
- His actions prevented the unnecessary death of many people (Dan. 2:1-13).
- Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah literally came through their trial of fire:

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (Dan. 3:17-18).

- Their declaration is one of the greatest illustrations of trust in God in the Bible.
- Their unwavering trust in Jehovah caused the ungodly king to acknowledge God as the only God to whom the Jews owe homage and praise (Dan. 3:27-30).
- The punishment for violating the above law was death in a cruel manner.

The four faithful Hebrew boys illustrate for us how trust in Jehovah benefits the believer, especially during the most difficult times.

CONCLUSION

Believers in the Bible find solace in many passages of Scripture. Here are but a few which remind us of the multiple benefits of trusting in Jehovah.

The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want (Psa. 23:1).

I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD (Psa. 27:13-14).

In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness (Psa. 31:1).

But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou *art* my God (Psa. 31:14).

In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me (Psa. 56:11).

Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he *is* their help and their shield (Psa. 115:11).

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psa. 46:1).

Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until *these* calamities be overpast (Psa. 57:1).

Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him *cometh* my salvation. He only *is* my rock and my salvation; *he is* my defence; I shall not be greatly moved... Trust in him at all times; *ye* people, pour out your heart before him: God *is* a refuge for us (Psa. 62:1-2, 8).

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths (Pro. 3:5-6).

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you (1 Pet. 5:7).

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Clark, Winfred J. *Expositions of "The Expositor."* Ed. Michael R. McDaniel. Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 2001.
- Delitzsch, F. *Commentary on the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980.
- Haley, Robin W. *A Commentary on the Book of Romans.* Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1994.
- Phillips, John. *Exploring the Psalms.* Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1988.
- Webster's New World Dictionary Third Collegiate Edition.* Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, n.d.

Whiteside, Robertson L. *Commentary on Romans*. Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation Publications, 1988.

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO IS FORGIVEN PSALM 32:1-2

Jeff Archey



Jeff Archey lives in Hendersonville, Tennessee, and works under the oversight of the elders of the New Hope Road Church of Christ.

After several years in local “part-time” work, Jeff began 2001 in lectureship appointments and meeting work along with his efforts at the Nashville School of Preaching and Biblical Studies located at the Crieve Hall Church of Christ in Nashville where he has taught for three years.

He has also spoken in several youth gatherings, various lectureships, and directed the annual New Hope Road Lectureship for three years. He is a graduate of the Nashville School of Preaching and Biblical Studies and the Great Commission School in Nashville and also attended David Lipscomb College and Freed-Hardeman College.

In secular work, he is a sales representative for Russell Stover Candies covering the north middle Tennessee and southern Kentucky area.

He and his wife Renita have been married fourteen years.

INTRODUCTION

“Blessed *is he* whose transgression *is* forgiven, *whose* sin *is* covered. Blessed *is* the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit *there is* no guile” (Psa. 32:1-2). What a wonderful passage and a wonderful blessing—to be forgiven of sin! Thomas stated, “Forgiveness is an attribute of God; and only those who have been forgiven are in position to understand and appreciate its meaning, and to manifest the spirit of forgiveness toward others” (*Another 7*).

If anyone could understand and appreciate the forgiveness of God, it is the writer of this text: David. Bible students recall from 2 Samuel 11-12 David’s desire for and committing adultery with Bathsheba, the planned death of Uriah, the rebuke from Nathan, and the death of David’s child because of David’s sin. Through the forgiveness of God, David writes this wonderful text of praise to God from which one can truly see that a man is blessed when he is forgiven!

The text of Psalm 32:1-2 is quite interesting because it builds from one part to the next. Quite obviously, one that rebels and revolts against

God is a sinner and against the very blessings God bestows. He desires to live His way, not God's. Yet, one can be forgiven of a rebellious life. When forgiven this person begins walking in the light, and now the formerly rebellious one's sin is covered continually in his walk (lifestyle) with the Lord. This person is assured that what God forgives He forgets, and punishment will not come upon the faithful child of God. Finally, as one grows in Christ daily, that former life of deceit and rebellion is put farther and farther away and he grows and remains a new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). One who is forgiven is truly blessed.

TRANSGRESSION IS FORGIVEN!

“Transgression” is translated from the Hebrew word *pashà* meaning “to break away (from just authority), i.e. trespass, apostatize, quarrel;—offend, rebel, revolt, transgress” (Strong 97). By reading this definition one can see how a man is blessed when he is forgiven! In transgressing God, we trespass, going into areas we should not go. Reared in the country, I fully understand “No Trespassing” signs. Simply put, one did not go there, nor did one have any business or concern there! Trespassing leads to apostasy. Sadly, dear reader, one who apostatizes from the body of Christ, His blessed church, begins by trespassing, simply going and having a part in what he should not do. Quite obviously, a quarrel happens. God and His will are transgressed, fellowship and harmony are disrupted, and a disobedient struggle begins. In preparation for this effort, the more I looked at *transgression*, I became grateful that transgressions could be forgiven. No matter how long one may trespass and apostatize, God is willing to forgive and once that individual repents and returns (see 2 Pet. 3:9), God will forgive!

Harris discusses *transgression* when he writes:

In a context of international relationships, the verbal form designates a casting off of allegiance, a rebellion against rulers. This secular concept of revolt appears in 1 and 2 Kings and parallels in 2 Chronicles. By analogy, but in a religious sense, Israel was accused of rebelling against her divine king and the established covenant between them (Isa. 1:28; 48:8; Ezk. 2:3 Hos. 8:1). The acts of transgression, i.e. going beyond the limits of God's laws, have impact on inner attitudes which create deceitfulness (Isa. 59:13) or a distorted love for this “independence” from God (Amos 4:4). It may dull one's knowledge of the right (Hos. 8:1; Psa. 51:13) and be a rigid refusal to accept correction (Jer. 2:8,29; Hos. 7:13; Zeph. 3:11; Amos 4:4) (741).

“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). From the inspired Word to the uninspired pen of man, transgression of God’s law will condemn man’s soul!

However, blessed is the man that is forgiven! My friend, see the positive over the negative. Forgiveness is a blessing from God; no matter how far one may go, when, as the prodigal son, he comes to himself (Luke 15:11-32), he may exclaim thoroughly the words of that blessed hymn: “I’ve wandered far away from God, *now I’m coming home*” (emp. JA)! Forgiveness is a pardon from transgression.

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

In Hebrews 8:8-12, the Hebrews writer, through inspiration, records this prophecy and in verse 13 declares its fulfillment. When God forgives, He forgets! What a wonderful message to proclaim to a lost and dying world, and what a wonderful reminder to the faithful child of the living God! No matter how hideous and rebellious one’s sin may be, again, God will forgive if one will repent and obey His will.

In studying the life of the apostle Paul, he is introduced in Acts 7 as Stephen is being put to death, and the *executioners* are laying their garments at Saul’s feet. In Acts 8:1-3 he persecuted the church and placed those of *the way* into prison. Ellis stated that Paul was “a fierce and persistent persecutor of Christians” (32). However, in Acts 9 we find Paul on the road to Damascus and as the Lord appeared to him confronting him with his transgression, Paul no longer wished to trespass against Christ. When the beloved message of the Christ, the gospel, confronts us, our response needs to be as Paul’s. We need to obey what we are told to do from the Word of God. In so doing, through our faith, repentance, confession of the Christ, and our baptism into Christ, our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16)! We are forgiven

from our transgressions. We are also reminded of the wonderful assuring passages from long ago:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isa. 1:18).

Who *is* a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth *in* mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:18-19).

Yes, my friend, blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven through the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7)!

SIN IS COVERED

Two other words for *covered* would be “hide” and “overwhelm” (Strong 56). Only God can hide one’s sin and most certainly He can overwhelm sin! “Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin” (Psa. 85:2).

As blessed individuals who are forgiven, we rejoice daily knowing that our sins are covered and that our Lord will overwhelm the sin in our lives. This is not a “once saved/always saved” doctrine! We must live as blessed redeemed people! One of my favorite texts makes it clear:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:7-10).

John is writing to the Christian, one who is in fellowship with his fellow Christians and with the Father (1 John 1:3). John continues by teaching that “[our] joy may be full” (1 John 1:4) and that we are to not “walk in darkness” but to do the truth (1 John 1:6). This context does not in any way acknowledge that a Christian can live a worldly life and be acceptable to God (see also 1 John 2:15-17; Gal. 5:1-4; 1 Cor. 5:11-13). Why would anyone wish to return to a life of transgression that has been forgiven and sin that has been covered?

The text of 1 John 1:7-10 teaches us about forgiveness. We also learn that sin is *overwhelmed* by living in Christ:

We have *direction* (v. 7)! We walk in the light with the Christ where there is no darkness. By walking with Him faithfully, we continue in fellowship one with another as His blood “cleanseth us from all sin.” The blood of Christ keeps our sin covered! Concerning the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, David Brown stated:

“Cleanse” is from the Greek word *katharizei*. It is a present tense verb. Thus it means that as one *continues* to “walk in the light,” the blood of Christ keeps on cleansing one from all sin (every kind and every form) (79).

We must not be *deceived* (v. 8)! We are sinners (Rom. 3:23), we have “an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1), and His blood cleanses us continually. As we walk with the Christ, we walk in the truth that makes us free (John 8:32)!

We depend on God and Christ (v. 9)! As stated earlier, God forgives and forgets! If we confess our sins we know God forgives because He is faithful (Heb. 10:23). He forgives, and the cleansing blood of the Christ keeps on forgiving!

We declare His name (v. 10)! His Word is in us, and as we declare the Word, we declare the truth (John 17:17). In declaring the truth, we proclaim the gospel to a lost and dying world (Acts 13:32), constantly reminding one another of its blessings (1 Cor. 15:1; Acts 20:27) and His righteousness (Rom. 3:25). We dare not use our arrogance in saying we do not sin. We declare the Christ because through his blood He keeps on forgiving the Christian!

In summary, Coffman says, “This great verse is the source of incredible joy, assurance and consolation to the child of God” (380), to which we say “**Amen!**”

On the other hand, we find many Christians who try to cover sins the **wrong** way. Leslie Thomas lists several examples of those who had tried to cover their sins the wrong way (*One* 89). Adam tried to blame Eve (Gen. 3:12), who had sinned as well—no forgiveness! Achan tried to hide his (Jos. 7)—no forgiveness! As penned earlier, David tried to push his off on someone else (2 Sam. 11)—no forgiveness! Today, there are those who believe the passing of time covers sins. Sins not forgiven will not be covered by time (1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 10:31). God forgets sin that is forgiven but remembers sins of which one has not repented!

This author recalls a couple coming to him after preaching a lesson on forgiveness. This couple was faithful in attendance and diligent

workers in the kingdom. However, for several years they were inactive, therefore unfaithful in their lives. They came back to the building as friends, but they were not restored to the **church** and their Lord. Their study of forgiveness prompted them to study further, looking at their lives through the mirror—God’s Word (Jam. 1:25). In so doing, they taught themselves that their lives had to be made right. The next service, they were restored and now he is a deacon in the body of Christ.

Although the author is unknown, the following article, *Slipping Back In*, expands on the point that time cannot do what God only can do.

In the church today, there are many backsliders—and perhaps some “insliders.” Recently while conducting a meeting, one of the leaders of the church came forward to ask the prayers of the church. The congregation was electrified, disturbed, and puzzled because they knew he was a fine man. His life was completely above reproach. His confession was not of backsliding, but of “insliding.”

He stated in substance, “A number of years ago, I was completely out of duty, refusing to attend church services and conducting myself in a way that wasn’t complimentary to the cause of Christ. I came back, not to make a confession, but to “slip in.” I sat on the back seat for a while, moved up a few seats and then after about a year, I was sitting on the front seat, singing as loudly as anyone else. This continued until I won the confidence of my brethren and they forgot about my sins and appointed me to be a deacon in the church. Even though the brethren forgot about my sins, I do not believe that God has. God knows that I just “slipped” back in. This time I am coming forward like the prodigal and saying, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight; and I am ready to work, having corrected, I trust, matters both with the church and with my Heavenly Father.”

Blessed is the Christian who knows that the blood of Christ covers one’s sin if one continues in His Way, walking in the light!

IMPUTETH NOT INIQUITY

Regardless of one’s wickedness, an individual is forgiven if he will believe in God and Christ (Heb. 11:6; John 8:24), repents (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38), confesses that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 8:37; Phi. 2:11), and is baptized into Christ so his sins will be forgiven (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). He is a blessed man whose transgression is forgiven.

This individual’s sin is covered. His lifestyle has changed, and as he walks with Christ and serves Him daily, confessing his sin, God will forgive him through the blood of Christ that continually cleanses him.

We see how this text *builds* meaning that a blessed individual continues to grow and experience the spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3). In our text, we find that man is blessed because “the LORD imputeth not iniquity” (Psa. 32:2).

Another word for *impute* would be “compute.” With one’s trespasses forgiven and sins covered, what would God compute or “add up”? God will not compute iniquity upon His children. *Iniquity* is also defined as “punishment” (Strong 86). How can the faithful, forgiven child of God be punished? He cannot as long as he is faithfully serving our Lord. He is forgiven! He is faithfully walking in the light! “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19).

From the inspired pen of Paul, God will not compute iniquity or transgressions! Obviously, how can God add that which is forgiven, released, and forgotten? God will not punish those who are reconciled to Him.

Concerning *reconciliation*, Thayer writes:

In the N. T., of the restoration of the favor of God to sinners that repent and put their trust in the expiatory death of Christ...allow yourselves to be reconciled to God; do not oppose your return into [His] favor, but lay hold of that favor now offered you (333).

May we recall our study of 1 John 1:7-10? In each passage we see the word *if*. *If* is a word of choice. **If** we do something or not hinges on whether the remainder of the blessing or curse comes. **If** we believe and are baptized into Christ and **if** we remain faithful, we will have a home in heaven; but **if** we fail to be obedient to the Lord who died for us, unfortunately we will spend an eternity in a devil’s hell.

For **if**, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Rom. 5:10).

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto *his* brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:17).

Again, it is our choice, yet if we hold on to the favor God gives through reconciliation, our iniquities are not computed, nor will our punishment be added up. With great anticipation we long for the judgment day declaration, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the

kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat. 25:34).

NO GUILF IN MAN’S SPIRIT

With man’s rebellious transgression forgiven, his sin covered with no iniquities or punishment to compute or add up, the passage of Psalm 32:1-2 concludes its *building* with “in whose spirit *there is* no guile.”

The blessed man who is forgiven of God has a new direction with his life. The *spirit* of man simply means his life, his very breath.

And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the **breath of life**; and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7).

For what man knoweth the things of a man, **save the spirit of man which is in him**? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:11).

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and **the spirit shall return unto God who gave it** (Ecc. 12:7).

Strong’s defines *guile* as “treachery, deceit; false; idle; slack; slothful” (109). Quite obviously, the blessed man will have nothing to do with these traits! Imagine these traits listed on an application for employment. Would you hire this type of individual? Parents, your daughter brings home a young man with these characteristics. What would your reaction be? For that matter, would you want your son to have these characteristics? Certainly not! From the definition, we see a lazy, lying person on our hands—no work from his body and a lie from his lips!

Wherefore **laying aside** all malice, and **all guile**, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious (1 Pet. 2:1-3).

Same as *if*, a choice is upon the blessed man who is forgiven of God. We must lay aside things that hinder us! Cast it off! No longer make it a part of our lives! Our focus as forgiven people is elsewhere toward the Christ! If we are walking with Him, we must keep our focus!

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us **lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us**, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, **Looking unto Jesus** the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).

Looking unto Jesus and desiring His Word daily will strengthen us to lay aside sin. We grow in Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). In growing, we leave the milk and move onward to the *meat* of the Word. The Hebrews writer wrote through inspiration:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

Nathanael was a man whose life had no guile. He was not a liar or a lazy man. We see that he was not lazy because when Philip urged him to come and see Jesus, he went (John 1:45-51). He searched out what he had heard and affirmed it! Jesus praised him for being “an Israelite...in whom is no guile” (47), and Nathaniel’s life proved such. We see the growth of Nathanael declaring that Jesus is the Son of God (49), and Jesus’ promise that he would see “greater things” (50). As the blessed man who is forgiven and whose spirit sees no guile, a great lesson is learned from Nathanael.¹

Jesus was found with no guile in His mouth (1 Pet. 2:22). The redeemed of God are found with no guile in their mouths and no fault (Rev. 14:5). As blessed, forgiven children of the Almighty, they press onward each day constantly being on guard with what may enter their lives.

Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man (Mat. 15:17-18).

Treachery, deceit, and lies that come from our mouths are sown in our hearts. Satan and the world are constantly firing at our armor as soldiers on the spiritual battlefield! Day by day, through the printed page, radio, television, and personal relationships many fiery darts are hurled at us. As blessed, forgiven people, we must walk daily always on guard (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

CONCLUSION

As we see throughout this volume, we are truly blessed. The theme *Beatitudes* is timely for all time. One that has preached and taught this theme in the past will proclaim it in the present and in turn declare it in

the future. He will also teach that such bits of wisdom are blessed reminders of what the Lord has done. Truly beatitudes are “attitudes to become!” *Beatitudes* remind the children of God of the blessings we have in Christ Jesus and to evangelize to the lost the soul-saving message of Christ by:

1. Letting them know that their rebellion and transgression, no matter how great, can be forgiven of God if they will obey the gospel of Jesus Christ
2. Therefore beginning a new and better direction by walking in the light and confessing their sins knowing that God continues to forgive them
3. Assurance that the Lord cannot compute the iniquity forgiven nor punishment that would come upon them
4. Continuing to grow and mature in the faith by growing in Christ every day sowing good news and good things in their hearts and minds!

Blessed is the man who is forgiven and covered! May we join with the beloved apostle Paul in declaring:

But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:57-58).

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Brown, David. “Fellowship With God And One Another; 1 John 1:5-10.” *Studies In 1,2,3 John*. Ed. Dub McClish. Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Co., 1987. 75-83.
- Coffman, James Burton. *Commentary on James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*. Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979.
- Ellis, Steve. “The Apostle Paul: Pharisee and Persecutor.” *The Apostle Paul: Great Soldier Of The Cross*. Ed. Curtis A. Cates. Pulaski, TN: Sain Publishing, 1996. 27-38.
- Harris, Robert Laird. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980.
- Strong, James. “A Concise Dictionary of the words in The Hebrew Bible,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.
- Thayer, Joseph H. *Thayer’s Greek—English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999.
- Thomas, Leslie G. *One Hundred Sermons*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1956.
- - -. *Another Hundred Sermons*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1979.

ENDNOTE

¹A side note for the reader concerning Nathanael. Many scholars believe he and the apostle Bartholomew are one and the same. Woods writes, “There is reason to conclude that Nathanael is to be identified with Bartholomew (Matt. 10:3), and was thus one of the apostles. In each instance, when he is mentioned, it is in connection with men who were, or were to become apostles. Neither Matthew, Mark nor Luke mention Nathanael; John does not mention Bartholomew: the name Bartholomew is a family name, as Bar-Jonah, Bar-Jesus, etc. In the list of apostles by Matthew, Mark and Luke, Bartholomew is coupled with Philip who brought Nathanael to Christ. These and other considerations make it probable that Nathanael and Bartholomew are different names of the same person” (Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary on The Gospel According To John*. Nashville: TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1981. P. 48.)

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO CONSIDERS THE POOR

PSALM 41:1

Tim Smith



Tim Smith was born in Clay County, Arkansas. He began preaching the Gospel, with the encouragement of his maternal grandparents, in 1981. Tim attended the Bellview Preacher Training School and took several classes at Alabama Christian School of Religion. His first full-time work as a preacher was with the church of Christ in McLellan, Florida.

Tim has worked with congregations in Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and Missouri, and is presently working with the Enon Church of Christ in Webb, Alabama.

Tim is married to the former Freda Sue Gott, and they have two daughters: Lee Ann and Amanda Sue.

INTRODUCTION

The assigned topic, “Blessed Is the Man Who Considers the Poor,” comes (so far as the phrase is concerned) from the first verse of the final Psalm of the first book of Psalms. We shall first endeavor to consider the lesson in the light of the composition of which it is a part and then we will make a few observations about our duty to the poor in general.

This poem is addressed “to the chief Musician.” It, as most of the other psalms, was intended to be used in the public worship of the people of the Lord, and was therefore sent to the chief musician for the purpose of putting music to the words. The specific occasion is lost, but the circumstances in which our writer found himself may fairly be thought to have involved bodily sickness, and this sickness seems to have been either brought on or worsened by the ingratitude and treachery of his family and close friends. Leupold gives this composition the title: “The Prayer Of A Sick Man Beset By Cruel Enemies” (329).

BEATITUDE

Blessed Is He

“The object is to describe the advantages of doing what is here said; or the excellence of the spirit which would be manifested in such a case, and the effect which this would have on his own happiness” (Barnes 367). There is great satisfaction to be found in doing for others, out of a spirit of love, that which they cannot do for themselves.

That Considereth the Poor

Literally the *poor* here should be rendered “sick” or “weak,” and we get the message that is still true. When we consider how difficult others have it, sincerely and carefully, we cannot help but think ourselves blessed. I wonder when it will happen, but so far as I know it has not yet, that the man suffering will look around and find that no one has ever suffered as he has. If we look hard enough, we will find those who have it worse than ourselves.

The Lord Will Deliver Him

That is, God will intervene on his behalf. We are not told just how this was to have been done, but the miraculous would have been in order in the days of the miraculous. In our day we have no miracles performed, but there are other ways for the Lord to deliver us in our hour of trial. We have the Truth and its sustaining and converting power; we have providence and prayer; we have the support of faithful brethren; etc.

In Time of Trouble

Again, the literal version would be “in the day of evil,” but the meaning is not substantially altered. “This is the first happy effect or result of showing proper sympathy with others in their troubles. It is a statement of the general principle that the Lord will deal with us as we do with others” (Barnes 368).

THE PROMISE

The Lord Will Preserve Him, and Keep Him Alive

This is a general principle that often appears in the Sacred Writings, and though somewhat enigmatic, we would do well to seek it out. For instance, we read in the first Psalm:

Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper (Psa. 1:1-3).

We are not told just how he shall be *blessed*, but that he will. A similar thought is introduced anew in the thirty-seventh song: “Trust in the LORD, and do good; *so* shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Psa. 37:3-4). When our Lord had introduced the physical blessings of providence, He proceeded to say: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33). We are told what to do, and we are told what will follow; but we are not told **how** these things will follow. We know that the miraculous is not the answer, for 1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians 4, and other passages indicate that the miraculous was to cease to be active when the Truth was fully revealed; but, we are nowhere told that God would cease provisions for His faithful. Paul wrote: “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8). What will happen? Our lives will be made better. How will this happen? We are not told. Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10). We are told **that** our lives will be made better, but we are not told **how**. This leads this author to the conclusion that **how** is not very important. We may know assuredly the truth about the **how** that Scripture excludes, but seemingly not any more than this.

And He Shall Be Blessed Upon the Earth

Much of Christianity deals with the after-a-while, but often more deals with the here and now than men appreciate. With Barnes in this connection (in a limited way) we agree: “This is... so often referred to in the Psalms and elsewhere, that the effect of religion will be to promote happiness and prosperity in this life” (368).

And Thou Wilt Not Deliver Him unto the Will of His Enemies

Here we appeal to the margin for a fuller understanding of the statement, and I think a more proper one as well: *Do not thou deliver him to the will of his enemies*. This is a prayer, a request, that God not allow the righteous to fall helplessly into the hands of the wicked. We know that requests are sometimes denied (cf., Stephen, Jesus, Paul, and

etc.), but we also see in David's' life and the lives of others that sometimes they are granted. "The idea is that he would find God to be a defender and a helper when he was attacked by his foes" (Barnes 368).

THE LORD

The Covenant God—*YHWH*. Often in the Psalms we see God so referred to, and there is a lesson in it for us. God had a covenant with the Israelites that differed from any arrangement He had with any other people. Only the faithful of Israel could address Him (properly) as *YHWH*. There may well have been something implied in the prayer before us (as well as other prayers) in the invocation of this name—it is as much as indicating that God would, by virtue of the covenant, show favor to the petitioner who was one of His own people as opposed to the oppressors who were not.

Will Strengthen Him

Jehovah will empower, sustain, and provide sustenance for him. It is important, also, to note here that God might choose to do no more than help the afflicted to find the power within himself to overcome his obstacles rather than removing them overtly.

Upon the Bed of Languishing

Inherent in this word is the idea of sickness, an enduring and painful sickness. David affirms that God will be with His faithful through this difficult hour. Personal experience in watching the suffering of others has allowed this writer to draw a firm conclusion on this point. The man who thinks himself accompanied by the Lord is able to face even death with confidence. Further, the man who is faithful when facing death and is so held to be by his friends and family is usually described as having passed to a better state in death. Contrariwise, when a man thinks himself without God, the approach of death is a most horrid thing. Lest we stray too far from the context, the thought seems to be still tied with verses 1 and 2, and the meaning is that the one who shows compassion and sympathy with the poor and weak, especially with them in their hours of trial and even sickness leading to death, will find himself so blessed in his own hour of need.

Thou Wilt Make All His Bed in His Sickness

We again have the promise of God's help to His faithful in their hour of greatest need. Our fickleness leads us to put off God until it is

convenient for ourselves to turn to Him, but in facing death there is no putting off. When we approach that hour, we need the assurance that God is with us. David affirms that He is. Oh, that all men would be so dedicated as to be able to be this confident in affirming the protection of the Lord!

It is significant that God cares for the poor, thereby setting for us an example. In Psalm 12:5 the inspired penman wrote, “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set *him* in safety *from him that puffeth at him.*” He has set Himself up to be the protector of the poor, as we learn in Psalm 35:10: “All my bones shall say, LORD, who *is* like unto thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?”

It matters not how this world treats one, God is able to deliver him. The Psalmist says, “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, *and* lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set *him* with princes, *even* with the princes of his people” (Psa. 113:7-8). His presence is the great equalizer of rich and poor: “The rich and poor meet together: the LORD *is* the maker of them all” (Pro. 22:2).

When God considers a man, He looks not to his wealth, his earnings, or his social status; He considers what is truly the essence of a man—his character. If we would be godly (imitators of God), we must look with compassion on all men, whether rich or poor, and do for them what they cannot do for themselves.

The Scriptures often inform us of our duty to those less fortunate than ourselves. It is not now, nor has it ever been, a matter of knowing what to do with respect to the poor. We know what to do, we simply must find the will to do it. Too often churches are interested only in those whereby they may be profited, catering to the rich even to the point of compromise. This author has been told to be careful about preaching on certain subjects in certain congregations because some wealthy or otherwise influential member held to error on that subject, and should they be offended, the church would have to do without their contribution. This one has seen poor members mistreated by the wealthy members simply because there was little or no recourse available to the poor. All such action is sinful. It has long been a part of the Divine Knowledge that people mistreat the poor: “The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy” (Psa. 37:14). Again, in Proverbs 14:20, we read, “The

poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich *hath* many friends.” These things may be found in the world, but the faithful have been given clear instructions as to how to view and how to treat the poor, and we would do well to heed them. Note God’s condemnation of Israel in Amos 2:6-8:

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the *same* maid, to profane my holy name: And they lay *themselves* down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned *in* the house of their God.

God clearly sides with those who consider the poor. In the realm of treatment of the poor, we know that a consideration of monetary matters has never been allowed to take precedence over the welfare of God’s faithful. Moses instructs Israel that:

If thou lend money to *any of* my people *that is* poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour’s raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that *is* his covering only, it *is* his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I *am* gracious (Exo. 22:25-27).

This is seen again in Leviticus 19:9-10:

And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather *every* grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I *am* the LORD your God.

An appreciation of one’s duties to the poor is absolutely essential to fidelity before the Lord. Jesus taught this lesson in Matthew 19:16-22:

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is*, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor,

and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

One of the first lessons we teach our children is to share with others. This is also an essential component in our faith, as the Lord taught in Luke 3:11: "He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." Again, the beloved physician records in Luke 12:33: "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth." In sharing our wealth with others, Jesus taught that we should be careful not to share it merely with those who might profit us, but with the "less fortunate," as we read in Luke 14:12-14:

Then said he also to him that bade him, when thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor *thy* rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

Paul summarized one of the conclusions arrived at by the Jerusalem Conference when he wrote, "Only *they would* that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do" (Gal. 2:10). Paul, having adopted the principle, states it plainly for the Galatians when he says, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). He told the brethren at Ephesus, "But rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28).

One of the requirements of a widow that was to receive support from the first century brethren was her fidelity in caring for the poor:

Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work (1 Tim. 5:9-10).

James taught the necessity of caring for the poor in the final verse of the first chapter of the New Testament book bearing his name, writing, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this,

To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (Jam. 1:27). He continued the lesson in chapter 2:1-17:

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it* profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

One of the factors that stood forth as witness to the condemnation of the wealthy in the first century was their mistreatment of the poor, as James tells us in James 5:4: “Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.”

Perhaps the greatest illustration of proper treatment of the poor (needy) is found in the story of the Good Samaritan. We read in Luke 10:30-37:

And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked *on him*, and passed by on the other side. But

a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*, And went to *him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

The Samaritan did as he should have done, and he did as we should do.

The ever practical John, writing of the duties of brethren one to another, said:

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him (1 John 3:17-19).

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Joy may be found in serving others.
2. The Lord treats us as we treat others.
3. We may properly ask the Lord for that of which we are incapable.
4. Though evil men oppose a man, he may expect a full and fair evaluation of his character when in audience with the Lord.
5. A multitude of enemies wilt before the power of the Lord.

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
 Barnes, Albert. *Notes On The Old Testament*. 1870-1872. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1983.
 Leupold, H. C. *Exposition Of The Psalms*. 1961. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1969.

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO DWELLS IN THE LORD'S HOUSE

PSALM 84:4

Mark Mosher



Mark Mosher was born on November 24, 1965, in Erie, Pennsylvania. He is married to Beckye Bell, and they have three children: Caitlin, Cassidy, and Callahan.

Mark graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching with the equivalent to a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts in Religion. He also graduated Summa Cum Laude from Southern Christian University with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He is currently enrolled at Southern Christian University working toward a Masters in Family Therapy

He has done local work in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Florida and has conducted gospel meetings in several locations and has spoken on lectureships in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Arkansas, and Louisiana. He has been the preacher for the Pine Street Church of Christ in Crossett, Arkansas, since January 2001. Mark has been the director of the Northeast Florida Lectureship and is currently the director of the Pine Street Lectureship. He has taught part time for the Florida School of Preaching and has written a book titled: *Is The Lads To Leaders/Leaderettes Really Good For Our Children?*

INTRODUCTION

This author deeply appreciates the theme of this year's lectureship, *Beatitudes*. To study in-depth these blessings bestowed upon us as Christians, to just stop and think about how blessed we truly are, will spur us to work harder and result in strengthening the church as a whole.

“Blessed” from *esher* means joyousness. And that joy is dependant upon the path we choose in life (Wilson 41). Many have sought such a life but few have found it, because they have not sought the proper source, the Word of God. *Blessed* has its source in the promise made to Abraham.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will

bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3).

Abraham was truly blessed of God for he received great wealth and riches. Many of the blessings dispensed in the Old Testament were physical in nature. Yet, as the plan of redemption unfolded from the Old Testament to the New Testament the physical blessings from God decreased as the spiritual blessing increased until its culmination in the New Testament. Today, we have all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3). Abraham, like all who lived in the Patriarchal dispensation as well as those who lived during Mosaic dispensation, received salvation in the same source as those who live during the Christian dispensation, Christ Jesus. Paul stated:

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God (Rom. 3:24-25).

However, although those who lived in both the Patriarchal and the Mosaic dispensations received salvation just as we do, they were not as blessed as those who are in Christ Jesus today. It was said of John the Baptist, "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Mat. 11:11). John the Baptist, as great a man as he was, did not have the privilege of being in God's true house and hence did not receive all spiritual blessings. Christians today have these blessings, but they tend to lose sight of them. Because of this it is truly a monumental task trying to get the average Christian to understand his relationship to Christ. Paul in explaining this problem among the Jewish people wrote, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). For one to have **all** spiritual blessings in Christ is to realize that there is nothing left out of his relationship to God.

It is thought that the authorship of Psalm 84 was one of the sons of Korah. It is also taught that one of the sons of Korah was temporarily banished from the temple (Leupold 603). Therefore, it is possible that Psalm 84 was written by the son of Korah who was banished from the temple. No doubt we can see the author of this Psalm is longing for the temple as one who does not have access to such (Psa. 84:2). The author begins with an exclamation: "How amiable *are* thy tabernacles, O LORD

of hosts!” (Psa. 84:1). Since the adjective *amiable* can also be translated “loved” (Leupold 604), we can see the author has a tremendous love and passion for the temple. He observes that even the birds have a refuge in the sanctuary (Psa. 84:3). How joyous must all be who have access to the house of God. This blessing should cause one to praise God forever (Psa. 84:4).

A Christian should always realize that in the house of God four blessings are found: (1) Blessedness is found in being concerned about the Father’s house, (2) Blessedness is found in the glory of the house of God, (3) Blessedness is found in the security of the house of God, and (4) Blessedness is the source of serving in the house of God.

BLESSEDNESS IS FOUND IN BEING CONCERNED ABOUT THE FATHER’S HOUSE

In Genesis 28 we read the story about Jacob who met with God. In his dream he saw a ladder upon which angels were ascending and descending. The Lord stood above the ladder and renewed the promise He had made with Abraham (Gen. 28:13-14). Jacob, seeing this great event, out of fear said, “How dreadful *is* this place! this *is* none other but the house of God” (Gen. 28:17). He therefore called this place Bethel. Jacob understood that the only way to have access to God was through the house of God. That place is seen later in the tabernacle. The tabernacle became the place where God dwelt—thus, the house of God.

Luke recorded Jesus as saying, “I must be about my Father’s business” (Luke 2:49; KJV). The ASV renders this verse: “I must be in my Father’s house.” The only way we can accomplish the Father’s business is to be concerned about the Father’s house. God’s house today is the church. “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). Again the Hebrews writer makes mention of God’s house under Judaism and Christianity:

For every house is builded by some *man*; but he that built all things *is* God. And Moses verily *was* faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (Heb. 3:4-6).

The argument being made is that Moses was in the house of God whereas Christ is over the house of God today. The foregoing conclu-

sion is that Christ and His house are superior. The house of God (church, kingdom) must be loved and defended. There are those who wish to change the house of God. They are simply not satisfied with God's house. Yet those truly concerned about the house will rise up and withdraw fellowship from those who are against His house (Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9-11). There are too many in the house of God today who, like the ostrich, wish to bury their head in the sand toward the real issues confronting the Lord's house. Yet, when part of the house of God is suffering and struggling against false teachers, the whole house needs to be concerned.

There is, however, a second group within the house of God who are so truly unconcerned they have reached a state of apathy. They are just *keeping house*. They never act as though they long for the church. They are never involved. They do not love the house of God enough to want others to be a part of it. John wrote of such a church in Revelation:

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth (Rev. 3:14-16).

There are so many small struggling congregations of the Lord that, if they do not get busy and evangelize, they will not be here in ten years. The candlestick can be removed (Rev. 2:5). Yet, how true it is that sometimes we do not appreciate something until it is taken away. This was the case of Israel who spent seventy years in captivity before being allowed to return and build the temple. For seventy years there was no gathering of God's people to hear the law. For seventy years there was no gathering of God's people to encourage, love, and strengthen one another. For seventy years there was not an opportunity to come together as God's people and give God the glory for His blessings. Finally after seventy long years of captivity, Israel was allowed to return and build the temple. There is, therefore, little amazement at the reaction of Israel when the opportunity to hear the Word of God heard came, as they were hungry for the Word of God:

And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that *was* before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* unto the book of the law (Neh. 8:2-3).

The Psalmist is longing for God's house. For some reason he has been banished from the temple, and now he realizes how precious that house really is. For this reason does he pause (Selah—Psa. 84:4) to contemplate how wonderful it is for others who have what he no longer has.

BLESSEDNESS IS FOUND IN THE GLORY OF THE HOUSE OF GOD

After Israel's sin in erecting the golden calf, Israel again found forgiveness and fellowship with God. Therefore, the book of Exodus closes with:

Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Exo. 40:34-35).

The glory of God had been with them since the beginning. That glory led them by day through a cloud and by night through fire (Exo. 40:38), and that glory filled the tabernacle in their presence. The place for the glory was the Most Holy Place (Exo. 40:35; Heb. 9:5). It was here only on the Day of Atonement that the High Priest could enter. Priests could enter the Holy Place. The people could only come to the door of the tabernacle. The Psalmist understood the significance of the tabernacle and described its beauty and glory—He longed for it. Yet, the glory under the law of Moses was limited. Every time they came up short of the full glory of God, since they could not enter in to where the glory was. However, the old law was not God's plan forever—it was only temporary. Isaiah prophesied of the glory that was to come after the law of Moses. Peter recorded this prophecy for us:

Receiving the end of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the *grace that should come* unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow (1 Pet. 1:9-11).

Again Paul, speaking concerning the state of the Gentile and Jew prior to the cross, declared that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Too many in the church today do not realize how blessed they really are. They are not left outside the glory of God for they are in the church, which is the location of the glory of God. They do not come

short of the glory. They represent the glory of God in its fullness. They are a representation of the wisdom, love, and work of God (Eph. 3:10-11). They have the ability to let their light so shine so others can give glory to God (Mat. 5:16). Truly the Christian can live a full joyous life because of the blessedness of the glory of God.

BLESSEDNESS IS BEING SECURE IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

The illustration to exemplify security given by the Psalmist is seen in the birds that have found a house in the tabernacle and are so secure as to make nests and lay their young. What a wonderful way to express the security one has in the house of God. Too often the Christian today walks without confidence. Yet, as long as that confidence is based on fact and not fantasy, there can be no disappointment and all is secure. John wrote concerning this security: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13). As long as we are walking in the light, there is security in the house. John describes those who walk according to fantasy and not fact, and thus have no security, when he wrote:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth (1 John 1:5-6).

Yet, those who walk with the facts (in the light) have two reasons to embrace confidence: (1) There is fellowship with God, and (2) The blood of Christ cleanseth all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7).

The reason one knows he has fellowship with God is because the passage says so. When one walks in the light, he is walking with the Christ, because He is the light. He is walking in the house and the house is the light, for Christ is the light. Yet what causes fear for some is their misconception of the light. The Psalmist proclaimed, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:105). The idea is not a light such as a ceiling light or a flashlight that shines down the road. Rather it is a torch that we are able to hold out in front of us and see a few steps at a time. Can we not walk in the house of God a few steps at a time? Too many times we want to get ahead of God, and we stumble. Yet, we should have the confidence that as long as that light shines there is no reason to stumble. However, walking in that light (truth) does not mean there will not be a time in which we do not fail. There are times in one's life when he is not one hundred percent in

agreement with God and His Word. Therefore, he confesses and repents of that sin (1 John 1:8-10), knowing there is the blood of Christ to atone for that sin (1 John 1:7b). As long as he is walking in the light he cannot be lost. We must remember that walking in the light is conjoined with obeying the will of God. John declared:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 John 2:3-5).

We must keep His commandments if we are to be assured of salvation. It is not a matter of talking that is under consideration but rather a matter of walking. It is not what we say that counts but rather what we do that counts. If we say one thing and do another, we are liars and the truth is not in us. Yet if we keep the words of God, treasure it and obey it, then in us is verily the Word of God. We, therefore, are secure in the house of God. Moses stated it this way, “Yea, he loved the people; **all his saints are in thy hand**: and they sat down at thy feet; *every one* shall receive of thy words” (Deu. 33:3).

BLESSEDNESS IS THE SOURCE OF SERVING IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

One of the difficulties today is trying to get the average member of the Lord’s house to see his relationship to God. This difficulty has as its foundation the love of God.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

Paul stated:

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8).

One could study the great loves of the Bible and never see true love till he studied the love of God. Yet, one of the greatest dangers we face in the house of God today is familiarity. We can become so familiar with

something it no longer makes an impression on us. Israel had taken the tabernacle and its worship for granted and were offering sacrifices without any consideration of God. Thus did Isaiah write:

The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.... To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting (Isa. 1:3, 11-13).

One could not accuse Israel of not worshiping. One could, however, accuse Israel of not worshiping God. There was no consideration of God—no thanksgiving and praise for all He had done.

It is said that one does not appreciate a thing until it is taken away. The psalmist, now banished from the tabernacle, can see how precious the house of God really is. How often do we attend worship to hear sermons we have heard all of our lives. How often do we participate in worship year after year only to realize one day that we have forgotten what it really means to us. We can become so familiar with Christianity that it no longer impresses us. It is at this moment that we fail to serve God out of thankful hearts. Moses, just thirty days before he died, tried to teach that second generation to love God and not forget His blessings lest they meet with the same fate as that first generation. Therefore Moses reminded them of all of God's blessings. There was the blessing of being God's special people. "For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that *are* upon the face of the earth" (Deu. 7:6). Of all people those in the house of God should rejoice as God's special people. There was the blessing of being God's delight. "Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, *even* you above all people, as *it is* this day" (Deu. 10:15). We need to realize that in the house of God we are God's delight. There was the blessing of a love described as a mother's love for her children. "Yea, he loved the people" (Deu. 33:3a). "Love" comes from the Hebrew word *chabab* which means "to cherish with tender love, to hide in the bosom, to love fervently, and so to protect" (Wilson 260). One can picture a mother holding a child to her bosom and that child feeling the warmth and protection he needs. As Christians

we have that relationship with God for we can cry “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15). There was also the blessing that would not allow the world to curse his people. “Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee” (Deu. 23:5). In the house of God today we have that same blessing. Though we will endure difficulties in this world, let the world do what it wants for **it cannot curse God’s people!** “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me” (Psa. 23:4).

With all of these blessings that first generation still said, “Because the LORD hated us” (Deu. 1:27). How can one come to the place where he feels God hates him? Israel had focused on all of the problems they faced in the wilderness. What they did not focus on were the blessings of God’s protection and guidance. When we get to the point where we are so familiar with God’s blessings that they are no longer impressionable, then we are at the point of focusing on our problems without God. We will soon be a people who are not grateful for God’s love (Rom. 1:21). There is, therefore, a need to keep the goodness of God foremost on our mind (Rom. 2:4).

When we keep the goodness of God foremost on our mind, we will worship and serve God out of thankful hearts. Likewise, when we keep the goodness of God foremost on our mind and when we worship God out of thankful hearts, nothing will keep us back from serving faithfully in the house of God.

CONCLUSION

In Mark 10 we have the story of a man who desired to have eternal life. Thinking he had done enough, he enquired of Christ the solution to his desire. Jesus asked him to do one more thing:

Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions (Mark 10:21-22).

Here is an example of one who saw the love of the Christ directly and rejected that love. His possessions apparently meant more to him than eternal life. It is possible to see all of the blessings of God that are found in God’s house and still reject those blessings. Men today reject God’s blessings daily when they refuse to submit to His will. Yet to do

so will lead to a life of sorrow and not joy. To live a blessed, joyous life, we must obey God's will and we, too, will find sanctuary in the church and an eternal life in heaven.

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated. Leupold, H. C. *Exposition Of The Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959.

Wilson, William. *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*. Peabody, NY: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE STRENGTH IS IN JEHOVAH PSALM 84:5

David B. Jones



David B. Jones is the evangelist for the church of Christ in Nesbit, Mississippi. David graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1986 and is also an instructor in the school. He is married to the former Kathy Louise Williams and has two children (Shelly Cates and Wayne Jones) and two grandchildren. Shelly is married to Daniel who is an instructor at the Memphis School of Preaching and works with the congregation in Nesbit, Mississippi. Wayne is married to Shana Kaye and works with the Southaven Church of Christ, Southaven, MS. David has done local work in Cleveland, Mississippi, Henry, and Middleton, Tennessee. He edits *Standing in the Gap* (a weekly publication from Nesbit) and directs the second session at Sardis Lake Christian Camp. David has preached the gospel over the radio and television, along with making nine mission trips to Russia and has also participated in campaigns in the states.

INTRODUCTION

The subject under consideration this year is one which should be uplifting to a brotherhood surrounded by the pain and anguish of this world. Meditating on the beatitudes of the Bible will also help emphasize the great blessings we enjoy in the Lord. Impossible would be the task if we were to draw a list of all the blessings we enjoy from the Lord. If we then took the completed list (as best we could) and placed it beside our usual attitude in given situations, we would come up miserably short. The Lord has blessed us beyond our worth and usually beyond our comprehension, and we ought to be eternally grateful for what He has done. Studying the beatitudes will also highlight the glory of the Lord and the depth of His love and mercy.

The subject for this chapter is found in Psalm 84:5: “Blessed *is* the man whose strength *is* in thee; in whose heart *are* the ways *of them.*” Truly, the book of Psalms provides many of the beatitudes we study, and we are thankful for the opportunity to expose the teaching from this psalm. In fact, this psalm provides three beatitudes for us (Psa. 84:4-5, 12). According to the *Pulpit Commentary*, this psalm is attributed to the

“sons of Kohath” and describes the blessedness of their position as dwellers in the house of God and keepers of its thresholds. Korah was one of the leaders in the rebellion against Moses who was swallowed when God opened the earth and devoured them (Num. 16: 31-33) (Rawlinson 191). However, according to Numbers 26:11, the children of Korah perished not. God’s inspired record shows that some of Korah’s descendants were still active, serving in the temple in the days of David: “Concerning the divisions of the porters: Of the Korhites was Meshelemiah the son of Kore, of the sons of Asaph” (1 Chr. 26:1). According to Adam Clarke, this psalm might have been sent to them to be sung, or one of themselves might have been its author (483).

Its date is uncertain, but it is believed to be earlier than the captivity since the temple is standing (Psa. 84:1-4, 10) and there is an anointed king upon the throne (Psa. 84:9) (Rawlinson 191). The whole of the psalm expresses the longing to worship God and the blessings for so doing. *J. Darby Synopsis of the Bible* says this about the psalm:

Psalm 84 contemplates the blessedness of going up to the courts of Jehovah, yet, in the figurative allusion to the road thither, refers to the path of tears which His people have had to tread towards their blessings.

The psalm falls into three equal stanzas or strophes, each of four verses, the ends of the first and second stanzas being shown by the pause-mark, “selah” (Darby). According to Adam Clarke, the three divisions signify: “(1) Longing for communion with God in the sanctuary [1-3], (2) the blessedness of those who enjoy God’s ordinances [4-7], and (3) with confidence in God, he prays for restoration to his house and worship [8-12]” (483).

EXPOSITION OF THE PSALM

The first section of the psalm indicates the intense desire and longing of the psalmist to be in the courts of the Lord. In verse two he writes: “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Psa. 84:2). The psalmist uses two words, *longeth* and *fainteth*, which both express his innermost feelings. *Longeth* means to “become pale, to pine after, to have desire” (Strong 56). Thus, here is one who is becoming pale in quest of searching for the courts of the Lord. *Fainteth* comes from a word which means “expire or cause to fail” (Strong 55). Here is a believer in God about to expire or die because he cannot be in the place

of worship. According to the psalmist, even his flesh “crieth out” for God.

The psalmist goes on to say that even the sparrows and swallows desire to build their houses near the temple (Psa. 84:3-4). *The Pulpit Commentary* offers this explanation:

The general meaning of the figure in this place seems to be, “If even birds love to build their nests, as they do, in the sacred precincts, how much more reason has the believing heart to find its home in the house of God” (Rawlinson 192).

Again the psalmist is impressing in our hearts the great desire we should have to assemble at God’s house. In fact, he records blessed are they that dwell in the house of God (Psa. 84:4). The reader gains a sense of desire and dependency upon dwelling in God’s house from the first section of this psalm.

The second section emphasizes the great trials one can face to assemble at God’s house. It begins with our subject for this entire lesson which shows the blessing for the man whose strength is Jehovah. The psalmist continues, showing that it will take strength to make it through the valley of Baca. Adam Clarke makes the following comment about this verse:

I believe Baca to be the same here as Bochim, Judges 2:1-6, called The Valley of Weeping. Though they pass through this barren and desert place, they would fear no evil, knowing that thou wouldst supply all their wants; and even in the sandy desert cause them to find the pools of water, in consequence of which they shall advance with renewed strength, and shall meet with the God in Israel in Zion (191).

Rawlinson comments that when the righteous pass through a time of suffering or calamity, they turn it into a time of refreshment (192). Obviously, the psalmist is instructing that the blessings of God rest upon those who seek after Him and who have the desire to worship Him as they ought. These verses remind us of the great admonition given in the book of Isaiah: “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31). God has always promised to be with His people and to bless them when they obeyed His voice. We remember what He said to the Israelites at Mount Sinai:

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a

peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine:
 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.
 These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel
 (Exo. 19:4-6).

God had brought them out of Egypt with His mighty hand. Moses reminded the Israelites shortly before they journeyed into Canaan:

But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deu. 7:8).

God had proven His power when He led them with the mighty hand. The Israelites should have known He would supply the strength they would need to overcome whatever life had to offer because of His mighty power. Thus, the man whose strength is Jehovah would truly have the strength he would need.

The third section in this psalm is filled with more promises for those who trust in Jehovah. God is said to be our shield. A shield is used for protection against something or someone. Often a shield in battle meant the difference between life and death as a shield would provide defense against arrows, darts, swords and spears. It would move where the soldier would move. God provides our spiritual defenses through His Word. By following God's Word one is able to withstand the Devil and his angels. A shield could also protect against the sun and the elements of nature. It provided shade when the sun beat down. It provided dry when the rains poured.

The Lord is also said to be our sun as well as our shield. The sun provides the rays of life by providing the heat we need. The Lord is our sun in that He provides the rays of life through His Word and through His Son. The Lord provides for His children grace and glory. This grace is a free gift—but not unconditional. We can do nothing to earn this, but we must do something to access this grace in our lives. In the psalm we are told He will not withhold this grace from those who walk uprightly (Psa. 84:11). To walk uprightly is to walk obedient to the commands of God. The psalmist asked this question in Psalm fifteen: "Who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart" (Psa. 15:1-2). To walk uprightly is the same as worketh righteousness. We are told in Psalm 119:172 that all of God's commands are righteousness. Therefore, to work righteousness would be to keep all of God's commands. Those who walk uprightly or obey His

commands will be granted grace. God also promises glory to those who are obedient. Drawing from the New Testament, we see this vividly portrayed:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.... Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. 8:17, 30).

Those who obey God will be glorified with Christ at that day. This is a tremendous promise to anticipate.

The psalmist also highlights the fact that one must be humble to walk uprightly. He says: “For a day in thy courts *is* better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psa. 84:10). The lowest place in service to God is better than the loftiest position among the wicked. What a wonderful attitude for one to have as he serves God. How many problems and troubles would be avoided if all would have such an attitude? Because God is his sun and shield, his attitude is only to be a servant—nothing more, nothing less. This shows great confidence in God and His promises.

The writer concludes this psalm with another declaration and exhortation for the reader to trust in God. All of the above blessings are reserved for those who trust in God. God will be that person’s sun and shield. He will grant to that person grace and glory. God will give them support and strength.

EXHORTATIONS FOR TODAY

What can we learn about the man whose strength is Jehovah today? What lessons can we glean from these truths from the Old Testament?

Desire to Worship God in Spirit and Truth

The man who draws his strength from the Lord will be one who will have a burning desire to worship God in spirit and truth. When Jesus was at Jacob’s well, He told the Samaritan woman:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

God desires, decrees, and demands that His worshipers worship Him in spirit and truth. Those who worship God must do so with the correct

attitude—in spirit. When we come before Him in worship, we must come in humility and not with puffed up hearts. We must approach Him, respecting Him for who He is and for what He has done. We must come with one thought on our minds—to give God glory and our worship. We must learn that we do not come to please ourselves, but to fall down before God and worship Him. We do not “go to church,” but we “come to worship.” Our worship involves much more than just simply assembling, sitting in a pew, and then going home. Our worship involves our whole beings. When we are able to learn that every person is commanded to worship, we will begin to appreciate the great privilege God has afforded those He calls His children.

When we come to worship we come to **give** God something. Peter writes:

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.... But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:5, 9).

When we come to worship, we come to give God spiritual sacrifices. Many people come to **get** something, and when they are not entertained or excited by the style of worship, they leave saying they did not get anything out of worship. When one considers the privilege of being able to approach the holy God of heaven in worship and have that worship accepted, he should be humbled to the bottom of his heart. How many people take this for granted? How many go and sit in a pew giving little, if any, thought to why they are even there? How many teach their children why they should want to worship God, instead of just driving them to or making them “go to church”? We are not suggesting that parents ought not bring their children to worship services, even if the child (or teenager) does not want to come. What we are saying is that parents ought to show that young person why he or she ought to want to worship God, and then more of our young people would continue to worship when they leave their parents. We sometimes are guilty of being Pharisaical in our attitude toward worship services. Some believe if they come and sit in the pew, then God is pleased. Certainly, we must assemble with the saints (Heb 10:25; 13:17), but it takes more than that. We must worship God with all of our heart if we want that worship accepted. If our worship is not

accepted, then we are lost. God desires His children to worship Him, and when we do not worship Him, He is displeased. We need to take a careful look at the subject of worship, and then we need to have the courage to look at our own worship honestly as there may be some areas where we need to improve.

What then is worship? According to Thayer, the word means: “To kiss the hand to one in token of reverence, to fall upon the knees and touch the ground with the forehead—in the NT, kneeling or prostration to do homage or make obeisance” (549). Strong says of the word: “prostrate oneself in homage” (61). In the Hebrew language it meant, “to prostrate in homage to royalty or God, bow self down, fall down flat, make to stoop.” We see an example of the word from the Old Testament:

And he told *it* to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What *is* this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? (Gen. 7:10).

Bow is the Hebrew idea of worship. Listen to the psalmist: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker” (Psa. 95:6). When we come together to worship, we are to come with the purpose of bowing down before God and offering Him our praise and adoration.

Why do so many not get anything out of coming together? Apparently they do not come with the right purpose in mind. If we come together with the one purpose of paying homage to God, we would go away blessed. Worship is more than just assembling, it is something which comes from our hearts.

First, just who can worship God? In the Old Testament, God’s people had to approach God through the priests. Notice the Law of Moses: “And thou shalt bring the meat offering that is made of these things unto the LORD: and when it is presented unto the priest, he shall bring it unto the altar” (Lev. 2:8). Notice this offering was to be brought to the priest and he was to offer for the people. Saul sinned when he offered a sacrifice because he was not a priest:

And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.... And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever (1 Sam. 13:9, 13).

Today only priests can offer acceptable worship to God. Who are the priests? Christians today are the priests of God: "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 1:6). Christians offer spiritual sacrifices through Jesus Christ: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). Notice Peter called those to whom he wrote a holy priesthood. These were the ones who had purified their souls in obeying the truth (1 Pet. 1:22). These had been baptized to save their souls (1 Pet. 3:21).

What sacrifices do we offer? The Hebrews writer recorded:

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Heb. 13:15-16).

When we sing praises to God, we are offering up spiritual sacrifices to God. When we praise His name we offer sacrifices. We are also to offer our bodies to Him for a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2). Obviously, one who is not a Christian cannot properly worship God, seeing he is not a priest. What about priests who do not offer when they are supposed to? Or what about those who offer what they are not supposed to? If we could ask Nadab and Abihu, what would they say about offering correctly? You remember they were consumed with fire from heaven because of the sin of substitution in worship (Lev. 10:1-2). The proper person with the proper attitude must offer the right sacrifices to God.

What must be our attitude when we worship? Jesus revealed what our relationship must be with our brethren when we worship:

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (Mat. 5:23-24).

We must first be reconciled to our brethren to be able to properly worship God. When we worship, our hearts and minds must be on what we do:

And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me (1 Cor. 11:24-25).

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the words of Jesus on the night before His death. Our hearts and minds ought to be remembering His death and suffering as we observe the Lord's Supper each first day of the week. We are to sing with the spirit when we sing (1 Cor. 14:15). God demands our hearts when we worship and will not settle for less. One who does not worship properly is lost and only those washed in the blood can offer spiritual sacrifices to God. Are you washed in the blood? Do you offer sacrifices which are acceptable to God through your High Priest, Jesus Christ?

Do we wear clothes on the outside which are expedient for worship? Do we place more emphasis on social events and the dress which accompanies them than we do on coming into the presence of God Almighty? When a person has his heart right and desires to offer acceptable worship to God, he will make sure he wears clothing which is respectful to the occasion. If a person does not have suits, ties, or dresses, he or she will make every effort to wear clean clothes and present themselves as neatly as possible before the throne of God. Clothes do not necessarily make the person, but they are, many times, a picture of the heart. A person who assembles and dresses in a disrespectful manner just to oppose parents or the preacher says he or she has no respect for the living God. Anyone expressing that attitude cannot worship acceptably and thereby cannot be saved. We need to stop and think seriously about our worship and our attitude toward it.

Dependence upon God as Our Strength, Sun, and Shield

Not only does the man who trusts in the Lord have a burning desire to worship God, but he also builds his life on God and depends on God for his sustenance.

First, the man whose strength is the Lord will study His Word. Peter wrote to Christians who were facing persecution: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). To grow in strength, one must feed his soul. To study God's Word is to feed the soul what it needs to grow thereby. One who starves his soul will not grow and will be as those to whom the Hebrews letter was written:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age,

even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

If a person trusts in the Lord for strength, he will naturally study that from which strength comes.

Second, the man whose strength is the Lord will pray regularly.

The Bible teaches there is power in prayer. Paul wrote:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phi. 4:6-7).

Total dependance upon God will mean one will take his problems and petitions to heaven and leave them there. We are assured we have help in heaven:

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins* of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

An advocate is one who comes to our side to aid us. Thus, Jesus Christ is the One in Heaven who speaks for us. The Bible teaches He is our Mediator and Intercessor: “For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

Prayer causes us to be able to pour out our hearts to Heaven and know for sure Heaven hears and heeds, if we our doing His will:

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him (1 John 5:14-15).

Prayer is one of the greatest blessings we have as Christians. To be able to stop any time during the day and pray for whatever troubles our lives or is bothering us is a rare privilege indeed. Truly, the man whose strength is the Lord will take time to pray.

Third, the man whose strength is the Lord will love his brethren.

The Bible teaches if we love the Lord, we will love our brethren:

We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this

commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also (1 John 4:19-21).

To say we love Jesus we must be keepers of His Word: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). One of the most deceptive of Satan's weapons is the weapon of hatred. It manifests itself in various shades. Sometimes it appears as indifference toward brethren. We may say we love someone, while at the same time we do not show that love by *action*. John also had something to say about this:

Hereby perceive we the love of *God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of *compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:16-18).

Since the Lord laid down His life for us we ought to lay down our lives for each other. The Lord showed His love by His actions, and we must show our love by actions also.

The Lord taught us how to handle matters when it comes to brethren. If we have done something against our brethren, we must make it right before we can worship correctly. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus spoke these words:

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (Mat. 5:22-24).

We are commanded to make the first move, trying to bring about reconciliation between brethren. We cannot sit back with indifference or pure hatred, doing nothing, and please God. The offended brother is also commanded to make a move to bring about reconciliation:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Mat. 18:15-17).

The ideal situation is that these two brethren would meet in the middle as they both obey the words of the Lord.

Fourth, the man whose strength is the Lord will teach the gospel to the lost. The Lord commissioned the apostles to take the gospel to the entire world:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen (Mat. 28:19-20).

Notice those who are converted are to go and teach others. Thus the man whose strength is in the Lord will do what the Lord said: go into all the world. Why must we go into the world? The whole world lieth in wickedness: “*And* we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19). Man’s sins are what separates man from God:

Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

Since man’s sins separate him from God, those sins must be remitted for man to be reconciled. What washes away sin?

And from Jesus Christ, *who is* the faithful witness, *and* the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood (Rev. 1:5).

The blood of Jesus washes away sin. Man must contact that blood to be saved. The only way that happens is in baptism:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

The man whose strength is the Lord will take the soul-saving message to a lost world.

CONCLUSION

The man whose strength is the Lord will trust the Lord and delight in worshipping his God. The Lord will bless this man being his Sun and Shield. Because the man is blessed and because he loves his God, he will do certain things: he will delight in worship; he will devour the

word of God, placing it deeply into his heart; he will be diligent in his prayer life; he will determine to love his brethren as the Lord loved him; he will deliver the message of salvation to the lost. As the psalmist said: “O LORD of hosts, blessed *is* the man that trusteth in thee” (Psa. 84:12).

WORKS CITED

- All scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Clarke, Adam. “Job To Solomon’s Song.” Vol. 3 of *A Commentary and Critical Notes The Old Testament*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, n.d.
- Darby, J. J. *Darby Synopsis of the Bible*. Internet. 21 March 2002. Available <http://www.biblestudytools.net/Commentaries/DarbysSynopsisofNewTestament>.
- Rawlinson, G. “Psalms.” Vol. 8 of *The Pulpit Commentary*. Ed. H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell. McLean, VA: McDonald Publishing Co., n.d.
- Strong, James. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982.

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOM GOD CHASTISES PSALM 94:12

Paul Vaughn



Paul Vaughn was born in Maysville, Kentucky. He is married to the former Ricki Jett, and attended Maysville Community College, Lexington Technical Institute, and is a 1986 graduate from East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions.

Paul worked in mission fields in Ohio and Kentucky for ten years, helping to establish a congregation in Brown County, Ohio and Jackson, Kentucky; he presently is working in a new mission field in Hancock County, Kentucky. Paul is a debater, editor, and publisher. He edited a book on the history of the church in Eastern Kentucky and has written lesson commentaries on the book of Hebrews and Daniel. He writes a monthly article for *Contending*

For The Faith on Restoration History. He is a speaker in the television broadcast, "What Does The Bible Say," sponsored by the Southwest Church of Christ in Clinton, Mississippi.

INTRODUCTION

It is possible for someone to live by the sea and fail to contemplate the wonder and majesty of its vast beauty. The grandeur and magnificence of a high mountain range are often overlooked by those who live beneath its shadow. The majesty, beauty, and grandeur of the teachings of God are available for all to meditate and consider, yet they are overlooked by those who have ready access to them. It is written, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psa. 119:18). The Scriptures give comfort, hope, confidence, and encouragement to those whose eyes are open to their astounding beauty. Love for God will lead one to love His glorious and marvelous Word and to meditate upon it. "O how love I thy law! it *is* my meditation all the day" (Psa. 119:97).

God's teaching ought to be welcomed by all, even when one is chastised by it. In Psalm 94, the Psalmist said, "Blessed *is* the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law" (Psa. 94:12). The man who is corrected by God is truly happy. One of the greatest lessons that man can learn and apply to his life is in Psalm

94:12. A full understanding of the chastening of the Lord will help us to be happy when we are disciplined through God's Word.

CONTEXT OF THE PSALM

In this psalm, man is taught that God is the Judge. He will judge the wicked and His righteous rule will be established. The psalm starts out with a prayer for God to judge evil men on earth.

O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud. LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? (Psa. 94:1-3).

The wicked speak insolent words and torment the followers of God. "How long shall they utter *and* speak hard things? *and* all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?" (Psa. 94:4). The servants of evil threaten God's children and make hard speeches toward them. Their desire is to discourage and conquer the servants of God. "They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage" (Psa. 94:5). Yet, all the wicked plans of man do not escape the attention of God.

Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, *shall not he know?* The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they *are* vanity (Psa. 94:8-11).

The wicked and godless heart has no true long lasting contentment because it has rejected God. The righteous does find joy and contentment because of the chastening of God. It is a baffling and unnatural beatitude from the prospective of the sinner, but God's chastening on the heart of His children comforts and strengthens, bringing true joy.

There will be hardships, misery, and anguish, but God will not abandon His people. He blesses the God-fearing and penalizes the wicked. Those who are chastened and instructed from His law are blessed.

THOSE CHASTENED BY THE LORD

The Scriptures give many examples of men and women who trusted in God. They looked to His instructions as the light to guide them along life's highway. It is written, "Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. I have sworn, and I will perform *it*, that I will keep thy righteous judgments" (Psa. 119:105-106). Life is full of dangers. It is easy to step into deep waters which will carry a soul into the horrors

of Hell. Yet the soul who is chastened by God will keep his feet on solid ground as he looks to God's righteous judgment to light the way of life.

Ezra

Ezra is an example of one who was chastened by the Lord. "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10). He prepared his heart to be disciplined, chastened, and instructed by the Lord. The heart that is chastened by God is diligent in the study of the Scriptures. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). The heart that is chastened by God does not come by coincidence. It takes desire and willingness to trust God. Ezra trusted God by seeking God's will and harmonizing his life to God's pattern.

Once Ezra's preparation process was complete, this servant of God set out to do that which he learned. It will not help a soul if he is just a hearer of the Word and not doer. "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Jam. 1:22). The chastising of God is working in one's life when he is a doer of His commandments. The person who is just a hearer of the Word will never profit from the teaching and chastisement of God. Therefore, he is immature, growing weak to the point that he cannot discern between good and evil. This was the very condition of some of the Christians in the early church. They were dull of hearing and sluggish in their spiritual life. The writer of Hebrews said:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

The author was shaming them because they had not grown in Christ. Their attitudes kept them in spiritual infancy. Their lazy hearing resulted in a life of apathy and procrastination. They could not profit from the chastening of God because they were not feeding upon the Word of God. Mature Christians are able to distinguish between good and evil. They follow the doctrine of Christ and are disciplined by it.

Paul

The life of the apostle Paul is an example of a man chastened by God. Paul was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, and was very fervent toward God. He said:

I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, *and* taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day (Acts 22:3).

His zeal led him to persecute Christians. The stoning of Stephen is an example of his misplaced zeal (Acts 7:51-8:1). The inspired Word said that he tried to destroy the church by dragging both men and women to prison. “As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison” (Acts 8:3).

In all of Paul’s efforts to destroy Christianity, he thought he was serving God. He told Timothy his deeds were done ignorantly. “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13).

Paul had the kind of heart that could be chastened, disciplined, and taught by the Lord. The narrative of his conversion is given explicitly in Acts 9 and in Acts 22. The key is seen in his reaction to Jesus on the Damascus road. “And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). He never questioned Christ about the necessity of doing something on his part. He never tried to justify his past deeds before the King of kings. He never blamed his condition on his family. He never appealed to the religion of his birth. Paul just went to Damascus as the Lord commanded and obeyed the gospel plan of salvation when it was told to him by Ananias (Acts 9:10-18). A life was changed because it was willing to be chastened by the Lord.

Paul was a blessed man. He was joyous because he was approved of God. In a letter to the church at Philippi, Paul confirmed his love for Christ when he said:

According to my earnest expectation and *my* hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but *that* with all boldness, as always, *so* now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether *it be* by life, or by death. For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if I live in the flesh, this *is* the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better (Phi. 1:20-23).

The Psalmist said, “Blessed *is* the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law” (Psa. 94:12). Paul was a blessed man even in the face of suffering and death. He was blessed because of his obedience to God. Paul allowed the teaching of God to chasten his life. Therefore, when facing death Paul could say:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Paul endured the pain, anguish, and suffering of this life because he knew he was saved. The chastening of the Lord brings blessedness. It brought it to Paul and it can bring it to all who conform to His teaching.

THOSE WHO REJECTED THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD

Just as there are numerous examples of those who love God and are chastened by His teaching, there are also those of contrary and ungovernable disposition who reject the chastening of God. They seek gratification, joy, contentment, fulfillment, and peace. Yet, their course is never finished, their cup is never full, their life never embraces true joy, and their soul shall never find peace. They miss the mark that is set from on high. Their aim is self-will, their heart is hardened, and their ears are closed to the chastening of God. It is at this time that we will look at those who turned from God’s instruction.

Esau

Esau and his twin brother Jacob were the sons of Isaac and Rebekah. As the boys grew up, Esau learned to despise his birthright. Being the first born of Isaac, the firstborn birthright was extremely important. The central thought is that the birthright blessing carried major promises from God. In Genesis 12 Abraham was instructed to leave his homeland and family. The Bible said that he acted by faith. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8). Because of Abraham’s trusting God, he and his descendants would be blessed.

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that

bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3).

Abraham was told that Isaac would receive the blessing.

And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called (Gen. 21:12).

This blessing not only meant that Isaac would receive the material wealth of Abraham, but also the spiritual blessing promised to him. When it came time for Isaac to pass on the blessing, the firstborn was to receive the majority of the wealth. Esau desired the material wealth, but not the spiritual. Look at his attitude and disappointment when it was time to receive the blessing and he did not.

And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? (Gen. 27:36).

Esau said that Jacob took away his birthright. This is not correct, for he sold it for a bowl of stew. The Scriptures say that Esau “despised *his* birthright” (Gen. 25:34). He considered the birthright blessing unimportant because of his concern for temporary and material needs. His priority was not spiritual but material. Therefore, God said that Esau was a profane person. “Lest there *be* any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright” (Heb. 12:16).

Esau refused to be chastened by God, he turned his back on all that is spiritual. He did not consider those things important that God considered important. When the inspired writer said that Esau was a “profane person,” he was saying that Esau took that which is sacred and made it common. Thus, he rejected the instruction, discipline, and chastening of God.

Judas Iscariot

The name *Judas* has become the embodiment for evil. It stands for treachery and disloyalty. Yet, Judas was an apostle of the Lord. He was blessed to hear those wonderful words spoken by Jesus during His earthly ministry.

Judas Iscariot was told to seek God first. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33). However, he refused to be disciplined by the teaching of the Lord. He was warned about the love of money. “No

man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Mat. 6:24). Nevertheless, he chose to sell his Master for the price of a slave: thirty pieces of silver.

Judas had the opportunity and liberty to choose to be chastened by the teaching of God. He could have done a great work in preaching the gospel. He might have been able to write part of the New Testament. However, none of this came to pass because he refused to listen, consider, and respect the chastening of the Lord.

CONCLUSION

In this short study one can see that the chastening of the Lord is a very important subject. Yet chastening is seen by most as deplorable, despicable, disgusting, and dreadful. People view chastening in such a negative way because they fail to see love as the motive behind any discipline or chastening.

God chastens because He loves and cares for those who are His children. The writer of Hebrews makes it very plain that it is by the means of discipline that God trains His children. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb. 12:6). The children of God are disciplined. The lack of discipline is a sign of illegitimacy.

In the Christian age those who are disciplined are changed. Thus, they realize God’s goal is for man to have a Christ-like character. Truly, the man who is chastened by God is blessed. He discovers that chastisement is best for his soul because, after the pain of discipline is gone, it has brought about great results making one subject to the will of God. When one is in subjection to God, he is truly blessed! He can say, “Blessed *is* the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law” (Psa 94:12). Esau and Judas never found that wonderful blessedness in their lives, while Ezra and Paul did achieve this state. The chastening of the Lord enabled Paul to say at his death:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

The person that is chastened by God looks forward to being with Him in eternity!

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO KEEP JUDGMENT

PSALM 106:3

Michael Light



Michael Light is a native of Beeville, Texas, and is married to the former Carrie Brown. They have two daughters, Shelby Elizabeth and Michaela Ashley. Michael is a 1991 graduate of the Southwest School of Bible Studies and received his B.A. degree from Southwest Texas State University. He is currently completing his thesis toward his M.A. in Roman Military History. Michael preached for the Northside congregation in New Braunfels for five years and is in his fifth year as the evangelist for the church in Bangs, Texas. He has been involved in overseas campaigns in England, Jamaica, Tobago, and Russia. He has held meetings and preached on lectureships in various states, as well as published several tracts and edited one sermon outline book. He is also a founding editor of the quarterly religious journal, *Seek Ye First*.

Introduction

Our title comes from Psalm 106:3: “Blessed *are* they that keep judgment, *and* he that doeth righteousness at all times.” While this passage is relatively short, it carries much meaning. While stating that blessings are promised to those who keep the judgments of God does not seem all that shocking to most Bible believers, identifying what those judgments are and then boldly proclaiming them does indeed shock many. We must be willing to preach the Gospel in such a way as to avoid generalities wherein the point is missed.

Most today want to be blessed by God while ignoring what He has taught in His Word. They are holy in their own eyes and think that somehow this over-inflated self image translates to being accepted by the Almighty. Part of our responsibility as members of the Lord’s body is to clarify this misconception and call the world to a recognition of the serious nature of the precepts of God and our obligation to submit to them. The Bible is not a collection of mere suggestions, but a book containing the will of the Almighty.

The apostle Paul discussed this attitude of being religious without being mindful and obedient to God’s Word. Notice Romans 10:1-3:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

Jesus also addressed this mindset saying, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). In Luke 6:46 He adds, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" It is one thing to call Jesus Lord, it is quite another to allow Him to actually be your Lord. Many desire a Savior without submission; such is impossible given the design of God's will for men. In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus speaks again:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

In this passage Jesus draws a distinction between those who hear His Word and those who completely give their lives over to it. It is easy to say, "I'm a Christian"; it is quite another to really be one. There are going to be literally millions of people shocked on the day of judgment when they find themselves at odds with the Lord. Hopefully this study will help us grow in respect toward the judgments of God.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS MUST BE STUDIED IF THEY ARE TO BE LEARNED

Perhaps no generation in recent history has been as ignorant of God's Word as the one in which we now live. Anytime one finds himself in a discussion with people about the Bible, far too often it is painfully clear they have no clue as to what the Bible actually says.

The Book of books repeatedly calls upon all men to engage in Bible study. Notice 2 Timothy 2:15 and 3:16-17:

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.... All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Without giving time to study of the Word of God it is impossible to ascertain the will of God. Many who have a desire to be religious need to recognize this basic fact.

The result of not studying the Word is a world steeped in ignorance. Contrary to popular belief: ignorance is not bliss. Ignorance damns. In Hosea 4:6 we read:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.

This verse amply describes many in both the secular world and the religious world. People seem to get their religious concepts anywhere but the Bible. The need for Bible study cannot be over-emphasized.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS ARE HIGHER THAN OURS

Contrary to popular belief, God does not think as men do. God is always right. There is never one case wherein His statues are lacking, and His justice is always absolutely correct. The great prophet Isaiah said:

For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

Many have erred in assuming that God's likes and dislikes are the same as theirs. It is almost humorous to listen to people argue with God. They will argue concerning what they must do to be saved. They will argue about the nature and organization of the church. They will argue about the particulars of Christian worship and Christian living. They will deny plain Bible teaching on virtually any doctrine if it is contrary to their preconceived notions. God could care less about their opinions. God's judgments are right.

As mentioned previously most deny the fact that God is always right. There are several places in the New Testament where specific actions are listed as sins for which men will lose their souls. Notice Galatians 5:19-21:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Several years ago this author asked one of his professors (who seemed to be very agnostic) about the above passage and tried to get

him to admit that the people on this list would indeed be lost if they would not repent. His response was that he could not say that. This is typical of many today. They can read a passage straight from the text, and then deny either the veracity or the force of it. This false sense of modesty will cause many to lose their souls.

The majority of the earth's inhabitants reject the truthfulness of the Word of God. Obviously the atheists of the world reject the authority of Scriptures based on their rejection of the very existence of God. World religions deny the power of the Scriptures. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and many others claim other *holy books* which supplant the Word of the one true God. Among the religious cults (Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.) the Word of God is diminished, twisted, and replaced by man-made doctrines. And while most would deny it, denominationalists also undermine the authority of the Bible by refusing to submit to it, and by the creation of creeds (written or oral) they deceive their members into accepting religious concepts and doctrines completely foreign to the Scriptures.

The resistance to the Bible's correctness (reliability) has spawned much confusion among religious people. This confusion leads to frustration, which in turn leads to skepticism and even anger toward religion in general. Recently, a young lady who attends services with us related an occurrence at school where another student had been asking her some questions. After showing the girl a passage which clearly condemned those who practice a certain sin, the non-member student said, "Well, you can't believe every thing in the Bible." This attitude is typical of far too many people.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS ARE NOT NEGOTIABLE

Most today have what might be called elastic morals. They have convictions, but they do not hold them very tightly. Many even in the church push for a spirit of compromise. The only problem with this type of thinking is that God does not compromise. God does not care what man thinks, He has spoken the truth and expects us to obey it.

Inspiration states, "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9). This passage affirms that Jesus is the author of our salvation and we must render obedience to Him. This is not open for discussion or modification: It is a point of fact. If you want to be saved you must be obedient to our Lord and Savior.

It is the epitome of arrogance to attempt to alter God's Word to make it more palatable to the general public. Many of our religious friends (and not a few brethren) need to grasp this point. When we alter God's Word, it ceases to be His Word. It is no more than the mere Word of man and as such it cannot save. The great prophet Jeremiah said, "O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

When God's Word is altered, destruction is swift in coming. The serpent only altered God's pronouncement by one word. The result was the introduction to sin and death into this world. Moses struck a rock when God said to speak to it. The result was being forbidden entrance into the promised land after more than forty years of wilderness wandering. God's judgments are not negotiable.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS ARE NOT POPULAR

God has never been popular with the majority of the world's population. In Genesis 6 we read of the account of Noah and the ark. The vast majority rejected God's counsel and would not heed the words of Noah. For over a hundred years Noah preached to masses to no avail. In time the rains came, and those who refused God's Word were drowned.

If we were to have taken a vote just moments prior to the battle between David and Goliath, who do you think would have been the odds on favorite to win? However, David did win the fight with the help of God. Remember the words of the apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phi. 4:13). We can and will overcome regardless of what the world thinks or says.

Let us not forget that Jesus was rejected by the world. In fact, the day the mob voted He could not get a majority. The picture of our Lord being led away toward His death while the murderous, seditious, thief, Barabbas is released should remind us of the fickle and untrustworthy nature of mankind.

Most reject the truth. Notice the Word of our Lord:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Mat. 7:13-14).

It is beyond this writer as to why many in the church seem to go through life totally surprised when people reject the truth. The Lord promised us that rejection would be the response of most.

Others will not only reject the truth, they will persecute those who attempt to teach it. Paul wrote, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). When we stand up for the truth and preach it in its entirety, there will be a certain amount of resistance. Notice the degree to which some had gone to stop the mouth of the apostle Paul:

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; *in* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

We must search our hearts and prepare ourselves to be willing to pay the price of faithfulness to God.

GOD’S JUDGMENTS MUST BE TAUGHT

We must light a fire under ourselves to once again burn with a desire to see the gospel taught to all men of every nation. The great commission still reads:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen (Mat. 28:18-20).

There are far too many who have yet to hear the message. Congregations of the Lord’s people must never grow weary in supporting men who will travel into foreign mission fields to teach the life-giving Word to those who are in darkness. We must make sure that our Bible classes are sufficiently taught so as to equip our children (the next generation) adequately to take the Gospel to those they know. Too often games and puppets take up time that should be spent preparing for the trials of life.

We must stress again the essentiality of being biblically literate. Paul told Timothy: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”

(2 Tim. 2:15). If we fail to study, we are doomed to miss the glories of heaven. Note the Spirit's directives in Romans 10:1-3:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

The apostle addresses a common problem of our day as well as His. These people (his Jewish kinsmen) were very religious, but they were also ignorant of God's will. Today the world is overflowing with religious people who are completely oblivious to the Scripture's teachings on a host of topics. This ignorance dooms them to failing as people. God's will cannot be done by those who are ignorant of it, and most will not learn without a teacher. Again notice:

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (Rom. 10:14-15).

GOD'S JUDGMENTS BRING BLESSINGS

The judgments of God as mentioned in our opening passage bring blessings. The Word of God brings us the blessing of freedom from our past sins. Jesus came to this earth to offer salvation to all men (John 3:16). He shed His blood for the remission of our sins. Notice what He told His disciples in this connection, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mat. 26:28).

The forgiveness of our sins is promised to all who obey Him (Heb. 5:9). To have our sins forgiven, we must hear the Word. "So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). We must also believe, "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Upon that belief we must repent of our past sins, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). We must also confess our faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10). Then, we must be baptized for the remission of our sins:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom. 6:3-6).

God's judgments also bring us the joy of the Christian life. After we become Christians, we are called upon by God to live a faithful life. Notice the encouragement found in 1 Corinthians 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." God expects us to be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10).

The Christian life is the best life that a man or woman can live. Jesus referred to it as the abundant life in John 10. If we will instill the principles of Christianity into our life and the very fabric of our being, the benefits and the joys of Christianity will overwhelm us. It is indeed a privilege to be born into the family of God and to be known as one of His children. His judgments provide a future for us that is beyond mortal description.

The judgments of God will lead us all the way to heaven if we will stay true to them. Jesus called upon the apostles to recognize this fact in John 14:1-3:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.

Note some of Paul's closing words to the Ephesian elders: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). This verse reaffirms the life giving nature of the Word of God. It has the power to show us how to have our past sins remitted as well as how to get from this life to the next.

CONCLUSION

We have looked at several things concerning the judgments or Word of God. Will you follow God's judgments? A failure to do so will rob you of blessings now and heaven in the hereafter. If you will study

God's Word and humbly submit to it, He will remove your past sins and point you toward the path that leads to life everlasting. Will you receive the blessings offered to us all through His Word?

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO FEARS THE LORD

PSALM 112:1

Toney L. Smith



Toney L. Smith was born in Nashville, Arkansas, and raised in Texarkana, Texas. He preached for several years around the Texarkana area before entering Brown Trail School of Preaching, where he graduated in 1982. Toney has preached in Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and Tennessee. He is presently working with the Dresden Church of Christ in Dresden, Tennessee.

Toney and his wife Debby have three sons.

INTRODUCTION

“Praise ye the LORD. Blessed *is* the man *that* feareth the LORD, *that* delighteth greatly in his commandments” (Psa. 112:1) It is interesting to notice the clear parallelism between Psalm 112 and Psalm 111. Both Psalms begins with:

Praise ye the Lord, both are alphabetical (acrostic), both consist of twenty lines, arranged into ten verses, and they compliment each other. Psalm 111 sets forth the greatness, mercy and righteousness of God. Psalm 112 concentrates upon the happiness, beneficence, and righteousness of God’s servants (Coffman 311).

The subject of this Psalm concerns the blessings of man given by God to those who fear Him.

There are many blessings to be enjoyed by those who observe and do the commandments of God. The beginning of one’s wisdom is fear (Psa. 111:10). Why? The reason is that the individual is moved to learn and observe that which God has required through His commandments. It is the attitude of servitude due to one’s love and respect for God and His powerful Word.

Not many things are more misunderstood than the subject which we will be studying. I do not presume to understand why it is that men will not believe there is a place for the fear of the Lord in our lives. It may

be because there is a lack of understanding relative to the meaning of fear. Some seem to think that it would be out of God's character to be feared, and there are some who do not understand the meaning of fear. There are still others who feel that because God is love (1 John 4:8), fear is out of place when relating it to God. Problems have come forth in the lives of individuals because they do not understand that we can experience both love and fear at the same time for the same individual. The fear of God does not negate the love of God. In fact, when we come to understand this biblical concept, we will be well on the road to living a life which pleases God and will provide many blessing from the giver of all good things (Acts 17:25).

A STUDY OF FEAR

"Feareth the Lord" is found seven times in the Bible. The word is *yare*, meaning (1) fear, be afraid; (2) stand in awe of; (3) reverence and honor (Brown-Driver-Briggs 431). Fear is taken from the Greek word *phobos*, from which we get our word phobia. W. E. Vine says the word "first had the meaning of fright; that which is caused by being scared; then that which may cause fright" (Vine 424).

There are various degrees or intents for the word fear. Sometimes it is rendered as reverential awe: "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all *them that are* about him" (Psa. 89:7). Sometimes it carries the meaning of caution or devoutness: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28). *Fear* also carries and emphasizes the meaning of dread and terror. The word must be taken in its context for us to know exactly which emotion is being set forth. There is a way in which fear is approved and one in which it is not. Fear is approved when it brings about godly changes in one's life. Noah acted because God had warned him of what was about to happen. The Scripture says, "Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Heb. 11:7). On the other hand one must not "fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:6). The latter is the kind of fear which is to be avoided.

Our fear of God is not to be only dread and alarm. Godly fear is that which includes love and respect as well as the dread of punishment (Heb. 12:28-29). Compare the parent/child relationship when discipline is to be administered. There is no question as to the commandment to

discipline our children (Pro. 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15). Just what is God's purpose in commanding punitive discipline upon children? Is it just to create terror, dread, or alarm? No, the discipline of a child is to correct, to instruct, and to set them on the right path. Both punitive and corrective discipline is to be enacted (Eph. 6:4). Some enact punitive discipline without love and instruction, and it nearly always fails.

I loved and respected my father without measure. He was a loving and kind man. However, I greatly feared the time when he would administer physical discipline to me. I can to this very day remember the dread, and yes, fear that came when I knew there was a session about to take place behind the barn, and when it was all over, I loved my daddy no less than before. I never wanted to do things that would cause him pain and sorrow, but sometimes I did. He had rules by which I was to live and there was a clear understanding of what he expected of me. I also had the knowledge that he would carry out exactly what he said relative to punishment. There were several reasons why I tried to walk according to his wishes: I loved him dearly, I respected him greatly, but I also feared what would be coming when I disobeyed. Did that fear remove the awe, respect, or love I had for him? No! Truthfully it was an equal part of our relationship, and to him I will always be indebted.

So today, when this author hears individuals talk about the impossibility of having the emotion of dread when referring to God, he knows they do not have the full understanding of God, and their relationship with Him is incomplete. We should be reminded: "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Heb. 10:31).

THE BLESSINGS FOR THOSE WHO FEAR GOD

Psalm 112 is outlined in such a way so as to see the blessings which God has promised to those who fear Him. Verse 1 states that the man who fears God "delighteth greatly in his commandments." Man's reaction to the commandments is the key to receiving the promised blessings. *Delighteth* means "to be pleased with, desire:—X any at all, (have, take) delight, desire, favour, like, move, be (well) pleased, have pleasure, will, would" (Strong 42). The man who is blessed not only stands in fear of God, he finds pleasure and happiness in doing God's will. He is rewarded by the wonderful blessings which God promised to the faithful. Notice the blessings promised to the "man *that* feareth

the LORD, *that* delighteth greatly in his commandments” in verses 2-9. These blessings include:

1. His generations will be blessed. “His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed” (Psa. 112:2). When Abraham chose to do God’s will, he was given the promise that his seed would produce a great nation (Gen. 12:2). The generations of sincere, devout, and righteous men, as a rule will continue from one generation to another. The godly may be persecuted, but never will they be forsaken. The men of the world will persecute them, but the upright will always be blessed of God. No one can change or altar the blessings God promised. The prophet Balaam said to Balak, “Behold, I have received *commandment* to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it” (Num. 23:20). The seed of god-fearing men will have a greater advantage of following in the same delight of the Lord’s Word because of proper training (Pro. 22:6; Deu. 4:5-10).

2. He shall prosper (Psa. 112:3-5, 9). This promise was given under the Old Law and should be understood as a covenant blessing. God blessed Israel with material wealth and fortune. It was under this covenant that God was giving the promised land to the descendants of Abraham. God prospered them financially (Deu. 8:1). But even now under the New Covenant, those who fear God will be provided those things which are needed for day to day fare (Mat. 6:25-34). The man who fears God will be prospered and will be able to be benevolent to those in need (Psa. 112:4-5). That characteristic is still required of the faithful (Jam. 1:27; Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

3. His heart will be blessed (Psa. 112:6-8). This man’s heart is so established and strong that worldly things will not sweep him off of his feet. He will not be alarmed when evil tidings come because of his faith and trust in God. His heart is fixed and is not tossed to and fro with every change or whim which might come his way. It will be much like Paul when he said, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). His heart was established and sure. This describes the heart of a man who fears the Lord. When we fix our hearts as God desires, we will be strong in the face of difficulties (Psa. 57:7; 108:1; Isa. 51:7). When Moses brought Israel out of bondage, he said to them in the face of danger, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the

Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever” (Exo. 14:13).

4. In contrast to all these blessings the text says, “The wicked shall see *it*, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish” (Psa. 14:10). The ungodly will one day see the need for fearing God to obedience. They will observe the godly and upright man but will not fear until it is too late. He will never achieve the purpose God intended for mankind, and will die a disappointed individual. While the righteous shall endure forever the ungodly are not so (Psa. 1:4).

These few thoughts give a broad overview of Psalm 112. Herein is described the man who is to be blessed, and it all begins with the fear of the Lord.

EXAMPLES OF THOSE WHO SHOULD HAVE FEARED THE LORD

Remember that fearing the Lord is the manner and means by which one comes to love and appreciate what God’s commandments mean. It is not merely doing God’s bidding because we will be punished otherwise, it is knowing both the love and the justice of God which demands the punishment of the disobedient.

In Leviticus 10:1-2 we read of Nadab and Abihu. These men were priests under the Mosaic law. They were sons of Aaron, the high priest, and nephews of Moses. For their transgression at the sacrificial altar, God reacted quickly and decisively. The Scripture says, “And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD” (Lev. 10:2). What had they done? All we know is that they “offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not” (Lev. 10:1). We do not know exactly what this strange fire was, however, we can know that it was a strange fire. In other words, it was a fire not authorized by God. God had given instructions concerning the fire on an altar: “Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon” (Exo. 30:9). They committed an act of disobedience and God punished them sorely.

We remember again from our text (Psa. 112:1) that men are blessed when they fear the Lord and delight in His commandments. Nadab and Abihu did not fear the Lord. They set out and did that which was “right in” their “own eyes” (Jud. 21:25). The Proverbs writer said, “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil” (Pro. 3:7; 12:15). God’s vengeance was meted out upon these two men because

they did not fear the Lord, else they would have delighted in His commandments. “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11).

RECONCILING FEAR AND LOVE

Ecclesiastes 12:13 says the whole duty of man is to “Fear God, and keep his commandments,” yet John writes that there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, and that one who fears has not been made perfect in love (1 John 4:18). Jesus told His disciples to fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell (Mat. 10:28). What can we make of this? Do these passages contradict one another? Some go from one extreme or another in the subject of fearing God.

The Bible is filled with statements and examples of God’s love for us. He, by His love and grace, has given to mankind all that could be needed to achieve both our physical and spiritual well being (Mat. 6:33; John 3:16; Rom. 8:28). We are told to love Him supremely (Mat. 22:37-38). We are also told to fear Him (Rev. 19:5). In Luke 12:4-5 we read:

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.

The apostles were not to fear men but they were to fear God. The worst that men can do is kill the body; God can *destroy* both body and soul in hell. There is a fear that we might have over what might be done to us by worldly people, but God will punish the disobedient in unquenchable, never-ending fire. Some have tried to equate this fear of God with awe and reverence only. They like to say the passage only refers to our need to respect and to stand in awe of God’s power and authority, and that it in no wise refers to “dread or terror.” However, the truth of the matter is that respect, awe, and terror are all to be observed. Know this, God has the power to cast “the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 25:30). Paul said, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences” (2 Cor. 5:11). Can we dismiss what the Hebrews writer wrote by saying that it only refers to awe and reverence?

For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his

people. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Heb. 10:30-31).

Of course we cannot! Therefore we must realize that God loves us and has made all provisions for our well-being, but He expects and requires obedience from us. Our passage (Psa. 112:1) gives a clear and distinct answer: "Blessed *is* the man *that* feareth the LORD, *that* delighteth greatly in his commandments."

We can reconcile love for God and fear of God by admitting that God is to be "greatly feared" (1 Sam. 12:18) as well as being held in awe and reverence. Just as a child loves his parents and respects them greatly, he also knows that there will be punishment for disobedience.

APPLICATIONS: HOW MAN OUGHT TO FEAR GOD

A proper fear of God is revealed by our treatment of others. Leviticus chapters 19 and 25 give a good insight into the application of the fear of God. Leviticus 19:14 says, "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I *am* the LORD." This same sentiment ("fear thy God") is found four more times in these chapters. Fear of God is connected with the treatment of the elderly (Lev. 19:32), one's neighbors (Lev. 25:17), business associates (Lev. 25:36), and servants (Lev. 25:43).

A proper fear is also revealed in our relationship with God. That fear is manifested in our obedience (Ecc. 12:13; Gen. 22:12), in our holy living (2 Cor. 7:1), and in our worship before Him (Rev. 14:7; 15:4).

Men should fear the name of God. This author means by this that men should hold His name in the greatest respect. Men should fear taking the Lord's name in vain (Exo. 20:7). Many use God's name in a vulgar sort of way. They use it in curse words, euphemisms, and without respect. His name should be spoken with the deepest of respectful tones.

Men should fear the Word of God. To break or violate His authority should be a fearful thing. Why did God cause Israel to wander in the wilderness for forty years? It was because they did not respect His authority. People today who do not know God's Word or who seek to be their own authority (Jer. 10:23), have no fear (dread or alarm) in their hearts before God. They will commit sins willingly, arrogantly, and will distort His Word so as to establish their own error. Remember: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man" (Ecc. 12:13).

Unprepared men should fear the judgment to come.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

Paul sought to move men to respect the judgment that is coming for all men (Heb. 9:27). Why would there be a need to reveal the terror and dread of judgment if fear was not to be a motivating factor? Why would we read of “the wrath of God” and “the smoke of their torment” (Rev. 14:10-11) if there was not to be a fearful dread of judgment to the unsaved? The answer is clear: We should have a deep fear and dread of eternal punishment. Yes, we should feel an emptiness to think we would be removed from God for eternity. The emotions of dread, terror, and love cannot be separated because they go hand in hand in making up the complete understanding of eternity.

When proper fear is removed in our feelings toward God we will drift in our resolve to be all that we can. We will have no boundaries, no restrictions, and no dread of punishment. This may be one of the greatest reasons men have gone so far away from the God of heaven. They have imagined God as one who would never eternally punish the unbeliever. I have heard some say, “I do not serve a God like that.” And in truth they have created a being which is not to be found in the Bible. God is true, His Word is true (Tit. 1:2), and His promises are sure (Heb. 10:23; Psa. 111:7). Both the blessings and the curses are real and true. Just remember what was said to Israel in the long ago, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deu. 30:19).

CONCLUSION

Let us all be reasonable and honest in understanding the fact that God ought to be feared. He does not desire mere dread, alarm, or a terror filled heart in man. Neither does He desire indifference, apathy toward His Word, His name, nor the judgment to come. God is love. He is merciful, kind, compassionate, and not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). He has given men guidelines by which they are to walk and He expects all to abide therein.

He has promised many blessings for those who fear Him. I suppose we could sum it all up by saying: “The man who fears God will love

Him enough, respect Him enough, and dread the consequences of sin enough will obey Him in all things and receive the blessings promised—the blessings of this life and the life to come.”

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Brown Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Gesenius Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon*. No city listed: Christian Copyrights, 1983.
- Coffman, James B. *Commentary on Psalms 73-150*. Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1992.
- Strong, James. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. McLean, VA: MacDonald Publications, n.d.
- Vine, W. E. *Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words*. Peabody, MA: Henderson Publications, n.d.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE UNDEFILED IN THE WAY PSALM 119:1

Preston Silcox



Preston Silcox was born in Pensacola, Florida, in 1972. He graduated from Memphis School of Preaching, Memphis, Tennessee, in 1995. Preston has done local work in Tennessee and Oklahoma. He has done mission work in Murmansk, Russia. He is presently working with the Eastside Church of Christ, Muskogee, Oklahoma. He is the director of the *Annual Speaking as the Oracles of God Lectureship*.

Preston and his wife Tanya (Brantley) have one son, Rice Paul-Travis.

INTRODUCTION

With eloquent speeches and poetic pens, men have paid numerous and loving tributes to God's Holy Word. None, however, can compare to the inspired and majestic acclamation of Psalm 119. As its length exceeds all other chapters of the Bible, so its breadth of thought, depth of meaning, and height of fervor excels the uninspired accolades of men (Spurgeon 130).

Amidst the top of this towering tribute to God's word is an insightful glance at those who faithfully walk within the boundaries of that lofty and life-giving law. The psalmist describes these devoted souls as *blessed* and, by implication, provides some thought-provoking reasons why they are such.

THE PARDONED

Those considered in Psalm 119:1 are *blessed* because they have been pardoned from their sins; they are *undefiled*. When one considers the present state of such souls, especially contrasting their former corrupted condition, a number of significant items come to mind.

The Perils of Sin

The apostle John defines *sin* as the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). When man engages in such transgression, he defiles his soul. Jesus warned:

That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man (Mark 7:20-23).

The Scriptures certainly warn mankind of the perils and pitfalls of sin. That which defiles man is deceptive, divisive, and deadly.

Sin does not present itself with a warning label; rather it arrives at the doorsteps of individuals wrapped in an appealing package of pleasurable promises and illustrious enticements. Sin vows itself to bring lasting joy and meaningful contentment to the practitioner, but its pleasures are only temporary (Heb. 11:25), and its victims are never fully satisfied (Ecc. 2). Of course, one should not be surprised at the deceptive nature of sin since the father of it has been a liar from the beginning (John 8:44)!

Accompanying the deceits of sin is the division it causes. Isaiah scolded God's Old Testament people with the following words:

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

While sin has the destructive power to separate families and rend friendships, the most tragic division it causes is that chasm between the omni-benevolent God of heaven and the sin-stained soul of an eternity-bound man.

That which begins with deceitful allurements and leads to separation from God, ultimately ends in the eternal death of sin's servant. James pictured this woeful pattern in James 1:14-15: "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Paul similarly warned of this dreadful destination of sin by stating that the wages of such is death (Rom. 6:23).

The Perfection of the Blessed

Undefiled carries the ideas of “sound, without spot, without blemish, complete, whole, and perfect.” Since sin is that which defiles the soul, the *undefiled*, the *blessed* ones of Psalm 119:1, are those people whose sins are pardoned, cleansed, or forgiven.

When the pardoned reflect back on their former condition, they cannot help but to rejoice in their present state. The sin that once marred their souls no longer stands between them and their God. That which formerly deceived them and placed them on the path to eternal destruction is wiped from their records and cleansed from their consciences. Like the Ethiopian of Acts 8 and the jailor of Acts 16, they go on their way rejoicing.

The Power of God

By means of the great ability of God, those once polluted by transgressions are afforded the opportunity of blessedness—of cleansing and completeness. Placed into motion before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-12), the scheme of redemption, authored and executed by the Almighty, makes cleansing possible for even the vilest of sinners. While man’s obedience cannot be ruled out, ignored, or diminished in any way (Mat. 7:21), the fact remains that without God, no power in the universe is strong enough to wipe away the presence and penalty of sin. By means of God’s perfect plan, Christ’s sinless blood, and the Spirit’s instructive Word, man can escape the crippling clutches of sin and enjoy fellowship with a mighty and merciful God. Truly, the pardoned ones of Psalm 119:1 are blessed.

THE PATH

Those pictured in Psalm 119:1 are also blessed due to the path upon which they are walking. Someone once stated that “travelers are always discoverers.” While such is usually true concerning the geographical journeys people might take in this world, consider a few of the things the blessed discover while traveling on “the way” of the undefiled.

The Precision of the Path

The way upon which the blessed ones travel is perfect. This route of redemption is free from needless and cumbersome restrictions that prohibit the sojourners to move about as freely as necessary. John penned that God’s “commandments are not grievous” (1 John. 5:3). On the other hand, this heavenly highway is lined with clear boundaries

that help keep its pilgrims safely pointed in the proper direction. God warns of the dangers of venturing off His plainly marked path: “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God” (2 John 9). The precise and perfect nature of this path is no wonder since its builder and maker is God. As a loving and providing Creator, He knows and meets the exact and true needs of His creation.

The Provisions of the Journey

Since the Father does indeed know well the needs of His people, the blessed discover that the way on which they journey is perfectly supplied with their every necessity. With the Bible as their road map and fellow Christians as their travel companions, the undefiled possess directions from God (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and encouragement from brethren (cf., Acts 28:15). With the water of life and the bread of heaven in abundant supply (John 4:14; 6:35), the throats of the blessed will never be parched with thirst, nor shall their stomachs be panged with hunger. Truly, every need is supplied.

The Prevalence of the Way

Even though the path of righteousness is not chosen by the majority or considered lofty by the world, the wondrous way of the undefiled *is* the high road. Jesus stated in unmistakable terms that the narrow path, discovered by the few and trodden by the minority, “leadeth unto life” (Mat. 7:13-14). While the path of perdition might appeal to the masses, to the spiritually discerning the perils it produces and the pain it procures reveal it to be a deadly and damning route. The path of the blessed, prepared by God and perfect in design, proves itself to be the favorable and supreme way.

The Preparation of the Builder

The delightful discoveries mentioned above assure “the undefiled in the way” that the road upon which they journey was created with divine compassion and forged with eternal foresight. With eyes of faith, the blessed see a Father who loved enough to plan the heavenly way, a Savior who sacrificed enough to purchase that way, and a Spirit strong enough to preserve directions to and for that way.

No doubt, the pardoned who travel the path of righteousness are discoverers, for the route leading to life is lined with eternal treasures and

paved with spiritual riches. The ones who find and choose to walk this wonderful way are blessed indeed.

THE PILGRIMAGE

Finally, the undefiled ones of Psalm 119:1 are blessed due to the actual pilgrimage in which they are engaged. As “the pardoned” and “the path” noted previously, a number of observations are worth noting concerning the heavenly journey and its implications.

The Progression of the Undefiled

In the mind of the inspired psalmist are those who “**walk** in the law of the LORD.” This **walk** stands for the manner of life in which the blessed are engaged. While God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), He certainly respects character and is thus pleased by those who walk, or live, according to His will (Acts 10:35). By their holy manner of life, then, the blessed, or “undefiled in the way,” ardently advance toward heaven. Their walk is not some sort of blind wandering, but rather is a positive and purposeful progression aimed in the direction of life everlasting.

The Precepts of God

Because the blessed know that God accepts those who live in accordance to His will, they steadfastly “**walk in the law of the Lord.**” It is impossible to be *blessed* and *undefiled in the way* without living in harmony with God’s precepts. The very psalm of which this beatitude is a part highly exalts God’s Word and repeatedly encourages the reader to turn to it in submission. God’s powerful precepts cleanse (Psa. 119:9), guard (Psa. 119:11), delight and counsel (Psa. 119:24), give hope (Psa. 119:43), quicken (Psa. 119:93), guide (Psa. 119:105), provide understanding (Psa. 119:130), and, among many other things, endure forever (Psa. 119:160). No wonder the ones who walk in this law are called **blessed!**

The Preparation of the Heart

Knowing well the solemn obligations of God’s law and the serious nature of the undefiled’s pilgrimage, the blessed enter the heavenly pathway with a realistic understanding of the costs involved (cf., Luke 14:28-33). They do not fool themselves into thinking that the way leading to eternal life is free of sacrifices, absent of difficulties, or void of obstacles. Rather, like Ezra of old, they prepare their hearts ahead of

time to seek the Lord's law and determine to abide by its commands no matter what (Ezra 7:10).

The Patience of the Blessed

With the heart prepared and God's precepts in focus, the undefiled proceed on the route of redemption with energetic endurance. Through the trials and triumphs of this earthly realm, the blessed walk with persistence and "run with patience" (Heb. 12:1). Whether in blessed abundance or in desperate want, their pilgrimage continues in faithful steadfastness (cf., Phi. 4:12). When they stumble, they quickly gain composure; and when they fall, they gracefully rise again to press further onward. In every sense, the blessed are steadfast, unmovable, and they always abound in the work of the Lord, for they *know* their labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

CONCLUSION

While Psalm 119 as a whole beautifully exalts the Word of God, Psalm 119:1 in particular rightfully elevates those who love and obey the Word of God. When souls are pardoned by heaven and enter the path of righteousness, the pilgrimage in which they participate allows them to be truly blessed.

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated. Spurgeon, C. H. *The Treasury of David*. Vol. 3. n.p.: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO REBUKE SINNERS PROVERBS 24:25

Harrell Davidson



Harrell Davidson was born in Gibson County, Tennessee. He began leading singing for meetings at twelve years of age and was encouraged to preach the gospel. He attended Freed-Hardeman University, Harding University, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He preached his first sermon in 1955 and began preaching every Sunday in October, 1958. Harrell preaches in several gospel meetings and lectureships each year. He has preached in most of the 50 states and in Europe, Asia, and Africa. He has written one study book on *Marriage and The Christian Home* (out of print). Harrell is the son of a former elder and preacher. He has worked with the church in Obion, Tennessee for the past 21 years, which is only 20 miles from where he was born and raised.

Harrell is married to the former Carrielyn Spurlock. They have four children and five grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

In Proverbs 24:25 the Bible says, “But to them that rebuke *him* shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them.” The center reference of the King James has this notation, “A blessing of good.” Solomon is the writer of these inspired words. Many times proverbs mystify us; either of modern day or of old they speak a language that requires diligent thought. *Rebuke* carries the idea of reproof or pleading with someone over sins committed. *Pleading* carries the notion of convicting, refuting, and reproof. This is not a pleasant task. For instance, how can we understand that a blessing of good will come upon the one who rebukes sinners? We usually think this is not the general rule. So many times a preacher of the Word has rebuked error only to be lashed out at by those whom he has rebuked. However, it does not stop there. All of a sudden, those who were rebuked have all kinds of friends stored away who are ready, willing, and able to come to their defense.

WHY DO PEOPLE CHOOSE FRIENDS OVER DOCTRINE?

The Lord's church has grappled with this problem for many long years. Have we reached the point that when a sinner is rebuked, we say privately and even publicly, "I do not care that he has been rebuked, he is my friend"? That seems to settle the conscience, then arm in arm we walk off into the sunset, never turn and look back at the error that we have endorsed. How can we forget about truth and walk away endorsing the errant one who has been chastised?

As we look back over so many years of Gospel preaching and the *marking* of those who were involved in error, it seems some of us have bitterness hanging over our heads. It does not appear initially that we have received a "blessing of good" for the error that was rebuked. Certainly God's Word is not saying that this blessing will necessarily come immediately. We must understand that the Lord is a righteous Judge and will render to every man according to his works, whether they be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). We must understand what the Hebrews' writer said, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). In verse five he encouraged us not to despise the chastening that we receive or to *faint* when we are rebuked. There is no doubt that this is the proper attitude that should motivate each one who is rebuked.

Those who refuse to display the proper attitude toward chastening continue to increase. They are rebuked and they arise arrogant, hostile, dishonest, breathing out threats with bitterness in their hearts toward all except those who will continue to agree with them. It is disgusting to the core that a dog will return to its own vomit again and the sow that was washed will go right back and wallow in the mire (2 Pet. 2:20-22). If that were the end of it, that would be fine. If that person has made that choice, then so be it. Let them do just what the Scripture has already declared that some will do. However, brethren, let us not coddle and cajole them in their error! Someone will want to say, "Well, the elders botched this matter." Others may say, "The preacher stepped out of bounds on this one." They are unwilling to acknowledge that their friend has been rebuked or withdrawn from. We cannot deny that this happens, it is obvious in case after case.

One night several years ago this author was talking on the phone to a fellow preacher. He told me that his doorbell had rung and that I could never guess who was at his door. He told me who it was, and we ended our conversation so he could visit with this brother that was

passing through his area. The person bragged about having done various things and having been fired and rebuked before all. He was a “good old buddy”; so everything was all right.

The previous night, a preacher in another state had called me from a congregation that was having a lectureship and asked me, “What in the world is going on?” “About what?” I asked. He had told me that this wayward, withdrawn from brother had been there at the lectureship bragging about what he had done and what he had in the trunk of his car to seemingly prove his case. Late the next afternoon, another preacher had called from one of the Tennessee major cities to tell me the same story! Guess who this person was on each of these occasions! It was the same one who was passing through our area and was going about to establish his case with his “good old buddies,” including the one to whom this writer was talking with on the phone as he was passing through. His cronies hover around him like chicks to the mother hen. They laugh at his error. They accept him as a faithful brother instead of shaming him for the sins he has committed and for which he has been rebuked.

This scribe worked in an “Old Dominion State,” doing local work as well as meeting work, preaching in at least two Gospel meetings in that area. One day their local preacher got “bent out of shape,” splitting the local congregation. He left the faithful behind to go out on a tear of his own making. Of course, some of the flock and a shepherd or two followed along. He was notably rebuked, as he should have been. What happened after that? He started a lectureship and invited his “good old buddies” to come and speak on his lectureship. His “good old buddies” not only went; they defended his actions.

There has been much bitterness over this through the years. The Lord said, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Mat. 12:30). Do we understand the meaning of this simple New Testament statement from the lips of our Lord? If rebuking is God’s way, and it is, then the one that who is rebuked but never corrects his errors is haughty and living in sin. The rebuked brother who goes on in his stubbornness is not *gathering* with the Lord but is rather scattering abroad.

Those who have done the rebuking have followed the demands of Scripture in both the Old and New Testament. Paul wrote, “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a

drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat” (1 Cor. 5:11). Do we not understand that a *railer* is a reproachful man who is coarse, a harsh individual who is spewing bitter words out of his mouth? His characteristics are to abuse other people to wound their character and feelings. Needlessly, we say that this is a contrary spirit to Christianity. Did the great apostle Paul tell us to cajole him, laugh and be merry with him, treat him as a “good old buddy”? We think not! He said for us not to even eat with such a one. This ought to shake us to the very roots of our faith that we have taken liberties where none existed. We have made choices that we did not have to make. We have chosen friends over the will of God.

Paul said, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). Have these people that we are describing caused division? Yes, they have! Do they cause offenses? Yes, they do? Are they walking contrary to doctrine? Yes, they are! What are we supposed to do? We shall not add one whit to what Paul has by inspiration written. It is so plain that man’s words might *mess* it up. Let us be honest with ourselves—we know what it means. Why will we not accept it? We have chosen not to walk with the Lord. While He has given us the power of choice, we have made the wrong one in such cases and will reap destruction.

Paul also said, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us” (2 The. 3:6). A command is here stated. If we would go to heaven in the by and by, we **must** withdraw from every brother who walks out of step (disorderly). Instead of being saddened by the state of affairs that one is in, some go about as pompous as ever, still gloating of the sin that they wittingly committed. Paul did not have this kind of sympathy when Demas forsook him to walk in worldliness. Paul also rebuked Peter in Galatians 2:12. Peter did not go about gloating over being rebuked. These are wrongs that must be righted before we can proceed in that which is true and pure in the sight of God.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PROVERBS 24

In verse one Solomon warns about associating with evil men. Who would want to do such? It appears to this writer that only an evil person would want the fellowship of another evil person. Solomon tells how their hearts study destruction and they run off at the mouth (Pro. 24:2).

“Wisdom *is* too high for a fool,” he states in verse seven. The one that invents, “deviseth to do evil,” is a mischievous person (Pro. 24:8). Their strength is small or narrow. Notice verse twelve, “If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider *it*? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth *not* he know *it*? and shall *not* he render to *every* man according to his works?” We may allege that we did not know this or that and sometimes this is truth. However, God knows the hearts of all men (cf., Acts 1:24), and it is He who keeps the soul. Paul stated in Hebrews 4:13: “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” If we think that we can fool God, we have a faulty understanding of God.

The wicked lie in wait against the righteous (Pro. 24:15). The man of God falls and gets back up and tries again to do that which is right in the sight of God again. He never gives up! However, the wicked fall into mischief (Pro. 24:16). We are not to keep company with wicked men (Pro. 24:19). The wicked will have no reward in heaven. They will have a reward, though Solomon does not call it that, simply because he does not address that point just here. The point is that their reward is not going to be with God. In verse 21, Solomon admonishes men to fear God and the king, and not to meddle with the change agents (changers). Why? Their calamity will rise suddenly, and those that meddle with them shall be lost with them. The friends of the wicked, sinful person may call him righteous, but the people will curse him with nations abhorring him (Pro. 24:24). The one who rebukes the sinner, his lips shall be kissed because he answered with the right words.

The fields of the wicked were passed by and their vineyards were not being tended. As a result of his failure to get his life back in order after being rebuked, he had no fruit. His vineyard was overcome with weeds. He failed to have understanding. Solomon said he saw it and considered it; he received instruction. He slept on the matters at hand and then proclaimed, “So shall thy poverty come *as* one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man” (Pro. 24:34). There is no good in unrighteousness or in evil. There can be no fellowship between light and darkness, with Christ and Satan. We must make our choice. We either rebuke the sinner and receive a blessing of good from God, or we wink at sin and condone the error that ought to be exposed and suffer the consequences.

OTHER PROVERBS

The Holy Spirit saw fit to inspire Solomon to say much about the subject of rebuking. In Proverbs 28:23 He inspired Solomon to write, “He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue.” Solomon wrote in Proverbs 27:5-6: “Open rebuke *is* better than secret love. Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.” A partial friendship might cover some faults of the friend. Finally, however, those sins will be multiplied time and time again. We start concealing things from ourselves when what we need is to be shown, out of love, the worst part of our character. Some call this “tough love.” We used to hear the expression “rough medicine.” A physician doing his job in exploring a wound may very well hurt us from time to time while probing about trying to find the malady that has beset us. We may even scold him for hurting us, but in the end we give him a reward (pay) and we do so gladly. One who is rebuking sinners ought to be paid highly. At the time of the rebuke it is not appreciated. However, the proper outcome of repentance on the part of the one rebuked brings dividends untold. One of the preacher students in Online Academy of Biblical Studies e-mailed me to tell me that I would be proud of him. He said, “I stepped on some toes Sunday.” If we are not *stepping on toes*, even our own, then we have ceased to preach the truth.

A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool (Pro. 17:10).

Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware: and reprove one that hath understanding, *and* he will understand knowledge... Judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of fools (Pro. 19:25, 29).

The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so *do* stripes the inward parts of the belly (Pro. 20:30).

When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise: and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge (Pro. 21:11).

He, that being often reproveth hardeneth *his* neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy (Pro. 29:1).

Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you (Pro. 1:24-27).

Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy (Pro. 6:15).

All of these selected Proverbs have something to do with reproof and correction. It is vital to our well being to be rebuked when we err. If we love the brethren, as we ought, we will reprove them. In fact, this is one of the reasons for giving us the inspired Scriptures. Paul told Timothy:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Scriptures furnish man completely to every good work. One of those works is reproofing those in error. It should be underscored that this should be done in love, considering ourselves, lest we are tempted and the shoes put on our feet.

There is a statement in Acts 13:7 which states, "Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God." Look at the greater context in verses 7-12. Here is a man that wanted to hear the Word of God. Here is a man with the right attitude. He wants to hear what is right. This is the kind of attitude one needs. He obviously has some knowledge of what Paul is preaching, and he wants to hear more. In verse eight Elymas withstood them. You cannot find a worse person in the world than one who is trying to keep someone from hearing and knowing the truth. The truth on any subject is very vital to our soul's salvation. Think what it is going to be like on the day of judgment for those who have tried to lead people astray and keep their minds away from the knowledge of the Word of God. Those who teach false doctrine or lead wrongful lives are opposing the truth. He was trying to turn the deputy away from the faith. Paul, who had previously been called Saul, was now recognized as Paul, and was under the inspiration of the Spirit, was going to take action guided by the Spirit. He said, "O full of all subtilty" (Acts 13:10). He was not full of the Spirit or the truth, but was full of deceit. There may be a false teacher who is not deceitful, but this author has not personally met any yet. A man who has been cast out of the fellowship with the saints is a false brother. He does not deserve the role of discipleship because he has failed to comply with the terms of discipleship. A true disciple will correct wrongdoing pleading for forgiveness before all. What a contrast!

Elymas is a child of the devil—an instrument of Satan. An evil doer who claims to be under the “direct inspiration of the Spirit” is actually called an instrument of Satan! These are not my words but the Holy Spirit’s Word. He is described as an enemy of all that is right. Look at the terminology: (1) subtility or deceit, (2) mischief, (3) child of the devil, (4) enemy of all righteousness, (5) one who perverts, which means to corrupt. Think about somebody corrupting the Word of God. All of this applies to every false teacher and every false brother. It would be difficult to find a passage that underscores the damage of false teaching and false living more than this one.

The blessing for rebuking will be twofold. We will be blessed in this life beyond what we may be able to comprehend. A good minister puts people in mind of these things (cf., 1 Tim. 4:6). Each night we must pillow our heads in restful slumber. If the soul is weary from sin, we should never be able to fall asleep without taking care of the sin in our lives. When those who are or have been rebuked take pride in their evil undone condition, they face a certain judgment that is not going to be joyous. On the other hand, if the person has rebuked a sinner from the error of his way, he can pillow his head in peaceful slumber, knowing he has done all that he could do. The blood of the rebuked one is not on his hands. He falls asleep in hope.

This has been the way of God from the time of sin in the Garden of Eden. The flood is a solemn reminder that God is going to judge the world. There is something worse than the flood ahead of the disobedient. Let us be prepared by doing that which is right to the best of our ability.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO WAIT ON THE LORD

ISAIAH 30:18

John West



John West was born in Aberdeen, Mississippi. He comes from a preaching family—his father, brother, uncle, and three cousins, as well as his father-in-law are gospel preachers. He is married to the former Sonya Caudle, and they have three children: Lauren, Jonathan, and Joshua. He is a graduate of Memphis School of Preaching, earned his B.A. degree from Faulkner University, and will finish a M.Min. degree from Freed Hardeman in May 2002. He directed the annual Millport Lectures and currently hosts the “Back to The Bible” television program which airs three days a week. He currently preaches for the Spring Valley Church of Christ in Tuscumbia, Alabama.

INTRODUCTION

A study of the *Beatitudes* is a much needed study today. In a world of depression, anxiety, and stress, one needs to learn how to be blessed. The Bible affords such joy to all who will read and study it.

In Isaiah 30:18, Isaiah writes, “And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD *is* a God of judgment: blessed *are* all they that wait for him.” This passage serves as a reminder that those who *wait* for the Lord will be blessed.

What does it mean to “wait for the Lord”? How does such *waiting* occur? This chapter will discuss what it means to wait on the Lord and how the Christian today can be blessed by waiting.

BACKGROUND TO THE TEXT

Before looking at this phrase, one must look at the context of the chapter to have the proper understanding of why God made such a statement to His people. In verse one Isaiah pronounces a *woe* to the people. They rebel against God by taking counsel of Egypt rather than Him. They are seeking protection (covering) with Egypt from Assyria. The idea of “cover with a covering” is that they want to “ratify a covenant or compact” with Egypt (Barnes 448). The Jews think they can

turn to Egypt for help rather than to God. “In their dealings with Jehovah, they act like stubborn, rebellious children who refuse to obey their parents, thereby becoming worthy of death (Deut. 21:18-21)” (Hailey 250). They rebel against God and add “sin to sin” by trying to find human help rather than divine.

The Jews in verse two go down to Egypt to find strength in Pharaoh and the shadow of Egypt. They think the strength of Egypt can save them from the impending attack. To “trust in the shadow of Egypt” is to seek protection from the burning rays of the sun (Barnes 448). In this case the burning sun is likely the Assyrians. “The context likely refers to the period of revolt against Assyria during the reign of Hezekiah (703-701 B.C.)” (Jackson 61).

To trust in Pharaoh will be to their shame. There is nothing the Egyptians can do to save the Jews from the Assyrians. For them to seek the help of man rather than God will be a great source of shame and even confusion. Egypt can be neither help nor profit, but a shame and a reproach (Isa. 30:5). Jeremiah writes, “Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? thou also shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria” (Jer. 2:36). There is shame each time the people put their trust in man. The same is true today when man puts his trust in man rather than God for his spiritual well-being. He will be disappointed and should be ashamed.

The Jews are willing to risk physical harm from the lion, viper, and fiery flying serpent (Isa. 30:6) to seek the help of Egypt. They are taking treasures down to Egypt with the hope of having adequate protection against their enemy. However, Isaiah tells them that they are going to a people who cannot profit them. Their help is in vain because God will cause their strength to “sit still” (Isa. 30:7). They are powerless against the almighty God because when God decides to punish His people, no other person or country can come to their aid.

Isaiah is instructed to write in a book telling that the Jews are a rebellious and lying people who “will not hear the law of the LORD” (Isa. 30:9). This is to be a public record so that all generations from that time forward would know how the people acted. It was likely written:

1. To shame the men of the present age, who would not hear and heed it when it was spoken;
2. To justify God in the judgments he was about to bring upon them;
3. For a warning to others not to do as they did, lest they should fare as they fared (Henry 167).

Their sin is further described in verses ten and eleven. They do not want the truth preached to them because they “despised the truth and trusted in error” (Jackson 61). They want smooth things and deceits taught to them. This sounds like many of the present day. Both in the church and the denominational world, people are wanting things preached that will make them “feel good” about themselves rather than hearing the truth. It is considered *negative* by many if the truth is preached. But when men today preach the Word of God in its purity, it is positive in the sight of God. The only negative sermon is one that is filled with error rather than truth. Paul warns of the time when men will turn away from the truth. He writes Timothy and states:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

This can accurately describe the Jews of Isaiah’s day. They want the “Holy One of Israel” away from them. They do not want to hear God’s Law presented to them. They are content with living in sin and rebellion.

In verse twelve, Isaiah further describes the depth to which the Jews have sunk when he states that they “despise this word.” They do not listen to the message of God through the prophets. The words of Jesus accurately describe the attitude of the Jews of His day. He states, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Mat. 6:24). The people of Isaiah’s day reached the point of despising God and His Word and turning to serve the things of this world. Paul warns the Thessalonians of this when he writes, “Despise not prophesyings” (1 The. 5:20). Because of the iniquity of the Jews, God tells them that they will fall as a high wall and break into pieces (Isa. 30:13-14).

In verse fifteen God tries to encourage His people to return to Him for rest and salvation, but at this time, they refuse. God knows there is hope for those who will return to Him in repentance and listen to His will, and He is willing to wait. God’s judgment upon His people must first be seen because of her disobedience, then will He be gracious and have mercy. God is exalted by waiting on His people to return to Him

where He can show them His mercy. This discipline is necessary for the people to return to God where He can bless them.

This “waiting” period of Jehovah is His program to work repentance in His people. His people must be prepared to receive His mercy. In their rebellious, ungodly attitude they do not even desire His mercy. They must see His judgment upon themselves and their enemies, cry to Him, listen to His teachers and purge themselves of false gods. Then they are ready to want and appreciate His mercy.... There must be a complete change of attitude toward who God is and what He says through His teachers, before they are ready for God’s great blessings (Butler 123).

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO WAIT FOR HIM

Wait appears one hundred six times in the Bible. “Wait for (on, upon) the Lord” is found ten times in the Bible. Observing these ten verses, one can see the importance of waiting on the Lord.

An Explanation

“This section probably refers initially to the captivities of Israel by the Assyrians and Judah by the Babylonians and the restoration under Ezra and Zerubbabel” (Butler 123). The Jews see God waiting patiently for them to return to Him, now they must wait for the Lord in faith to receive His blessings. This waiting is not “sitting still and biding our time, like a man waiting for a coach,” but waiting “patiently and perseveringly” (Bertrum 333). They must be willing to trust in the Lord to act in His own time and “long for the fulfillment of what He has promised (cf. Zeph. 3:8; Dan. 12:12)” (Young 354).

Throughout Isaiah, he speaks of waiting for God. Isaiah is waiting in hope for the Lord to bless them. He states, “And I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him” (Isa. 8:17). The faithful will say, “Lo, this *is* our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this *is* the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isa. 25:9). Isaiah further states that “they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31).

“Instead of taking matters into their own hand, they allow Jehovah to act on the ground of His infinite righteousness and justice” (Hailey 256). God does not work on man’s timetable, but His own. Many today want things immediately and believe God fails them when they do not see immediate results in prayer. This society has catered to people to

the point that patience is a lost virtue. Man will often take matters into his own hand rather than putting faith in God. However, God expects His people to be patient, and through His providence He will respond and will bless man with the things he needs. Notice the words of Jeremiah, “Are there *any* among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? *art* not thou he, O LORD our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these *things*” (Jer. 14:22). Through His providence He offers salvation to those who wait in faith and obedience. “Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou *art* the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day” (Psa. 25:5). It is through His Word that one is led today, not some divine revelation or direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Man is sanctified today through truth (John 17:17; 8:32). God’s providence is also seen in the fact that He is the giver of temporal blessings. “These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give *them* their meat in due season. *That* thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good” (Psa. 104:27-28; 145:15-16). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, teaches that those living in faith should not worry about eating, drinking, and clothing because God through His providence will provide them for His children (Mat. 6:25-34). However, for one to be blessed by God, he must be faithful, for God will not hear the sinner’s prayer. “Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth” (John 9:31; cf., 1 Pet. 3:12; Isa. 59:1-2). Because God is a righteous God, He will destroy the wicked, but He will save those who obey Him.

The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. The LORD *is* nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy (Psa. 145:17-20).

God’s Word is clear that those who will patiently wait for Him in faith, will be blessed both in this life and in the life to come.

For What Is One To Wait?

Throughout God’s Word He teaches His people to *wait* for Him. There are many things for (with) which one is to wait.

1. We must wait **for mercy**. “Behold, as the eyes of servants *look* unto the hand of their masters, *and* as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes *wait* upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us” (Psa. 123:2). God’s mercy to man is great

and is seen in the offer of salvation. “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)” (Eph. 2:4-5, cf., Tit. 3:5).

2. We must also wait **for salvation**. “Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him *cometh* my salvation. He only *is* my rock and my salvation; *he is* my defence; I shall not be greatly moved” (Psa. 62:1-2). God offers salvation through Jesus Christ for those who will come in faith and obedience. To wait for salvation does not mean that a person waits for God to directly and miraculously guide him, but it means to come to the truth (John 8:32). Although God offers salvation, man must respond to His offer if he wants to enjoy it because it is a work of faith (John 6:28-29; 9:4; Eph. 2:8-10). Paul writes, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phi. 2:12).

3. We must wait **for protection**. “Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he *is* our help and our shield” (Psa. 33:20). In the twenty-third Psalm, David refers to Jehovah as a Shepherd who protects and tends His sheep. He also writes, “God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psa. 46:1). This is spiritual protection today that comes only through His Word. Christians need this protection to fight against Satan. Man cannot do it alone but needs help from God. He provides this help with His Word (Eph. 6:10-18). With this kind of protection, man can say, “The Lord *is* my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:6).

4. We must wait **for the coming of Christ**. “So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:7). Christians should long for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a great anticipation for that great day when Christians can finally go home to be with God and spend eternity in heaven. It is with this anticipation that Paul encourages the Thessalonians to “wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 The. 1:10). However, he also has to correct their laziness as they wait for the coming of Christ. Later in this book he writes:

And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk

honestly toward them that are without, and *that* ye may have lack of nothing (1 The. 4:11-12).

5. We must wait **with patience**. “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him” (Psa. 37:7). Those who wait with patience can echo the words of David in Psalm 40:1: “I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.” When the Christian today waits patiently, God through His providence will care for His child. It is with patience that the child of God waits for His spiritual blessings. “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain” (Jam. 5:7).

6. We must wait **for hope in His word**. “I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope” (Psa. 130:5). Christians today must live in hope for the life that is to come. This hope is lived in righteousness. “For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (Gal. 5:5). This hope is not fully realized in this life, but in the life to come (Tit. 1:2; 1 John 2:25). This hope is through the faith of the gospel. Paul in Galatians 5:5 is contrasting *the faith* with the Law of Moses. The hope of righteousness to Christians comes through *the faith* of the New Testament. Paul is teaching that there is hope in God’s law for man.

CONCLUSION

The people of Isaiah’s day were truly blessed by God, but they took it for granted. God patiently waited for them to return, and when they did, God blessed them. Today, when the Christian continues in faith, God will bless him with “all spiritual blessings... in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). One who truly waits on the Lord will be blessed not only in this life but also in eternity.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Barnes, Albert. *Isaiah, Barnes Notes on the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1974.
- Bertruam, R. A., and Alfred Tucker. *Isaiah, The Preacher’s Complete Homiletic Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978.
- Butler, Paul T. *Isaiah* Joplin, MO: College Press, 1975.
- Hailey, Homer. *Isaiah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985.
- Henry, Matthew. *Isaiah to Malachi*. Vol. 4. Iowa Falls, IA: World, n.d.
- Jackson, Wayne. *Isaiah*. Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1991.
- Young, Edward J. *The Book of Isaiah*. 1969. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.

“BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT” MATTHEW 5:3

Don Walker



Don Walker and his wife Jackie have two sons and two daughters. Don is a 1979 graduate of the Southwest School of Biblical Studies. He has done local work in Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. Don has taught in the Southern California School of Evangelism, and the Brown Trail School of Preaching. Presently, Don preaches for the Shenandoah congregation in San Antonio, Texas, where he is also the Director of the Annual Shenandoah Lectureship. He has done mission work in Bermuda, Czech Republic, Jamaica, and South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

There is probably no section of Jesus’ teaching that is as well known as the Sermon on the Mount. Even those who *dabble* in Scripture see some value in Jesus’ teaching. Those who are genuine students of God’s Word reap even greater rewards from this section of Scripture.

The Sermon on the Mount has been described as “the manifesto of the King, the Constitution of Christianity, the Magna Charta of the church and the greatest Spiritual Bill of Rights ever vouchsafed man” (Taylor 1). Truly Jesus gave what can be called the “Marching Orders” for the kingdom.

The most well-known portion of this sermon is almost without question the beatitudes. Though there are over one hundred beatitudes spread through both testaments, these that begin the Lord’s sermon more than likely are the best known. In these few verses, which open Matthew 5, we find a composite portrait of the ideal follower of Christ.

The linguistic makeup of the beatitudes in Matthew 5 is quite interesting. Leland Ryken writes:

The most obvious element of artistry is the parallelism of statements. Each beatitude follows a similar grammatical pattern consisting of three parts: an initial pronouncement of blessing (*Blessed are...*), the naming of a character type, and a rationale for the pronouncement of

blessing (starting with the statements *for they shall* or *for theirs is*). This parallelism of expression, which comes straight from the Hebrew poetry that Jesus loved, lends an aphoristic quality to the individual beatitudes and links them with the proverbs of wisdom literature (121).

Presenting this characteristic sketch in this fashion, Jesus helps us to remember the qualities outlined. Whether one recognized the great spiritual value of Christ's teaching or not, he had to admit, it was not easy to forget what He said.

The person described by our Savior in this context is one that will go against the grain of society. Many of the things that make for happiness in this world will be just as foreign to the follower of Christ as these qualities that bring Heaven's blessedness will be foreign to him of the world. We must keep this point in mind, for most will not see the tie that is made between the *character type* and the *pronounced blessing* for this very reason.

The problem is, most men have trouble thinking on a spiritual level. Whether we look at the disciples in John 2 who did not understand that Jesus spoke of the resurrection until after the fact, or Nicodemus in John 3 who thought of a physical birth rather than a spiritual birth, we see men struggling with spiritual precepts and truth. Men are no different today. We struggle to get men to think spiritually.

THE BATTLEFIELD

In our desire to stir men's thoughts to spiritual matters, we must remember the battle that is fought is waged on the battlefield of the mind. Paul wrote:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Again, notice the strong emphasis upon the mind of men in Ephesians 4:17-24.

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught

by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Most just simply are not willing to abstain from that which they desire to do. It is true that pleasure results from unbridled living, but it is pleasure only for a season (Heb. 11:25). On the other hand, those who allow the Spirit to rule, will bridle themselves. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:17). Those who do bridle themselves and fashion their being to conform to Christ will be the ones who recognize the truth of Jesus’ description in Matthew 5:3-12.

Now let us begin our study of the assigned passage: Matthew 5:3.

BLESSED

There are those who translate this term *happy* rather than *blessed*. The *Living Oracles* (Campbell 61) translation does just that, along with other versions. The Greek word *makarios* can and does mean “happy.” Brother Leroy Brownlow recorded an interesting story and commented upon it.

A Bible schoolteacher was reviewing his teenage class on the previous week’s lesson on the Beatitudes. One girl, not well acquainted with the Bible, was asked what was last week’s lesson. She replied, “the B-happys.” Really, that is about the best name for them (28).

On the other hand there are those who would warn against simply translating this Greek word *happy*. Concerning translating the Greek word *makarios* with the English word “happy,” John R. W. Stott wrote, “There is no need to dismiss this interpretation as entirely fallacious” (33). He goes on to write:

Nevertheless, it is seriously misleading to render *makarios* “happy.” For happiness is a subjective state, whereas Jesus is making an objective judgment about these people. He is declaring not what they may feel like (“happy”), but what God thinks of them and what on that account they are: they are “blessed” (33).

Others would agree with the above statement to a degree, seeing *blessed* as simply a better translation. Charles Allen wrote:

The word we begin with is “blessed.” Some have objected to the word “blessed” and have re-translated it “happy.” “Blessed” is really much better, and a stronger word. The Greek word is *makarios*, which is a

word used to describe the gods. The word "blessed" literally means: an inner joy that is untouchable by the world. The word "happiness" is built on the word "hap," and literally means: chance. Human happiness is often dependent on the chances of life, over which so often man has no control (27).

If God views one as *blessed*, then joy will be his. It all boils down to this. If a man desires genuine joy and happiness, which will endure past time, then Jesus provides the prescription.

Now let us turn our attention to Matthew 5:3.

THE POOR IN SPIRIT

The Poor

Matthew's account reads, "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit" (Mat. 5:3), whereas Luke records, "Blessed *be ye* poor" (Luke 6:20). We are well aware that there are those who see these types of discrepancies as weaknesses and arguments against the Bible. Yet, it is not the scope of our assignment to deal with such allegations. We would say however, there is absolutely no need to lose any confidence at all over such matters as these. Two different people recording the same event are not going to present verbatim, two, word-for-word accounts.

This is the question we would start with in our study: "Is there any inherent value in being poor?" The Bible, in both testaments, does give warning to the rich.

Two *things* have I required of thee; deny me *them* not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who *is* the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God *in vain* (Pro. 30:7-9).

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

In the Old Testament, the thought of poverty seems to evolve. Its literal meaning of need for the material things (both essential and non-essential) is there. Yet, as we continue to study, we see that Jehovah is greatly concerned for the poor. Many passages display Jehovah's concern.

He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor (Pro. 14:31).

He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse (Pro. 28:27).

He that oppresseth the poor to increase his *riches*, and he that giveth to the rich, *shall* surely *come* to want (Pro. 22:16).

He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy *is* he (Pro. 14:21).

These are but a few of the passages that could be presented. In noticing these types of passages it would be easy for men to see this great concern of Jehovah and conclude that there are some spiritual tones related to poverty and associate with it humble trust in God. Yet, not all poor men bow in humility to God's Will. In other words, there is no inherent value in being poor. Poverty does not necessarily make one more spiritual.

The Language

There are two Greek words translated "poor" in the New Testament English text. The first is *penes* which denotes one who has to work for a living, because he has no property. He has a job and labors to provide food for his family. If he does not work one day, then he and his family do not eat that day. It is poverty, but it is tolerable, by his own efforts.

The other Greek word is *ptochos*. This word means the complete destitution of an individual. He has no job to provide for himself, much less for his family, if necessary. He must seek help by begging. If others do not show mercy, then he ceases to exist. His condition is not tolerable, and he must depend on the efforts of others. Brother Hugo McCord makes these comments: "The man Jesus described is not in tolerably bad circumstances. He is a beggar.... A beggar is desperate.... If there is no mercy he knows he must die" (Lloyd).

Examples of *Ptochos*

When James wrote concerning possessing the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ "with respect of persons" (Jam. 2:1) he drew a contrast between the rich man and "the poor" man who enter their assembly (Jam. 2:3). In so doing he employs the use of the same Greek word that Jesus used in Matthew 5:3. In our mind's eye, we can see a beggar who has absolutely nothing, entering into the assembly and being asked to stand in the corner or sit on the floor.

Lazarus is described as a beggar in Luke 16:20. Again the Greek word used in this text is *ptochos*. Notice the description that Jesus gives of this man.

And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores (Luke 16:20-21).

Our Lord, in Luke 14, again uses the term.

Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor *thy* rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the **poor**, the maimed, the lame, the blind (Luke 14:12-13).

Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one *consent* began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused...So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the **poor**, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind (Luke 14:16-18, 21).

Jesus also described the widow who "threw in two mites" as "a certain poor [*ptochos*] widow" (Mark 12:42-43). A form of this word is even used of our Savior. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became **poor**, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

The Poor In Spirit

Now, let us follow the thought of our Lord to its completion. Jesus speaks not just of those who are poverty stricken. He speaks of those who are "poor in spirit." He speaks of those who are spiritually destitute—spiritual beggars. Their position is intolerable, and they do not possess the answer within themselves. If some one does not step up and help, then there is no hope for spiritual survival. Because this destitution is not obvious, it becomes a stumbling block for many folk. There are those in the world who are not all that bad in their own mind and perhaps in the minds of others. Morally, they are better than most. They are good children, good parents, good husbands or wives, good neighbors, and good citizens. They are caring people and generous. Yet, spiritually, because they have not obeyed the gospel, they are poverty stricken and dead in their sins (Eph. 2:1). Many simply cannot believe they are as bad off as the Scriptures teach. Yet, until they realize their spiritual condition, they will never possess the kingdom. Men must

come to grips with the devastation of sin. No matter how trivial sin may seem to most, or how often it is played down or laughed up by society, we must understand the havoc it plays on our souls if we are going to possess this characteristic of the ideal follower of Christ.

Great men of God were not men who were sinlessly perfect. In fact, at times, it was quite the opposite. King David was a man who committed fornication and murder. Yet, he was described as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). What is it that made this man, who transgressed so grievously, great? The answer is really quite simple. He was a man who was "poor in spirit," and he realized it. After being confronted with his transgressions, he wrote Psalm 51—a Psalm of repentance. Careful study of Psalm 51 will show David's recognition of his spiritual position. In verse 17, he provides a very good practical definition of what it is to be "poor in spirit." "The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psa. 51:17). The point is expressed well by Isaiah.

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Isa. 57:15).

The apostle Paul stands as another example of one who recognized he was "poor in spirit." When Paul wrote of his past condition to Timothy, he provided a good commentary on Matthew 5:3 and what it means.

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemers, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (1 Tim. 1:12-16).

It is this attitude that lifted King David and the apostle Paul; it lifts men today to be blessed of Jehovah.

HUMILITY VS. PRIDE

The quality that Jesus expressed in the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount is the epitome of humility. A proud man cannot realize he is poor in spirit. Haughtiness and arrogance will not allow him to do such.

Most of the inspired writers, if not every one of them, speak out against pride and uphold humility. Solomon wrote, "Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better *it is to be* of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Pro. 16:18-19). He also wrote, "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit" (Pro. 29:23). Paul wrote, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly" (Rom. 12:3). In James 4 we read, "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (Jam. 4:6). He goes on to exhort in that same chapter: "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (Jam. 4:10). Peter also addressed the subject: "Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). In 3 John we find, by the pen of John, the personification of arrogance—Diotrephes.

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth *them* out of the church (3 John 9-10).

Oh, that the haughty would realize the foolishness of boasting and the self-deceit of arrogance! How different would the matters have been if Pharaoh had not, in his arrogance, questioned: "Who *is* the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" (Exo. 5:2). Even after Jehovah questioned: "How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?" (Exo. 10:3), the king stood in arrogant defiance.

However, pride and haughtiness are not qualities that are relegated to those of the world. It can even raise its head in the church. Brother Hugo McCord wrote, "A man can be clean in his morals, honest in his business, liberal in church giving, and yet be spurned of the God of heaven. Why? Because he is proud of his goodness and his heart is not of low estate" (Lloyd).

When men proclaimed, "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12), their voices must have rang with pride. Men today, who *clique up*, by whatever standard, need to beware and be careful. What one possesses or where he lives or what his name is or where he went to school or how much schooling he has will often

stand between himself and recognition he is “poor in spirit.” In the character sketch proclaimed by our Lord on the mount there is no room for haughtiness.

I do not believe we would be too far off base if we proclaimed that religious haughtiness is probably the worst kind of arrogance. In this very sermon, Jesus spoke of those who, while doing alms, blew a trumpet to be seen of men (Mat. 6:1-2). What arrogance and conceit. Do we not cringe when we read of the prayer of the Pharisee as compared to the prayer of the publican?

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner (Luke 18:11-13).

What arrogance it must have taken to word such a prayer.

FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

“Kingdom of heaven” is unique to Matthew’s account of the gospel. Mark, Luke, and John use “kingdom of God” often, while it is used by Matthew only four times.

There are many passages that associate Christians with the kingdom. Not only do we see this association, but we see the kingdom proclaimed as a reality in the first century as opposed to something that is to come with Christ’s second coming. In Colossians 1:13 we learn that our first century brethren had been “translated... into the kingdom of his dear Son.” John declared that he was “your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:9). John wrote this in the first century. The Hebrews writer made this exhortation: “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28). Dispersed throughout the pages of the New Testament are numerous reminders that the kingdom existed in the first century and Christians were in it.

Our Lord proclaimed:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Mat. 16:18-19).

Notice Jesus' use of the *church* and *kingdom*—He uses them synonymously. The kingdom and the church are one and the same. When Peter exercised the use of these *kingdom keys* in Acts 2, he threw open the doors of the church. So when Jesus tells us the "poor in spirit" shall inherit the kingdom of heaven, He is speaking of the church He was going to build. Now, we need to realize that, "Those who are poor in spirit do not inherit the kingdom immediately. They must go on to mourn because of their sins, hunger and thirst after righteousness and **find it in Christ**" (Lloyd).

That brings us to this most important point. This beatitude is listed first for a reason. In fact these beatitudes are ordered as they are, because one naturally leads to another. Before one can mourn, or possess meekness, or hunger and thirst after righteousness, he must first empty himself. He must recognize he is "poor in spirit."

CONCLUSION

Jesus presents for our consideration, a portrait of the ideal follower of Christ. It is significant that this sketch begins with being "poor in spirit." There are many obstacles that may challenge each one of us. The kingdom of heaven is not made up of the arrogant or haughty. It is not made from one race or one tribe of people, which could lead to pride. No, the kingdom that is of heaven rather than earth (John 18:36) is made of the humble who have bowed to God's will. Truly it can be proclaimed, "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 5:3)!

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Allen, Charles L. *The Sermon on the Mount*. Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966.
- Brownlow, Leroy. *The Fruit Of The Spirit*. Fort Worth, TX: Brownlow Publishing Co., 1989.
- Campbell, Alexander. *Living Oracles*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1974.
- Lloyd, Steve. Personal notes. Chino, CA: n.p., n.d. N. pag.
- Ryken, Leland. *Words of Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Message of The Sermon On The Mount*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978.
- Taylor, Robert R., Jr. *The Sermon On The Mount*. Ed. Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren. Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, Inc., 1982. 1-14.

“BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN” MATTHEW 5:4

Jason R. Roberts



Jason Roberts is a 1993 graduate of Harding University with a B.A. degree in Psychology and a 1995 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He has done local work in Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia, where he currently is working with the Forrest Park Church of Christ, Valdosta, Georgia. He is a staff writer for *Contending For The Faith* and also writes for other brotherhood publications.

Jason and his wife Marcie have two children.

INTRODUCTION

The Beatitudes! What a thrilling theme that is! The beatitude assigned to me is the second of the eight marvelous statements spoken by our Lord, which comprise what Eldred Stevens called in the subtitle to his book, “The Constitution Of Christianity.” Indeed, the rich material contained within the Sermon on the Mount has been rightly referred to as the *Magna Carta* of the Christian faith. The powerful truths contained within these challenging verses, if lived, would revolutionize the individual, the home, the church, the nation, and ultimately the world itself!

Someone has well said that “attitudes determine altitudes.” And how high we, as children of God, soar in the kingdom of God, is directly tied to our attitude toward the Word of God.

A story is told of a decorative, circus clown, who was energetically peddling his bicycle throughout the neighborhood, advertising the circus which was nearby. In doing so, he had numerous, colored helium balloons tied to the back of his bicycle. Periodically he would let one of the balloons loose. Soon, dozens of children were following him to the circus. Before reaching the circus, the clown stopped at an intersection and while there, he felt a small tug on his coat-tail. Immediately, the clown turned and noticed a little, black boy standing there. The boy

was looking at the remaining balloons attached to his bicycle and said softly, "Mister, will that black balloon fly just as high as all the others?" The clown quickly replied, "Why, yes, son, you see it's not the color of the balloon that matters; it's what's on the inside that really counts." How true! It is what is on the inside that really counts. It was Jehovah Who said to Samuel, "For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

True Christianity is a "matter of the heart" and "the heart of the matter." I have long believed that the key verse in the Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew 5:20: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." The main theme of the Sermon on the Mount is true righteousness. The scribes and Pharisees had an artificial, external manifestation of righteousness. To them, true righteousness could be measured by praying, giving, fasting, etc. But the righteousness Jesus described is a true and vital righteousness that begins internally, in the heart. The Pharisees were concerned about the minute details of human conduct, but they neglected the major matter of character, forgetting that out of one's **character** flows his **conduct**. On the surface, they appeared to be the most righteous of all, but inwardly their wretched hearts reflected the true character of their spirituality (cf., Mat. 15:8). Hence, the Sermon on the Mount was given to unmask this superficial, external righteousness, replacing it with some of God's most profound truths that would cut straight to "the heart of the matter" and ultimately change the good and honest heart, molding it and shaping it to be "conformed to image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29).

The Beatitudes describe **attitudes** that ought to **be** in our lives today.

THE TEXT ANALYZED

"Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Mat. 5:4). What a strange paradox! This beatitude flatly contradicts the predominant view in our world today. In his marvelous book, *Christ Above All*, brother V. P. Black said, "The whole structure of the man of the world is to avoid mourning, sorrow, and pain" (8). It is true that very few people would attach happiness to mourning. Who thinks of congratulating a man because his face is wet with tears? Who thinks of congratulating him because he carries a heavy burden and an aching

heart? The world says, “Blessed are the tearless.” But Jesus came to revolutionize the thoughts of man and said, “Blessed *are* they that mourn.” By pronouncing a blessing on those who mourn, the Lord implicitly revealed that the supreme tragedy is that of the tearless eye and the heart without tenderness. The old saying, “Grown men don’t cry,” is a travesty indeed! Some of God’s greatest men were men who shed tears, who knew the value of mourning over their own transgressions, and who understood that within the depths of their sins how completely and utterly dependent they were on a God Who alone could wipe away their tears.

Blessed comes from a Greek word *makarios*, meaning, “happy.” Interestingly, the verse begins with joyousness: “*blessed*,” and it ends with joy: “*comforted*.” Sandwiched in the middle of these two expressions of joy is sorrow: “*mourn*.” Luke’s account of the beatitude uses *weep* instead of *mourn* (Luke 6:21). Commenting on *weep*, Thayer tells us that the word means “to mourn, to lament.” V. P. Black says, “It literally means to weep audibly, to shed tears, to cry as a child” (7). But what kind of tears are under consideration? Surely not all mourning is embraced in this beatitude. The Bible speaks of three different kinds of mourning (sorrow).

NATURAL SORROW

It is the common lot of man to periodically travel down the pathway marked sorrow. It was the patriarch Job who said, “Man *that is* born of a woman *is* of few days, and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). Sorrow, like death, is no respecter of persons. The wise Solomon said, “To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die... A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (Ecc. 3:1-4).

Contrary to the Atheistic mind-set, natural sorrow has some rich benefits. “Natural sorrow expressed in mourning releases a healing process in a person’s life and enables him to accept the pain, work his way through, and adjust to life again” (Black 10). One, natural sorrow serves as a great teaching tool to the human heart. The poet Robert Browning Hamilton wrote:

I walked a mile with pleasure, she chattered all the way. But left me none the wiser for all she had to say. I walked a mile with sorrow, and ne’er a word said she, but oh the things I learned from her, when sorrow walked with me.

Two, it reminds us that something is wrong in our world, namely the consequences of sin (Rom. 5:12). Three, it causes our hearts to yearn for a better place where sorrow is absent, namely heaven (Rev. 21:4). Indeed, "This world is not my home!"

WORLDLY SORROW

The apostle Paul mentioned the concept of worldly sorrow in the context of true biblical repentance. He said, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the **sorrow of the world** worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:10). Commenting on the nature of this verse, Larry Fluitt said:

From the time sin entered the world, men have grieved because of their mistakes. However, not all who have come to regret the error of their way have humbled themselves before God. There is a sorrow which accompanies discovery, that results when the transgressor is forced to endure the consequences of his evil deeds. Judas experienced such grief (Mat. 27:3). The man who trifles on his wife, then suffers the loss of his family and much of his material goods as a result of his betrayal, is sorry. However, it is the loss, not the deed, that is the cause of his grief. This is the "sorrow of the world" (2 Cor. 7:10) (176).

The Bible character who is most frequently referred to as manifesting worldly sorrow would be none other than Judas the betrayer.

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What *is that* to us? see thou *to that*. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself (Mat. 27:3-5).

Judas mourned. However there was no grief for wounded love in his tears. Therefore his mourning brought him nothing better than a hangman's noose and grave in the potter's field.

GODLY SORROW

This is the kind of sorrow that results from a heart that is overflowing with sorrow because of one's sins. It is crucial to remember that this beatitude falls naturally upon the heels of the one preceding. The late brother Winfred Clark said, "This beatitude is not unrelated to the first. In fact, you will see one growing out of the other. When you see one who is truly poor in spirit, you will see one that will soon mourn" (125). "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus said in the first beatitude. In other words, "Blessed is the man who is conscious that he is not

what he should be. Blessed is the man with a sense of need, the man who realizes that he can of himself do nothing” (Chappell 28). Blessed is the man who is not only conscious of his sin, but who grieves over it, who takes it to heart, and then in turn takes it to the heart of God. Notice the pathway to heavenly consolation. This person: (1) is **conscious** of his sin, (2) shows **contrition** over his sin, and (3) **carries** his sin to the Lord.

The knowledge of our spiritual poverty would be of little value unless it leads to mourning. The case of the prodigal son illustrates this truth. It would avail little for the young lad to realize that he was away in the far country in the hog pen if the realization did not bring him grief. It would mean nothing for him to be conscious of his hunger if he should content himself with the husks that the swine did eat. Because his heart was sensitive to sin, he made a determined resolution to arise and go home, laying his transgression at his Father’s feet.

True mourning, as reflected in this beatitude, leads one to repentance. “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:10). Upon his third denial of the Lord: “Peter went out, and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62). Interestingly, the next time we see Peter’s name mentioned by Luke, he (Peter) is running to the open sepulcher of his Lord (Luke 24:12). This author has often wondered if Peter had wept all the way to that open tomb? Regardless if he did or not, the very fact that he made the journey, no doubt, was certainly an indication that his heart was still tender toward spiritual matters.

There are several critical lessons that are reflected from our Lord’s beatitude: “Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Mat. 5:4).

It Reflects a Heart That Is Sensitive to Sin

The devil’s beatitude is “blessed are those, whose hearts are no longer sensitive to the devastating effects of sin.” Satan delights when a child of God reaches a point in his life when he is no longer touched by the gospel message. Whereas at one time, the gospel had a convicting influence upon their tender heart, now that same message has very little appeal to their conscience.

This author well remembers, as a young boy, hearing a preacher use a vivid illustration depicting the powerful influence of sin in one’s life. He described sin like a triangle inside of a person who has just become

a Christian. When that person sins, immediately the triangle starts to spin near his heart. Then the jagged edges of the triangle pierce the individual's heart, reminding him that something is wrong. The new Christian, who is sensitive to sin, immediately seeks forgiveness from his God. Through time, this individual involves himself in a life of sin. The triangle again starts to spin, but this time the jagged edges of it have been spinning for so long, that their edges have worn and the triangle has now become a circle. And tragically, what used to hurt his tender conscience, now no longer pricks his heart. How many of us have seen this happen with people in our own congregations? May we never underestimate the devastating, deceiving effects of sin!

Paul reminded the Ephesians of some "who **being past feeling** have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. 4:19). "Being past feeling" translates from one Greek word *apalgeo* meaning one who has become apathetic, one who has grown insensible to honor or shame. "This is the word from which the English equivalent "*analgesic*" is derived, meaning that which takes away pain" (Zodhiates 202). Furthermore, Paul spoke of some whose consciences had been "seared with a hot iron" (1 Tim. 4:2). The vivid phrase, "seared with a hot iron," comes from one Greek word *kauteriazō*, meaning "branded or having the marks of their guilt burnt in upon their own consciences" (Zodhiates 853). Peter described some as "Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin" (2 Pet. 2:14). Jesus described others who "could not believe" (John 12:39). May our hearts never reach such a depraved condition as the above mentioned verses depict.

Perhaps the most familiar character in the Bible who reflected the truth of this beatitude is David. David, the man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), tragically allowed his heart to be corrupted by sin. Adultery, deceit, and murder were the transgressions to which his heart had yielded. Before long, God commissioned Nathan the prophet to confront David with his sin (2 Sam. 12:1-4). Nathan's parable regarding the rich man who took the poor man's little ewe lamb to give to the traveler served as a mirror clearly reflecting David's sin. Immediately, Nathan pointed out his transgressions and outlined the consequences of them. And then David's tender heart is reflected by his own words, "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Sam. 12:13). To further show the tenderness of

David's heart, one only needs to read Psalm 51 as we see his broken heart being poured out before his merciful God. Truly, "the sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psa. 51:17). The kind of mourning illustrated by David and taught in the Lord's beatitude must be mourning for sin and not simply for its consequences. David mourned over his sins, and God graciously comforted him.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-19) is another classic depiction of one who mourned over the sins in his life.

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink (Acts 9:1-9).

It is very significant to remember that Saul could not have become the great man that he was for God's cause, if he had a heart that was clearly insensitive to sin. Before God could use him, Saul had to recognize the seriousness of his own sins, mourn over them, and repent of them.

Additionally, the person who is sensitive toward sin, will also maintain an attitude of sensitivity toward the sins of others. If a person no longer mourns over the sins in his own life, he is certainly not going to mourn over the sins of others. This can be extremely detrimental to a local congregation. Consider how Galatians 6:1-2 goes unfulfilled if brethren lose their sensitivity toward sin. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." What about the seriousness of James 5:19-20 going unfulfilled?

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

Oh the tragedy that results from hearts that lose their sensitivity to not only their own sins, but to the sins of others!

In short, we may say that the true import of the Lord's beatitude is simply this: "Blessed are those, whose hearts are still sensitive to the devastating effects of sin."

It Reflects a Heart That Is Serious about the Scriptures

A person cannot truly mourn, in the biblical sense of the term, unless he has a high estimation of the Word of God. Any time someone loses his respect for the Word of God, he will inevitably lose his respect for what the Bible reveals about the seriousness of sin. A person who exalts the Word of God in his life above all else, will maintain the right attitude toward sin. David gave a lofty tribute to God's Word when he wrote, "With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.... The law of thy mouth *is* better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.... I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments" (Psa. 119:10-11, 72, 131). It was Job who said, "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary *food*" (Job 23:12). And remember it was the Lord, in the fourth beatitude, Who said, "Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Mat. 5:6).

Numerous passages affirm that the Bible serves as a means of pointing out sin in a person's life. Perhaps the most quoted of them all is found in Paul's second letter to his son in the faith Timothy.

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

James described the Bible as being like a mirror, serving to precisely reflect our spiritual condition before the Lord (Jam. 1:23-25). It reveals: (1) What we are, (2) What we are not, (3) What we should be and (4) How to become what God wants us to be.

The Hebrews writer pointed out that the Bible has the power to accurately judge even the thoughts of man"

For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

The more we develop an appreciation for the Holy Scriptures, the greater our sensitivity to our own sins will be. The greater our sensitivity toward our own sins, the greater our dependence upon God becomes Who alone can cleanse us from those sins. May God give us hearts described as such.

It Reflects a Heart That Is Seeking Salvation

The latter part of our beatitude reveals that *comfort* is afforded only to those who truly mourn. “Comfort,” from the Greek *parakaleo*, literally means to call to one’s side for the purpose of receiving consolation. “The outcome of such mourning is reconciliation with God. It ends in pardon and peace that passeth all understanding” (Chappell 29).

The greater the mourning, the greater the comfort. Paul verified the truth of this in the following *comforting* words:

Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

The eloquent Clovis Chappell captured the beauty of this truth by writing:

The more we mourn after this fashion, the more dead we become to self. The more dead we become to self, the more alive we become to God. It is when self dies under the stroke of the cross that we can truly sing “Only the sorrows of others Cast a shadow over me” (33).

The earthly comfort given by God for the true mourners is really a foretaste of a greater, heavenly comfort that awaits them. The child of God, who mourns over his sins, knows something about the greatness of salvation, a salvation too precious to neglect (Heb. 2:3). Keeping this truth on the forefront of his heart will grant him the comfort he needs in this life and ultimately will pave the highway to a heavenly, eternal comfort in the life to come.

The satisfaction of pillowing one’s head at night knowing that one has been comforted by God’s providential hands is a marvelous bles-

sing indeed for those who mourn over their sins. The Proverbs writer recognized this comfort and peace in the following words:

My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet (Pro. 3:21-24).

How many of us truly feel this way at the close of each evening?

CONCLUSION

“Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” What a challenging truth the Lord set before His hearers. Down through the ages this beatitude has not lost any of its sacred truth. It speaks volumes to our hearts. May God give us more mourners, but not just any kind of mourners. Give us those, whose hearts will always be sensitive toward sin, whose hearts are serious about the Scriptures and whose hearts are seeking salvation from the “God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3). For it is only these kinds of people who are truly joyous, or as the Lord said, “Blessed.”

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Black, V. P. *Christ Above All*. Winona, USA: J.C. Choate Publications, 1991.
- Chappel, Clovis G. *The Sermon On The Mount*. Nashville, TN: The Parthenon Press, n.d.
- Clark, Winfred J. “The Bliss of Brokenness.” *Expositions Of “The Expositor.”* Vol. 2. Ed. Michael R. McDaniel. Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 2001. 125-126.
- Fluitt, Larry. “Good News From Corinth And Teaching On Repentance.” *Studies In 2 Corinthians*. Ed. Dub McClish. Denton, TX: Pearl Street Church of Christ, 1989. 170-183.
- Stevens, Eldred. *The Sermon On The Mount: The Constitution Of Christianity*. Dallas, TX: Eldred Stevens Publications, 1982.
- Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary—New Testament*. Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Bible Publishers, Inc., 1992.

“BLESSED ARE THE MEEK” MATTHEW 5:5

Lee Davis



Lee Davis was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He preached his first sermon at the age of 17 and preached regularly after that. Lee is a 1985 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching, has a B.A. degree in Bible from Tennessee Bible College (1990), a B.A. and an M.S. and M. Div. (cum laude) degrees from the Alabama Christian School of Religion (now Southern Christian University), and is working on his D. Min. Lee has been preaching for 21 years and has done local work in Tennessee, Louisiana, and Alabama. He is presently working with the Wartburg Church of Christ in Wartburg, Tennessee. Lee has participated in several short-term mission trips to Russia and Southeast Asia. He will begin evangelistic work with the Four Seas College of Bible and Missions in Singapore in 2003 with the Bellview Church of Christ, Pensacola, Florida, as his sponsoring congregation.

Lee is married to the former Patricia Crabtree of Crossville, Tennessee; they have six children. They are very active in adoption and foster care and have adopted children from Russia as well as the United States.

INTRODUCTION

I want to thank the elders of this church for having me, not only on this lectureship, but also for being such a supporting and encouraging element in my life. When I started thinking about a sponsoring church to oversee my work to Southeast Asia, there was only one church that came to mind. With the advice and encouragement of brother Ira Y. Rice, Jr., I asked them to oversee my work. The elders and the congregation have been so very supportive of my family and myself. If it is in the preview of the Providence of God, I pray that we have a long and fruitful work together in the Kingdom.

One cannot help but be directed to the great Sermon on the Mount when doing a study of meekness as per the subject of this lesson. The set of statements that are made within this context are sometimes flip-pantly used and misused (Wallace 94-95). The truth is, the statements that are made by our Lord in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, define the kingdom and its nature. They have rightfully been called “Pentecost Pointers” (Wallace 95).

Unfortunately, much of the teaching that is done in the religious world regarding *meekness* is faulty and subjective. For many years, people have labored under the delusion that a *meek* person is a person that sheepishly goes about life being fearful of their own shadow (Wallace 104). As will be illustrated in this lesson, this is not an accurate description of the one who is meek. The study will be divided into five sections dealing with the various aspects and responsibilities of one who is meek.

THE MASTER OF THE MEEK

One of the grandest blessings that we have from Jehovah is the access which we enjoy by being able to approach the Word of God and study it. Inherent in this blessing are the detailed descriptions that are given of those who serve as examples to those of us who want to be like Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). Ultimately, the perfect example of Christ is to serve the child of God with a pattern of living that is second to none (1 Pet. 2:20-22).

With this fact firmly in mind, let us look to the perfect example of meekness: Jesus the Christ. Jesus is the ideal example of meekness. He is meekness personified. If a person wants to know how meekness acts and reacts in the life of a Christian, then one need only look to the Master of the Christian. The principle of servanthood is expressed by the Lord when He states, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour" (John 12:26). If a Christian is to understand the principle of subjection to Christ, this must follow: "where I am there shall also my servant be." The Christian is a willing slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. A slave does exactly what his master bids him to do; he does not tell his master what to do. A slave not only does what his master commands, but he also speaks what his master instructs him to speak. A slave thinks what his master thinks. Thus, a slave of Jesus Christ patterns himself after every aspect of the Christ until "Christ be formed" in the willing servant. We became *enslaved* to the Lord when we obeyed the form of doctrine that made us such (Rom. 6).

In analyzing the life of our Lord, the word and work of service saturates the Son of God. Jesus did not come to do His own will; He came to do the work of the Father. He was not working a separate agenda than that of the Father. When one looked at the Lord and saw what He did, then one was looking at the expressed will of the Father

(John 6:36; 12:44-50). Thus, it can be confidently expressed that the meek person is a servant, just like the Lord was. However let it be quickly stated, being a servant is not a weak and passive thing. The meek person is obedient to the Lord and will not be moved off of the position of following the Christ no matter what the cost (2 Tim. 3:12; Rev. 2:10). A meek person is submissive to only one Being and will never submit to the sinful whims of others. He will do this even if he is killed for not complying with the wishes of the ungodly. Today, those who think that if a person is submissive to anything or anyone then that person is somehow defective and weak; they disdain the idea of servanthood. Nevertheless, there was no greater Servant than the Lord Jesus Himself. As was true in the time of our Lord, so it is true today. Men hated the Lord and everything for which He stood; likewise men today will not be correct in their view of what meekness is. As the principle of what meekness is and as it is pursued throughout this lesson, the false and destructive ideas of what meekness is will give way to the beautiful truth of the example of the Lord Jesus, Who is the Truth.

THE METHOD OF THE MEEK

As has been previously stated, many think that being meek is the same as being weak and frail (Wallace 104). However, the case is that the meek man is a man of courage and commitment (McGill 26-27). It is the case that the meek are subdued in some fashion. To be meek is not to possess an attitude of haughtiness and arrogance. At the very heart of meekness is the idea of control. The meek person is the person that is in control of his life through his humble obedience to the Father and the Son. Strong very beautifully expresses this idea by writing, "Meekness toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting." As the rudder controls the mighty ship in the sea and the bridle in the mouth of a strong horse controls the animal, so meekness is indicative of the one who has submitted himself to the controlling influence of the Master. When people willingly submit themselves to the Word of the Father, then that person is a meek and humble person.

The person that is meek will not be constantly trying to force his personal opinions and thinking on others. Nor should he attempt to force people to obey the Truth: Even the Lord Jesus did not do this. The meek person tries to ethically persuade people to obey the Lord's Word. If and when that persuasion is not heeded, the child of God

remains in control of his or her faculties so as not to *lose control*. This is being meek.

The person that is meek will not participate in that which is evil and self-serving. Inherent in the idea of meekness is "moral courage" or what is called "virtue" by the apostle Peter (2 Pet. 1:5). In this age of sinful permissiveness, the child of God must maintain strength of character and moral courage. The fact is, the strength that enables us to overcome the *smallest* sin is the same strength that is given to us to overcome the most grievous of temptations and the sin that will follow when those temptations are yielded to. That strength is given to us in the Word of God, and we activate and maintain that strength when we faithfully obey it (Mat. 4:1-11; 1 Cor. 10:13; Acts 20:32; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Eph. 3:16).

The meek person will not be involved in over-indulgence and excess in that which is good. There are many things in which a person gets involved which can lead to the destruction of the soul, and yet the thing itself is not inherently evil. For example, to this writer, football is one of the most noble of all sports. He has spent many hours watching football and those things that accompany it. Yet, if football starts to dominate one's thinking and actions, it has become a stumbling block. It is expedient to like and participate in these types of things, but the child of God will not be brought into bondage by these things (1 Cor. 10:23).

Jesus knew that His disciples would be the ones who would provide the personnel for the upcoming kingdom. The hate and persecution that would be heaped upon them by the unbelievers of the world, would be staggering. If they maintained control and balance in their lives in the face of these hot persecutions, they would be able to overcome them and spread the gospel to the whole world (Wallace 104-105).

THE MAKING OF THE MEEK

The question comes: "How does a person develop meekness?" One of the best ways to answer such a question is to examine the various people in the Bible who are called *meek* and see what they did and how they lived. This will contribute to the answer.

Moses

The Bible says that Moses was "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). In the context, we see demonstrated the idea of meekness. Moses had married an Ethiopian

woman. Because of this, Aaron and Miriam “spake against Moses” (v. 1). Aaron and Miriam even went so far as to question the authority of Moses and whether or not God spoke exclusively by him. They were trying to take upon themselves a position of authority that was rightfully Moses’. God became very angry and rebuked Aaron and Miriam; He also explained that the authority that was held by Moses was given to Moses by God Himself. God complemented Moses by saying that he was “faithful in all mine house” (v. 7). Before God departed, he asked Aaron and Miriam a question: “Wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (v. 8). They should have been afraid to rebel against the authority of Moses, because to do so was a rebellion against God. So, today, if people rebel against the authority of God (whether that be introducing unauthorized acts into worship, taking positions of leadership that the Bible will not allow, or rebelling against the expedient decisions made by God’s appointed leadership—the elders), they stand condemned in the sight of God. However, we see the true nature of Moses and how he demonstrated his meekness in this situation. How would we have reacted had we been in the position of Moses? Would we have been bitter and spiteful? When God struck Miriam with leprosy, would we have been delighted that “she got hers”? Moses demonstrates control and kindness by his reaction; he interceded on the behalf of his sister. That is *meekness*!

The idea of the Hebrew word here is that Moses was *humble* (McGill 26-27). The life of Moses proves that meekness is not passivity and weakness. No, Moses could have refused to intercede on the behalf of his sister; he could have lost control and had the earth to swallow her up like it did Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their followers. Moses demonstrated this same meekness when he went to Egypt and demanded the release of God’s children. This is the same meekness demonstrated in both situations.

What did Moses do to become *meek* or *humble*? First, he had to **channel his actions** into the area that Jehovah wanted them to go. When Moses went out to look upon his people, he observed an Egyptian abusing one of his kinsman. Moses killed the man for doing so. Could it be that Moses wanted to take upon himself the work of delivering the Israelites from bondage? It was not time for him to do this. He attempted to deliver them by taking his own unauthorized action and thus try to change the situation. If a person is to become meek, one must learn to act only when it is in complete compliance

with the commands of God (Col. 3:17). When men act unilaterally and without authority, disaster will be the result. It took Moses forty more years from this event to get to the level where God could use him. One of the hardest lessons to learn is to be dependent upon God in every situation and not implement our own wills when things seem to call for this action.

In Numbers 20 the children of Israel were complaining about not having enough of this world's goods to be happy. One of the things that they mentioned was that they did not have enough water to be sustained in the wilderness. God then tells Moses and Aaron to speak to a rock, and then water would come out of the rock. There is no doubt that Moses had every right to be irritated with these hardhearted and hard-headed Jews. The only thing they could do at times was to complain. Even though this was the case, it did not give Moses the right to do what he did. Instead of speaking to the rock, Moses smote the rock two times. Listen to what he said to the people, "Hear now, ye rebels; must **we** fetch you water out of this rock" (Num. 20:10)? Here again Moses puts himself in the position of "calling his own shots." Some might call this "showing incentive" and exhibiting "justified indignation," but God calls it unbelief (Num. 20:12). The meek thing to do would have been to be in control of self and continue to obey the Lord no matter how strong the temptation to do otherwise. Moses had to learn this lesson of meekness; so must we!

Second, Moses had to be **patient** when it came to doing God's will. Moses was ready to go to work forty years before God wanted him to. The fact that he labored an additional forty years away from Egypt, demonstrates that if one is to be meek, one must be patient/enduring. To be *put-off* as long as Moses was, would have discouraged many from continuing in the pursuit of the goal. Moses was a meek person because he persevered.

Third, Moses had to **overcome his past**. If a person is to be meek, that person must not allow his past to defeat his present and future faithfulness to Jehovah. When Moses stood before the burning bush, God commanded that he go to Egypt and deliver His people from bondage. One would think that Moses would be excited to go; however this was not the case. Moses gave five excuses for not doing what God commanded him to do (Exo. 3-4). It could be that Moses had interpreted the incident of forty years past in such a way as to become timid when it came to doing what God commanded him. If we are to be

meek, then we must not let the past defeat us; let us instead go on and do what God tells us to do.

David

David is another example of meekness. One might say, “How is David an example of meekness? David did not control himself with another man’s wife. He did not show obedience when it came to his murdering Uriah. David acted without authority when he moved the Ark of the Covenant in an unauthorized way.” This is all true. However, the fact of the matter is, the Lord’s very statement in Matthew 5:3, comes from a Psalm which David wrote. The Bible says, “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psa. 37:11). Yes, David said this! As with Moses, David was not always consistent with the biblical mandate. This should not discourage us from following the Lord; it should give us hope! Moses and David sinned and were forgiven. We sin and can be forgiven. Oh how wonderful! The sweet singer of Israel lists many characteristics of meekness within this section of God’s Word.

First, David says that the meek person must be satisfied with what God gives him in this life. “The meek shall eat and be satisfied” (Psa. 22:26). The apostle Paul gives this principle as well (Phi. 4:10-15). Second, if a person is to be meek, than that person must be open to the teaching of God’s word (Psa. 25:9). Several people are called *meek*, when in fact, they are rebellious and stubborn. Even if a person has a stable demeanor, it does not mean that he is meek. Some of the most demure of characters are some of the most hardheaded and hardhearted individuals in the world. Yes, a meek person will the Lord “guide in judgment.” A meek person will allow the Lord to “teach his way” and be obedient to it.

Third, the meek person will be protected and lifted up by the Lord. This is true because the meek person is the humble and obedient person. The Lord “lifteth up the meek” (Psa. 147:6). We have God’s promise that if we trust, obey, and follow Him, then we will have the provision of Heaven (Pro. 3:3-6). Fourth, the meek will have the ultimate blessing of salvation (Psa. 149:4). All of these characteristics are from the inspired pen of the “Sweet Psalmist of Israel.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ

The last example of meekness is the example of the Lord Himself. As was mentioned in the early part of the chapter, the Lord provides for

His child the perfect example of what it means to be meek. First, Jesus was being meek when he cleansed the Temple. The actions of the Lord on these two occasions would violate for many their idea of what a meek person is. The Lord cleansed the Temple at the beginning and the end of His mission on earth (John 2; Mark 11). Meekness will necessitate that the child of God will have to take a stand for the Truth, no matter how unpleasant the consequences.

Second, Jesus was being meek when He denounced the false teaching of those in His day. Being meek is to not allow false teachers to continue unchecked. Jesus exposed the false doctrine of those in His day and did so in a pointed and blunt manner (Mat. 23). Jesus was just as meek in this situation as He was with the woman at the well (John 4). There was never a time that He was not meek. The child of God, if he is to be meek, must do the same thing (Phi. 1:17; Jude 3; etc.).

THE MESSAGE OF THE MEEK

While many in the world think that the message of one who is meek would be comprised of a watered-down, lifeless, spineless, social dialogue, this is not the case. When examining the messages of those whom the Bible calls *meek*, it can be readily seen that meekness has nothing to do with timidity.

As per our first example of a human being that the Bible calls meek, Moses is a stellar example of what the message of the meek should be. As Moses stands before Pharaoh, he demands that the Ruler let God's people go and sacrifice in the wilderness. Even when Pharaoh does not comply, Moses still persists in this demand. In at least two cases in the story, Pharaoh attempts to get Moses and the children of Israel to compromise and accept an alternate plan. Moses responds, "Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind" (Exo.10:25-26)! This is not a message of weakness and passivity. Did Moses "beat around the bush" so as not to offend Pharaoh? No! His point was unequivocal and lucent.

Second, look at the message of David as he approaches Goliath. After the giant casts his tirades at the young David, David responds:

Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this

day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle *is* the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands (1 Sam. 17:45-47).

In this author's estimation, this is one of the greatest and boldest presentations made in the Bible. David did not compromise his message so as not to be killed by the giant. He did not try and take the giant to the political negotiation table to bring about an equitable agreement between Israel and her enemy. This very message exemplifies what meekness is. David did neither falter nor faint when threatened by the ungodly Goliath. David in a very controlled and steady way points out the demise of Goliath and all those who stand against Jehovah. That is meekness!

One personality that has not been discussed (but wonderfully fits the definition of what a meek person is and what a meek person does in the face of adversity) is Nehemiah. Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and his enemies tried to get him to come down from his work and *talk* about the disagreement that existed between the two parties. Nehemiah responded:

I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner (Neh. 6:3-4).

Nehemiah knew that these men were not sincere in their request for him to come down. They "thought to do me mischief," Nehemiah writes. But, even if it had been a sincere request, Nehemiah was not going to stop doing the work of God until it was finished. That is meekness!

We find many examples of the message of the meek in the New Testament. Having already studied many of the statements of the Lord Himself, there is no doubt that the message of the meek is clearly, forthrightly, and unashamedly true and right as it came from Him.

Another example of the message of the meek is the sermon delivered by the church's first martyr: Stephen. Stephen was an inspired man and what he said and how he said it was the exact way God wanted it done. In a very systematic and succinct way, Stephen reviews the history of the Jews and how God had brought them to this point in time. Stephen then points out to them their past reaction to God's messengers when he states:

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers *did*, so *do* ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept *it* (Acts 7:51-53).

This message is not from a "Casper Milquetoast" type of preacher. No, this sermon was from a **meek** preacher of the gospel of Jesus. Would any dare to say that Stephen had the wrong attitude when he preached the truth to these people? Would any dare to say that this message was not presented in meekness and love? Stephen's message was delivered in meekness because he told these people what they needed to hear. This is the exhibition of true love and concern for those who are lost. Those fearful and timid pseudo-preachers who would say that Stephen was overly pointed and blunt do not understand what meekness is. If one is to preach the message of the meek, then one should expect persecution for doing such. It might even mean that we will be killed like Stephen was for preaching the message of meekness.

One could give many more examples of those who practiced meekness in their messages. The fact of the matter is the message of the meek is the message of the New Testament.

THE MOTIVATION OF THE MEEK

Why be meek? What is in it for me? These are all good questions which point to our motivation for living a meek life. In the text under consideration, Jesus promises that the meek shall "inherit the earth." What does this expression mean? Brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr., believes that this expression refers to the fact that, if the meek persevere under persecution, then one day the gospel message would go out into the whole world (Wallace 105). Brother James McGill states that this phrase has reference to the fact that the earth is the Lords and the fullness thereof and that we are His children and thus possess it this way (McGill 32). Brother Dave Miller states:

The meek will "inherit the earth." That is, they will enjoy life more fully now (Phil. 4:9); they overcome and subdue the evil of the earth that assaults them; they anticipate the day when they will possess the "new earth" in eternity (2 Pet. 3:13). We cannot subjugate the lost world by force (Matt. 13:29; Luke 9:54-56). Only true humility enables us to view our existence properly and enjoy life now. Thus we "inherit the earth" spiritually (Acts 20:32; Eph. 5:5; Col. 1:13). Even our defense and propagation of the truth must be conducted in a **meek**

manner [emp. mine—we have seen what true meekness is] (Miller 197).

All three positions have merit and in some ways apply in every category. Ultimately the motivation for living the meek life is Heaven itself. Just as has been stated, the meek life is a life of **control**. The meek life is a life of **stability**. The meek life is a **humble life**. The meek and humble life is the **obedient life**. Thus, the Gospel is the only message that will bring us this life when we obey it, and the blessing for keeping the Law of Christ is living an eternal life in glory with the Master.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- McGill, James. "Blessed are the Meek, Matthew 5:5." *The Sermon on the Mount*. Ed. Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren. Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1982. 26-32.
- Miller, Dave. "The Beatitudes; Salt and Light; Fulfillment Of the Law; Sin in the Heart; Marriage; Oaths; Second Mile; Love." *The Book of Matthew*. Ed. Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren. Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1988. 192-216.
- Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*. Logos Library. Electronic Edition. Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996.
- Wallace, Foy E. Jr. "The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth." *Number One Gospel Sermons*. Fort Worth, TX: Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Publishing, 1967. 94-109.

“BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH DO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS” MATTHEW 5:6

David P. Brown



David Brown was born in 1946 in Camden, Arkansas. He is married to the former Joann Anglin of Jackson, Tennessee. They have four children: Timothy, Carrie, Rebekah, and Joanna, and four grandchildren.

He holds the B.A. and M.Ed. degrees from Northeastern Oklahoma State University and has completed course work toward the Ed.D. at Oklahoma State University.

David has been preaching for thirty-three years and is active in gospel meeting work and lectureships in and out of the United States. He has written for several religious journals and for seven years served as Associate Editor for the *Christian Worker* and now

serves as editor for *Contending For The Faith*.

He has served as Assistant Director of Turley Children's Home in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Director of the Southwest School of Bible Studies in Austin, Texas. He presently preaches for the Spring Church of Christ in Houston, Texas, is founding director of the Spring Bible Institute.

INTRODUCTION

Man must realize that God wrote the Bible (1 Cor. 2:9-16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). It was written for the purpose of being understood by man—His creature (John 12:48; Acts 17:11; Eph. 3:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:15; Jam. 1:25). We may, therefore, understand the Sermon on the Mount because it is a part of the Bible.

In the Sermon on the Mount there is found the greatest moral and spiritual constitution available to mankind. It is transcendent in the truth it presents regarding motives of the heart, which motives always precede our actions (Pro. 4:23; 23:7; Mat. 12:34). God's Truth, therefore, is the ultimate standard by which man is to be guided in his conduct on earth and by which he will be judged (John 8:31-32; 17:17; John 12:48). Thus, if our lives are lived in obedience to God's will, we will be focused on and engaged in a constant and steadfast effort to

attain to the life governed solely by the principles contained therein (Mat. 5:1; 1 Cor. 15:58).

Preceding our study text, the Lord had spoken of those who were fully and keenly aware of their own poorness of spirit. Also, He addressed those who mourned over their own sad moral and religious state—the poverty of their own spiritual condition. Moreover, He spoke of those persons who always realize the need to submit to the mandates of God simply and only because He is the singular Being who can give proper moral and spiritual guidance (Ecc. 12:13; John 6:68-69; Pro. 14:12; Jer. 10:23).

The principles preceding the one herein under study and the ones following are labeled *beatitudes* which derives from the Latin word *beati*. It is the Latin term that translates the Greek word *makarioi* in the Latin *Vulgate*. *Beati* means “blessing.” It pertains to the joyous (blessed) state of mind. No one of these dispositions of the heart (elements) is greater than the others. Thus, the singular ideal Christian character is comprised of eight character traits as the Lord discussed them in Matthew chapter five. Each one is a constituent element of the one Christian attitude comprised of all the beatitudes of Matthew 5:1-12. We, therefore, in the *Beatitudes* have the beautiful attitudes or mind sets to which all should attain that the one Christian disposition of character may be formed. If we desire to make Heaven our eternal home how important, therefore, are the *Beatitudes* of Jesus Christ’s Sermon on the Mount to us.

MATTHEW 5:6

“Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” As previously noted, this beatitude is one of the constituent elements comprising the ideal Christian character. The core point of this verse is found in the words “hunger and thirst after righteousness.”

In studying the meaning of the verse, let us first of all define *righteousness*, for this is the object after which we are to “hunger and thirst.” David, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gave us the definition of *righteousness* when he wrote, “My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments *are* righteousness” (Psa. 119:172). Thus, the apostle John wrote to Christians saying, “If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him” (1 John 2:29). The apostle also wrote, “He that doeth righteousness is

righteous, even as he is righteous” (1 John 3:7). Since it is the case that the commandments of God are *righteousness*, we understand why John wrote that *righteousness* could be done—such is *done* by obeying the commandments of God. To “do righteousness” is the way or manner, whereby God turns a sinner into a righteous person. Therefore, the singular object of those who possess the disposition of heart described by Jesus as hungering and thirsting is nothing more, less, or anything else, but to know the commandments of God and from the heart (inward man) obey them (John 14:15; Psa. 51:6; Jer. 31:33; Rom. 2:29; 6:17-18; 10:9-10; 2 Cor. 4:16).

In the Old Testament, David helps us see what it means to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” when he said, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts” (Psa. 139:23-24). The Psalmist also pronounced a blessing on the person whose “delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psa. 1:2). Jesus showed us the way of righteousness when He said, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34). Indeed, as Jesus said, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mat. 5:48).

Why should one have the mindset of which Jesus speaks? For one reason and one reason only—because, it is the driving force that leads to being *filled*. *Filled* with what? In this life, the *filling* pertains to the contentment of those who know they are forgiven of their sins, justified before God, reconciled to Him, and the beneficiary of all spiritual blessings that God has located in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Thus, Paul’s own inspired pronouncement that those in Christ are *blessed*—joyous—because the Lord will not impute or reckon sin unto them (Rom. 4:8:) The ultimate, complete, and eternal *filling* is to dwell in Heaven and enjoy all that living in the presence of God in a glorified body pertains and implies (Mat. 25:34; 2 Tim. 4:8). Of course, if one is not interested in the righteousness (commandments) of God in the here and now, one has rejected the only avenue leading to eternal life in a resurrected glorified body in the there and then—Heaven. With these thoughts in mind, again consider what the apostle John wrote:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

Thus, all who desire to be righteous are encouraged to live righteously (keep God's commandments) by the expectation of our resurrection and life in Heaven with God, which God has promised only to the faithful (Rom. 6:17-18; Ecc. 12:13; Heb. 5:9; Rev. 2:10). This enlightens us more concerning what the apostle Paul meant when he said we are saved by hope (Rom. 8:24).

THE MEANING OF HUNGERING AND THIRSTING AFTER SOMETHING

What does it mean to *hunger and thirst* after something? In this case it is an earnest longing for a right relationship with God. It is as intense as a starving person craves food and/or one dying of thirst needs and desires water. There is no better description of how fervent and effectual our desire to know and do God's will must be than that of the intensity of the yearning of starving and thirsting persons for food and water. Herein revealed is the sad reality of why so many people never learn the commandments of God—they have no appetite for them, much less one that may be properly described as “hungering and thirsting.”

Found later in the Sermon on the Mount is another verse giving emphasis to the vigorous mental determination that characterizes the person who longs to be right with God. It is Matthew 6:33: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” The environment or context in which Matthew 6:33 is located is one designed to rid a person of the anxieties common to mankind, which anxieties rise out of our physical needs. In so doing Jesus emphasizes that, if we put spiritual matters before earthly matters, God will provide for our material needs. How does one make spiritual matters have priority over fleshly needs? Christ's provides the answer in this passage.

The verse divides itself into four important points. They are: (1) an obligation, (2) an object, (3) an order, and (4) a conditional promise. While a study of all four points is necessary to get the full message of the passage, in this study I am interested in point number one because it further enlightens us regarding Matthew 5:6.

Notice that the Lord stated that man must “seek [Greek—*Zeteo*] the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” It is the meaning of *seek* that

parallels the *hunger and thirst* admonition of Matthew 5:6. *Seek* means “a striving after, coveting earnestly, or a diligent search of patient enquiry on the part of a person.” Only this intense desire to know the will of God and do it will compel us to discover our obligation(s) to God. Seeing that the New Testament overflows with this kind of instruction, let us consider a few of these passages:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love (Gal. 5:6).

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phi. 2:12).

Obviously, in each of these passages, as he does in many others, Paul is calling for intense mental and physical effort on the part of Christians in their pursuit of learning the Will of God, identifying their responsibilities thereby, and discharging their obligations derived therefrom.

However, let us study another of our Lord’s statements obtained from His own focused intensity to do His Father’s Will while on earth. Jesus emphatically declared, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). To make salvation possible to mankind it was imperative that Jesus do only what He and He alone could do. It was not that He should, or He ought to, or that it would be best if He did, but “I must” do it. Must do what? He must do His Father’s work. When? He must do His Father’s work “while it is day”—while He was in the position to do His Father’s work, because there will be an end to opportunity—“the night cometh when no man can work.” Thus, we understand some of the emphasis in the Scriptures on the mental and physical intensity characterizing one who desires more than anything else on earth to please God. The preceding material is further evidence of the importance and meaning of Matthew 5:6 in making men into the likeness of Christ.

When a person is starving and/or thirsting to death, that person makes everything else secondary and subsidiary to locating food and water—nothing else matters. He will allow nothing to stand in his way or come between him and quenching his thirst. But it is here that men

fail in their application of the passage once they intellectually understand the message of our Lord.

MAKE ALL ELSE SUBSIDIARY TO THE INTERESTS OF CHRIST

To give greater emphasis to what the Lord meant (“hungering and thirsting after righteousness”) regarding our efforts to learn God’s will and do it, let us consider another statement from Him. Jesus said, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24). Notice *strive*. It translates the Greek word *agonizomai*. Its noun form is *agonia* and is the word from which our English word “agonize” comes. It means not only are we to struggle to know and do the will of God, but if necessary to engage in painful toil to learn our responsibilities and discharge our obligations to God. Are we willing to put ourselves through such agony if necessary to learn and do the commandments of God?

It is important to note that this state of blessedness or joy belongs to the one who attains unto God’s righteousness. Indeed, being righteous is the only avenue to peace and joy. It is the ultimate joy and contentment that only comes from being right with God. We see this intense desire to be righteous in Paul’s writings. To the Philippians he wrote:

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phi. 3:7-14).

Here is a very important point that must not be missed in this study—**one must desire righteousness on its own account**. It is not a matter of seeking to escape Hell; so I, therefore, must be righteous. Righteous-

ness is set out in Matthew 5:6 as an end within itself. This righteousness is found only in Christ. Thus, the apostle John wrote to those “in Christ” saying:

Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous... By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous... And this is love, that we walk after his commandments (1 John 3:6-7; 5:2-3; 2 John 6).

Again, to better understand the significance of Matthew 5:6 we examine another point already noted from Matthew 6:33. Christ says we are to seek God’s kingdom and His righteousness first. The English of this passage, as well as the beatitude under study, is written on about a 5th grade level. Therefore, our problem is not our inability to understand what the information conveyed by the words of the verse mean. Wherein, then, is the problem? It is in our unwillingness to apply it. Indeed, it is not a matter of understanding but of our own will power. We chose not to follow the order set out by our Lord! Thus, we do not develop the beautiful attitude of Matthew 5:6.

This unwillingness to alter our priorities to comply with our Lord’s order of things regarding (in this study) His righteousness reveals that many are attempting to serve God with reservations. They understand the passage to teach that everything is to be made secondary to the interests of our Lord (in our study it is God’s righteousness), but in their lives they chose to place their desire for God’s righteousness in a position other than first place.

A MAN THE SAVIOR COULD NOT SAVE

In the divine volume Jesus has left us a negative example (a pattern we must not follow) of a person who thought he loved God and His commandments, but in reality he did not. He thought he was hungering and thirsting after God’s commandments, but learned he was not. He thought he was putting God first, but he was not. We know him as the rich young ruler (Mat. 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:18-30). It is the record of a man the Savior could not save. Jesus loved him and had the power to save the young fellow, but He could not save him (Mark 10:21; John 17:2). Why was this the case with Jesus and the young man? The following material contains the answer to the previous

question. Though the young ruler did more than many in taking time out of his schedule to locate Jesus, approach Him with the right demeanor, and ask Him the right question (all of which are commendable and more than many then or now would do), his heart was not prepared (unlike Ezra of old) to receive the answer Jesus gave him. Of Ezra's disposition toward the will of God the Scripture reads, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10).

IDLERS OF THE HEART

Why did the wealthy young man not completely and totally yield himself to the Lord's will? The answer: he had an idol in his heart (Luke 18:23). His desire for God's righteousness could not be described as "hungering and thirsting." His longing for righteousness was lacking because his love for material things took precedence over his love for the commandments of God. Thus, he did not follow the order of Matthew 6:33. The consequence of that disposition of heart, mind, or inward man resulted in his repudiation of the authority of Christ. Therefore, the love of Christ for him and the power Christ had to save him was thwarted and blocked, and, as noted, though he had done several commendable things, he was lacking in one area of his life—he was unwilling to obey the Lord regarding his material holdings. The rich young ruler only **thought** he wanted to "inherit eternal life"—in reality when his faith, love, and determination to know the will of God and do it was tested, he failed in all three areas.

From the account of the rich young ruler we may learn that submission to God's Word in many areas does not provide one with license to set it aside in even one area. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all" (Jam. 2:10). James is teaching us something about the nature of law in general when it is violated (James' lesson about the nature of law would certainly include the "perfect law of liberty"—Jam. 1:25). Violate one element of it and the whole body of law is violated. For example, if I were in a room composed of four walls with a door in each wall, to get out of the room must I go through all four doors or only one door? Of course, common sense tells us that when I exit the room through only one door, I have left the whole room, though I never touched the other three doors. The same is true of a body of law—violate one element of it and the whole thing is violated, and one is condemned thereby.

It is sad but true that many sinners are tolerated in the Lord's church because they do many things that are authorized by the New Testament of Christ, but they harbor some sin in their lives. Too many members of the Lord's church (one member is too many) do not approach sinners as the Lord did the rich young ruler. They think that if a church member's faithful deeds number more than or outweigh his sinful deeds, we should not upset such a church member by pointing out what is lacking in his life. It should be apparent to anyone who can see through a barrel with both ends knocked out that our Lord did not hesitate to immediately point out to the young man the one thing he lacked, which thing was keeping him from being complete before God. Moreover, once Jesus had told him what he must do, and the young man rejected the Lord's teaching and sorrowfully had gone away, Jesus did not run after him and attempt to soften the impact of the truth for which the young man had sought.

This writer has no doubt that some church members today would have told Jesus that He should have been more positive in His reply to this person (after all he was a young man); He should have considered all the good points of the young man and not been so negative and picky about the fellow's conduct. Also, some of these same modern-day church members, who think themselves to be more spiritual than some of the rest of us, are quick to inform us that we cannot follow this example of our Lord's conduct toward the rich young man in dealing with people today. They say this is the case because we cannot know the hearts of people today as Jesus knew the young man's heart. Question: Have they never read in the Scriptures, and if they have, do they disbelieve what Jesus said in Matthew 7:16 and Luke 6:44? Jesus directed us to apply the fruit test. Bad fruit does not come from good trees. Thus, by their fruits we are to know them. When the young man heard the truth from Jesus and what it demanded of him, he refused to do it. When people today reject the truth, as did the rich young man of our study, we can know the same about them today. The problem with people who do not want to expose any and all error in anyone's life today (especially their own) is this: **they think they know more about how to deal with people who have sin in their lives than did and does Jesus.** Thus, with their false concept of love and longsuffering, they turn a blind eye to sin, tolerate it, and finally embrace the rich young rulers and others of the same stripe. Moreover, they think they

do God service when they allow sin to exist in the lives of church members. This is especially true if these modern day sinners are rich as the young ruler of our text was. In such cases one may be very sure that there is no hungering and thirsting after righteousness on their part. Thus, this beatitude is absent from their lives.

Another lesson derived from the account of the rich young ruler is this: deeds done by sincere people, but done without the authority of God's Word, can never be deeds of love or of faith. Again, this emphasizes the importance of the disposition of heart set out by Christ in Matthew 5:6—that of “hungering and thirsting after righteousness.” We have no choice; if we are going to be acceptable to God we must do only what His Word authorizes us to do (Col. 3:17), and we must leave undone what is not authorized and what is forbidden. However, if we do not have the disposition of mind to be righteous even as he is righteous, there will be some one or some thing else that will claim our love, faith, and allegiance. Like the young ruler, we may be sorrowful as we leave the Lord and His Word, but leave Him we will. We must learn that to live outside the authority of God's Word is to live outside the power of his love (2 John 8-11). Hence, and again, “hungering and thirsting after righteousness” is the beginning of being righteous for righteousness' sake.

Today, many in the church are saying that Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and so on are sincere, good people. Thus, who are we to think that they are not acceptable to God? While there are many errors involved in someone who has digressed this far from the Truth of the New Testament regarding salvation and the church, it is obvious that they do not understand (as written previously) that good deeds done by sincere people, but done without the authority of God's Word, can never be deeds of love or of faith. This author does not doubt that the sectarian denominational world has always been and always will be full of such people. In fact, Jesus clearly points out that at the great and final Judgment, men who address Him as Lord will attempt to make their case that Heaven should be their eternal home on the basis that their good deeds were done in sincerity. How do the Scriptures teach us that Jesus will respond to such reasoning? Does He say, “You smell like sheep too; come on in”? On the contrary, Jesus tells us that He will pronounce the following sentence on these sincere

doers of good works, who lived their lives out from under the authority of Christ.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat. 7:20-23).

How people, especially members of the Lord’s church, can continue to believe that sincere deeds done by people will get them into heaven when such deeds were and are not authorized by our Lord in the New Testament is beyond this writer. They do, but we must not allow them in their disbelief and rebellion to Christ to sway us from the disposition of mind that has always characterized the true servants of God. Samuel clearly set out this godly attitude to faithless and rebellious King Saul when he said:

Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN HONEST AND GOOD HEART

There is something else behind and providing a foundation for the indispensable attitude found in Matthew 5:6. It is the “honest and good heart” of Luke 8:15. The honest and good heart (or inward man) will not be satisfied with anything but God’s Truth (righteousness). Thus, it is the necessary medium for the growth of the attitude that Jesus describes as hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Notice that such a heart hears the Word, keeps it, and brings forth fruit with patience (See 1 Cor. 15:58). If we allow ourselves to be dishonest, there is really no end to the evil we are capable of doing. One may be honest, and like the rich young ruler, be exposed to some truth to which he has not been exposed. That truth may condemn some area of the person’s life. When that happens, one of two things will take place: (1) either he will retain his honesty, give up his error, and embrace the truth; or (2) he will reject the truth, give up his honesty, and retain his error. In the case of the rich young ruler he may in all honesty have come to Jesus, but

having rejected the authority of Jesus (Christ's Word) in one area of his life, he departed from the Lord, retaining his error and no longer an honest person.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE INDICATORS THAT EVIDENCE THE ABSENCE OF THIS BEATITUDE?

1. **A Lack of Concern for Bible Study**—For it is the only way one can grow spiritually (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18).
2. **The Improper Use of Time** (Heb. 5:12)
3. **Little or No Concern About the Company We Keep** (1 Cor. 5: 6-7; 15:13).
4. **Little or No Desire for Spiritual Exercise** (1 Tim. 4:7; Gal. 5:6; Mat. 23:11; Jam. 2:18).
5. **Lack of Prayer** (1 The. 5:17-18; Acts 2:41-42; 12:5; 1 Cor. 7:5; Eph. 6:18; Phi. 4:6).
6. **Lack of Giving of One's Means to the Lord** (Mark 12:41; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:12; 9:7).
7. **Lack of Concern for Being God's Steward** (1 Cor. 4:1-2; 1 Pet. 4:10; Luke 12:18-80).
8. **Lack of Concern for Lost Souls** (Mat. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:2; Heb. 5:12; 1 Cor. 9:16; Mat. 22:39; Mat. 7:12; Eze. 33:8-9; Pro. 11:30).
9. **Lack of Concern for One's Own Soul** (1 Cor. 10:12; Heb. 3:12; Gal. 5:4; Rev. 3:16; John 15:1-6; Mat. 25:14-30).
10. **Lack of Concern for Godly Things in the Home** (Eph. 5:22-23, 25; Col. 3:19; 1 Cor. 7:2-3; 1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Pet. 3:5-6; Col. 3:18; Acts 5:29; 1 Tim. 2:15; Tit. 2:5; Pro. 31:10-31; Eph. 6:4; Pro. 22:6; Luke 2:52; Tit. 2:5; Pro. 23:13-14; 13:24; 29:17; 2 Cor. 12:14).
11. **Lack of Concern for Scriptural Worship and Attendance at Worship** (John 4:24; Eph. 5:19; Heb. 10:25; etc.)
12. **Lack of Concern for the Organization of the Church and the Authority of Elders** (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1:5-9; Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).
13. **Lack of Concern for Guarding the Truth**—It seems strange that those who are described as loving the truth so much that they would hunger and thirst after it would not as strenuously desire to guard it. Paul wrote Timothy saying, "O

Timothy, keep [guard—ASV] that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane *and* vain babblings and oppositions of science [knowledge—ASV] falsely so called” (1 Tim. 6:20). In his second epistle to Timothy he repeated this charge (2 Tim. 1:13-14). Paul declared that God had entrusted him with the gospel (1 The. 2:4). There is no greater trust committed to any man than to be entrusted by God with the keeping of the Gospel.

There is only one true Gospel, and we must do all that is within our power to keep it from being perverted (Gal. 1:6-7). Only the Gospel of Christ is the power of God to save us (Rom. 1:16). The Truth of the Gospel is the only Truth that can make us free from sin (John 8:31-32). We are warned repeatedly in the Bible to beware of false teachers whose goal is to deceive the church (Mat. 7:15; Acts 20:29; 1 Tim. 4:2; 2 Peter 2:3).

If we “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” we will be quick to tell the difference in truth and error (Heb. 5:14). We will attack the first step away from the pathway of righteousness and not tolerate sin in the camp (Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 2:5). It is tremendously important that we attack the first move away from the Truth, because usually upon that first step away from the Truth of the Gospel all the other errors to follow are built upon it. We will emphasize that love “Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6). We will “contend for the faith” no matter what pious frauds say about us or do to us (Jude 3). Always we will be set for the defense of the gospel (Phi. 1:17). There will be no thought in our minds of “peace at any price.” We will test men by the doctrine of Christ to determine their faithfulness or not (Rev. 2:2). As the apostle John wrote: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Also, Paul penned, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 The. 5:21). We will extend no fellowship to those who teach and/or practice false doctrine (2 John 8-11).

When anyone opposes those who routinely practice what the Bible clearly teaches regarding guarding the Truth, know that such persons do not “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” do not love God, do not love Christ, do not love the Bible, do not love the truth of the Gospel,

and do not love the church of Christ (her organization, work, worship, and destiny).

We must heed the warnings of Paul when he wrote:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

WE MUST RESTORE THE CONSISTENT AND REGULAR PRACTICE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

We must practice church discipline to keep our ranks pure (Mat. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-11). People may say they love the truth and hate error, but when they will not obey the command to “withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us,” they do not love the Lord, His Truth, or the souls of men in or out of the church as God requires (2 The. 3:6). How, can we honestly think that we are acceptable to God when we refuse to discipline erring church members? Seeking to restore the erring is as much a part of faithful service to God as partaking of the Lord’s Supper on every first day of the week. Do we think Paul was jesting when he wrote that the faithful have a responsibility to reach their erring brethren and sisters in Christ? He penned, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault (trespass—ASV), ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1-2).

CONCLUSION

The worldly-minded person in and out of the church “hungers and thirsts” after power, wealth, honor, education, social standing, climbing the executive ladder, political status, and the various other ways that the people who are motivated solely by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life conduct their affairs (1 John 2:16). However, the apostle John has warned:

Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

Indeed, “hungering and thirsting after righteousness” is the only attitude of the inward man that helps and motivates a person to live in such a way (the Christian life in the church of Christ) as to be filled with God’s saving Truth and thus to be molded and formed into the likeness of Christ as he obeys the commandments of God. It is the only state of mind that produces a manner of life that is blessed here on earth because we know we are right with God. This craving to be righteous for righteousness’ sake finds its ultimate and eternal reward in the glory that awaits the faithful in the very presence of God in Heaven. This author can think of no better way to end this study of the earnest longing of all Christians to be righteous as set out by our Lord in Matthew 5:6 than to let the Word of God further speak on the matter. With the words of the apostle Peter this scribe closes this brief study:

Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.... Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, *see that ye* love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.... Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (1 Pet. 1:2b-5, 22-23; 2 Pet. 3:13).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL” MATTHEW 5:7

Danny L. Box



Danny L. Box is a native of Alabama. He attended Freed-Hardeman College and finished his education at Druid City Hospital School of Nursing where he received his degree in nursing. As a self-supporting gospel preacher, Danny has worked for the last 25 years in the critical care field, mostly in the emergency room and intensive care units of different hospitals. He is the Clinician-on-Duty in the emergency room of Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital.

Danny is married to the former Patricia Howton, and they have two children. He serves as the full-time preacher of the East Pointe Church of Christ in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He has written articles for *Contending For The Faith*, *Fulton County Gospel News*, and other publications. Danny also presents lectures on drugs and alcohol to schools and to groups of young people.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *beatitude* as “supreme blessedness or happiness.” In God’s Word, *beatitudes* are expressions of praise for those individuals who have done as instructed by God, and who can expect their promised reward, in this life and in the life to come. The beatitudes often begin with *blessed* and many can be found in the Old Testament, especially in the books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Psalms. An example can be found in the very opening verse of the book of Psalms:

Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.
But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night (Psa. 1:1-2).

The Old Testament relates that blessed is that righteous person that will do as directed by God. He will gain divine favor, and enjoy the material blessings of this life. In the New Testament, most of the beatitudes given are found recorded in the gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke. There are others found in the New Testament, but those recorded in these two books are better known. The difference in the promise between the beatitudes in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is that along with the blessings promised in this life, we now have a

heavenly reward promised. Look at Matthew 5:8 for an example, "Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Will any man see God in this life? Of course not! We can see Him only through the Word, by faith. However, if we will keep ourselves "pure in heart," we will see Him when this life is over. That is a promise we can hold dear and look forward to.

The most familiar passage of Scripture recording a list of beatitudes is found in Matthew 5:3-11. Our Lord, taking His disciples up on the mountain, sat down and began to outline for them the moral qualities of those He would consider worthy of being in His Father's kingdom. There are at least eight and possibly nine promises made to the righteous person in this passage. Matthew 5:7 contains the beatitude that this author has been assigned: "Blessed *are* the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy." It will be our aim in this lesson to answer the following questions: What is mercy? Why should we be merciful? How should we show mercy? To whom should we show mercy? Then we will close by looking at what is the reward for the merciful?

WHAT IS MERCY?

Webster defines *mercy* as "compassion or forbearance shown to an offender; clemency." *Smith's Bible Dictionary* defines *merciful* as, "actively compassionate." But to get a better understanding of mercy, we must also define *compassion*. Again, referring to Webster, we find *compassion* is "sympathetic consciousness of another's distress together with a desire to alleviate it."

William Barclay has this to say about the meaning of *merciful*:

The Greek word for merciful is *eleemon*...The Hebrew word for mercy is *chesedh*; and it is an untranslatable word. It does not mean only to sympathize with a person in the proper sense of the term; it does not mean simply to feel sorry for someone in trouble. *Chesedh*, mercy, means the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings. Clearly, this is much more than an emotional wave of piety; clearly this demands a quite deliberate effort of the mind and of the will.... Sympathy means experiencing things together with the other person, literally going through what he is going through (1:98-99).

Adam Clarke has this to say about the meaning of the words *mercy* and *merciful*:

The word mercy, among the Jews, signified two things: the pardon of injuries and almsgiving.... To know the nature of mercy, we have only

to consult the grammatical meaning of the Latin word *miser cordia*, from which our word is derived. It is composed of two words: *miserans*, pitying, and *cor*, the heart; or *miseria cordis*, pain of heart. Mercy supposes two things: 1. A distressed object: and 2. A disposition of the heart through which it is affected at the sight of such an object. This virtue, therefore, is no other than a lively emotion of the heart, which is excited by the discovery of any creature's misery; and such an emotion as manifests itself outwardly, by the efforts suited to its nature.... A merciful man enters into the miseries of his neighbors, feels for and mourns with him" (5:66).

The Bible tells us to "weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15), and if we are merciful, we will feel the pain of the suffering individual and *weep* with him. If we feel that pain, our compassion and sympathy will move us to action. If we are merciful, we will do everything in our power to relieve the pain and suffering of the afflicted. As citizens in the kingdom of God, "happy is that one who shows mercy." So what is mercy? S. A. Brooke defines it this way:

Mercy, then, is a quality of the whole nature; a certain soft, sweet, tender gentle, gracious atmosphere in which the whole man lives and breathes; in which he continually acts toward injury and wrong; and under its warm and sunny rays, injury and wrong melt away day by day, like icebergs that come floating down into the tropical stream. And those are blest who have it (53).

WHY SHOW MERCY?

Why should Christians be merciful? Why should we have compassion on and be sympathetic with those who are suffering? Why should we go out of our way to make an effort to help? Consider the following reasons given to us in God's Word.

First, we should be merciful because **God has been merciful to us**. When we were miserable, wicked, helpless, ungodly sinners, God showed us mercy. John 3:16 displays the mercy of God: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Even though we were disobedient, foolish, unrighteous, ignorant, miserable, and suffering due to the consequences of our sin, He was not willing that any of us should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). It was because of the mercy of God that Christ left His home in glory, became flesh (John 1:14), lived as a man on this earth, endured the temptation of life, and was offered up on the cross for our sins (Rom. 5:8). We were shown and are shown mercy by God, and that is the reason we should be merciful every day.

Second, **being merciful is one of the "good works" that we are to do.** The Lord said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mat. 5:16). James relates to us that faith without those obedient works commanded by the Lord is a dead faith, being alone (Jam. 2:17). Paul, in writing to the church at Ephesus, stated, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. 2:10). These *works* are those things that are ordained of God and that will identify us as one of His children. For that reason we must be merciful every day.

Third, being merciful **proves our faith.** As Christians we have received the grace of God (the unmerited favor) and His mercy through obedience. If we are not merciful to those who need mercy, then we have a poor understanding of what being faithful means. Our Lord, in the parable of the unmerciful servant recorded in Matthew 18:23-35, made it perfectly clear that if we, after having received mercy, refuse to extend mercy to some one who needs our mercy, then we will be "delivered to the tormentors." Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes this statement: "If I am not merciful to those who need mercy, there is only one explanation; I have never understood the grace and mercy of God; I am outside of Christ; I am yet in my sins; and I am unforgiven" (105).

Fourth, as priests of God, **mercy is an offering we must make to God.** Peter calls Christians, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9). The purpose of the priest under the Old Law was to make sacrifices to God for the atonement of the people's sins (Heb. 5:1; 8:3). Under the New Law, each Christian, as a priest, is responsible to God and must offer their own sacrifices. The Hebrews writer tells us that as priests, the sacrifice that we must offer to be pleasing to God is "to do good and communicate forget not" (Heb. 13:15-16). John, in his discourse recorded in 1 John 3:11-18 on the need for loving our brethren, made some important observations:

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another... He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death... Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

As a priest of God, how can the love of God be in us if we refuse to show compassion and sympathy to a needy brother?

Fifth, **we need God's mercy each day**. As we walk down the road of life, we very often encounter stumbling blocks along the way. These stumbling blocks are temptations, and when we give in to them we have sinned and separated ourselves from God (Jam. 1:11-15; Isa. 59:1-2). Paul tells us that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and because we sin, we need God's forgiveness. When teaching His disciples how to pray, our Lord made this fact perfectly clear. He stated, "Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Mat. 6:11-12). Because we need His mercy and forgiveness, we must be merciful to others. Our Lord, in Matthew 6:15, confirms this thought: "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Sixth, **we will need mercy at the Judgment**. No man can stand before God on his own merits. We are saved by the grace of God, a believing faith, and obedient works, but we still need God's mercy at the Judgment. We must remember the words of our Lord: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). Paul asked that the Lord show mercy "unto the house of Onesiphorus" for the good that this man had done for him, but he also prayed: "he may find mercy of the Lord in that day" (2 Tim. 1:16-18). Brethren and friends, we will need mercy when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and that explains why we must show mercy to those around us every day.

HOW ARE WE TO SHOW MERCY?

Both the Old and New Testament are filled with instructions on how we are to show mercy. From God's Word, **we find that we should not do it grudgingly or out of a feeling of necessity**. Moses in writing about being merciful to our brother penned these words:

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, *in that* which he wanteth.... Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works (Deu. 15:7-8, 10).

We should show mercy **cheerfully**. It should be a joy to show compassion and sympathy to those less fortunate than ourselves. Paul wrote

in Romans 12:8 that a person who shows mercy should do it with "cheerfulness." Every time we have the opportunity to show mercy to someone, we should rejoice and take advantage of that opportunity. We read in 2 Corinthians 9:7 that "God loveth a cheerful giver," and we must realize that this does not apply just to financial matters, but in every aspect of our lives, which includes being merciful.

We should be **humble**. When the Lord separates the sheep from the goats and relates what they had done, those on His right hand ask, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred?" (Mat. 25:31-46). They had performed their good works in humility, and even today those who make it to the right hand of the Lord will be those who show mercy with humility. They will not stand on the "street corners" and brag about what they have done, neither will they "shout it from the roof tops." We know that God will see those things we do in secret and He will reward us openly (Mat. 6:18). We must be clothed in humility (1 Pet. 5:5), and if we are, God will bless us.

We should be **thankful**. God has blessed us above measure and we must ever be thankful for this. However, when we see someone who needs our comfort, sympathy, compassion, and support, do we remember to be thankful even then? One way that we can show our thankfulness for what we have is by sharing it with others. Paul charged those who have been blessed with the following:

That they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

The rich young ruler went away from the Lord in sorrow because he was not willing to share his wealth, forgetting where it came from (Mat. 19:17-24). The Lord made this statement as He left: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." The reason is, the rich man often forgets to be thankful and to show that thankfulness by sharing with others.

WHO NEEDS OUR MERCY?

When we read Matthew 5:7, it leaves unanswered the question "Who needs our mercy?" To answer that question, we must again turn to God's Word.

First, we find that we should show mercy **to the lost**. Keeping in mind that God showed His mercy to all men by sending His Son, we must tell the lost about Him. The Lord gave us this entreaty: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). All of us can look around and see untold numbers of people who are miserable and in trouble because they are in sin. What better way to show mercy to them than by teaching them the truth of God’s Word? It is only by coming to a knowledge of the truth that they will be made free of sin and death (John 17:17). Once they come to a knowledge of God’s Word and obey it, they no longer are lost in sin. They now have hope and can rejoice in that hope (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

Second, we must show mercy **to our enemies**. Our Lord gave this command:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven (Mat. 5:43-45).

As we go through this life, all of us are going to have people who are our enemies. That is just a fact of life. Not everyone is going to like us, but as we deal with him or her, we must show mercy to them. Paul wrote:

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21).

The Christian can overcome his enemies with good by being merciful to them.

Third, we must show mercy **to our brethren**. Paul tells us that we are to “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). John tells us that we are to love one another: “For love is of God” (1 John 4:7), and then he goes on to say:

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also (1 John 4:20-21).

What better way to show our love to our brethren than by having compassion and sympathy for them in times of trouble? It might be a physical illness, the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, or even a spiritual problem, but if we are what we are supposed to be (a Christian), we will be merciful to our brethren.

Fourth, we must show mercy **to the less fortunate of this world**. The Lord said that "ye have the poor always with you" (Mat. 26:11). Many people are in destitute circumstances through no fault of their own. We, as Christians, have a responsibility to these people and should show mercy to them. Paul wrote, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*" (Gal. 6:10). Paul extends his thanks to the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 9:7-13. He was thanking them for their "liberal distribution" to the saints and "to all men." Again, we can look at Matthew 25, and when the righteous ask, "Lord when saw we thee" He answered and said, "Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these." (Mat. 25:40). We must be merciful to those in need. Brethren and friends, we must show mercy to the lost, to our enemies, to our brethren, and to the less fortunate of this world, if we hope to obtain mercy!

WHAT IS OUR REWARD?

As we previously stated, *beatitudes* are expressions of praise for those individuals who have done as instructed by God and a promise of a reward for their obedience. In this beatitude, the instruction is for us to be merciful, and the promise is that we shall "**obtain mercy**." Adam Clarke makes the following statement: "Mercy is not purchased but at the price of mercy itself; and even this price is a gift of the mercy of God... Whatever mercy a man shows to another, God will take care to show the same to him" (5:66). The man that would be merciful is a *blessed* man. He will enjoy the blessings of the Almighty. In 2 Samuel 22:25, we are told "the LORD hath recompensed me according to my righteousness," and to the merciful He will show mercy.

Thomas Watson has this to say about the reward for the merciful:

The merciful man shall be rewarded. In this life he shall be blessed (1) In his person (Psa. 41:1). (2) In his name (Psa. 112:6). (3) In his estate (Prov. 11:25). (4) In his posterity (Psa. 37:26). (5) In his negotiations (Deut. 15:10). (6) With long life (Psa. 41:2). But also the merciful man will be blessed in the life to come. Remember, whatever alms you distribute (1) You shall have good security (Prov. 19:17;

Ecc. 11:1) Luke 6:38). (2) You shall be paid with the over plus. The interest comes to infinitely more than the principal (1:85).

W. J. Woods makes the following observation:

The reward of Christian mercy—1. A merciful man has the joy of dispensing blessings. He dwells among his neighbors like God’s sunlight. 2. A merciful man has his supreme reward in receiving blessings. “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.” They shall obtain mercy from men because they have spent themselves for others. Moreover, God blesses the merciful man. 3. In acquiring a habit of mercifulness a man gains likeness to the Holiest! (1:86).

Look with me at the rewards that Mr. Woods states the merciful person can expect to receive for their mercy.

He stated first that, if we are merciful, we will have “**the joy of dispensing blessings.**” As we strive to live the Christian life, there is a joy that is felt. It begins when we rise up out of the “watery grave of baptism” and continues until we are laid to rest. We have that joy because of the difference in our life and the difference we can make in someone else’s life. No longer are we lost in sin, but we become a child of God, and as a child of God, we will live in such a way to make a difference in the lives of others. People can see our *good works* and glorify God (Mat. 5:16). This joy that we have, “no man taketh” from us (John 16:22).

Second, Mr. Woods said that a merciful man **would receive blessings.** This is what our Lord promised in Luke 6:38. He told us that if we give of ourselves, of our means, of our love, and our support to those in need, we have the assurance that it shall be given back to us “good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.” William Barclay has these comments on the reward for being merciful:

Happy is the man who gets right inside other people, until he can see with their eyes, think with their thoughts, feel with their feelings; for he that does that will find others doing the same for him, and will know that he will have joy in this life and in the life to come (1:100).

Third, Mr. Woods states “**God blesses the merciful man.**” This reason alone should be enough to stimulate us into being merciful. We need God to be compassionate and sympathetic to us on the day of Judgment. When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, after having done all we can to serve Him, we are still “unprofitable servants” (Luke 17:10). To receive God’s mercy at Judgment, we must have been merciful in this life. James wrote, “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy” (Jam. 2:13).

H. Leo Boles says the following about the Christian's reward for being merciful:

To be merciful is not the ground of receiving mercy from God, but an occasion and condition thereof. The promise to the merciful is that "they shall obtain mercy." They shall obtain it frequently from their fellows, and always from God (Psa. 41:1; Prov. 11:25; James 2:13)... Showing mercy to others proves that we have a state of heart which makes it safe for God to extend mercy to us (100).

So we can see the answer to our question: "What is our reward for showing mercy?" is quite simple. We will have joy and blessings in this life, and we will receive the mercy of God at judgment. When we are merciful in this life, it makes it much easier for God to show us mercy in the life to come!

CONCLUSION

In *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, *blessed* is defined as "having spiritual well-being and prosperity; the deep joy of the soul" (167). It goes on to say that "the beatitudes describe the ideal disciple, and his rewards, both present and future." Based on this definition then, we can safely say that in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the Lord told His disciples that "to have spiritual well being, prosperity and joy of the soul, and so that you might enjoy mercy in this life and in the life to come, you must be merciful." Brethren and friends, I plead with you and beg you to remember the Lord's words today and every day: "**Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.**"

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1958.
- Boles, H. Leo. *A Commentary of the Gospel According to Matthew*. Nashville, TN: The Gospel Advocate, 1989.
- Brooke, S. A. *The Biblical Illustrator: Commentary on Matthew*. Ed. Joseph Exell. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953.
- Clarke, Adam. *Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament*. London, England: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1982.
- Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Ed. Ronald F. Youngblood. London, England: Nelson Publishing Co., 1995.
- Watson, Thomas. *The Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary on the New Testament*. Ed. W.S. Lewis. London, England: Funk and Wagnall's Co., n.d.

Woods, W. J. *The Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary on the New Testament*.
Ed. W.S. Lewis. London, England: Funk and Wagnall's Co., n.d.

“BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART” MATTHEW 5:8

Stanley Ryan



Stanley Ryan was born July 12, 1954, in Oneonta, Alabama. He attended Walker College, University of Alabama, Memphis School of Preaching, and Southern Christian University. In 1974, he married Pattie Thompson, and they have three children: Beth, Sarah, and Caleb.

He has done local work in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Stanley currently is working with Columbiana Church of Christ in Columbiana, Alabama.

INTRODUCTION

This writer is glad to have a part in the Twenty-seventh Annual Bellview Lectureship, *Beatitudes*. Our brotherhood owes a debt of gratitude to the Bellview congregation for its past defense of the gospel (Phi. 1:17) and continued stand for the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:1-6; 6:10-18; 1 Tim. 3:15). You have offered the anchor of hope (Heb. 6:11-19) during times of drifting departures and apostasy. Your *Beacon* has shined to expose the dangers of spiritual darkness and to magnify the light of the world (Mat. 5:14-16; John 8:12). Your evangelistic zeal has encouraged many to enter the ministry, and your financial support has sent missionaries around the world (Mark 16:15-16; Mat. 28:19-20). Your lectureship has offered a spiritual feast for those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Mat. 5:6). Your joys and heartaches have been shared by all who know you personally (Rom. 12:15; Mat. 5:10-12). We rejoice with you as we remember those who have labored with us in the service of the Lord and have gone to be with the Lord (Rev. 14:13). We cherish the love, faith, and fellowship we enjoy together in Christ.

This wonderful theme shall surely stir our hearts to greater appreciation for the wonderful blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3). It should encourage unity as we strive together for the faith of the gospel (Phi.

1:27). It should provoke us unto love and good works (Heb. 10:24). It should challenge our brotherhood to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 1:9).

BLESSED MEANS “JOYOUS”

W. E. Vine says of adjective *makarios*, “In the beatitudes the Lord indicates not only the characters that are blessed, but the nature of that which is the highest good” (1:133, 2:194). James Strong says “it is a form of the poetical *makar* (the same); supremely blessed, fortunate, well off, blessed, happy” (46). *Makarios* is often translated “happy” in the King James Version. Paul uses the word as he makes his defense before Agrippa:

I think myself happy, king Agrippa (Acts 26:2).

Paul wrote to the Romans:

Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth (Rom. 14:22).

To the widow who is to marry only in the Lord Paul observed:

But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 7:40).

In teaching humility and service Jesus said:

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them (John 13:17).

Peter reminds us of the joy of suffering:

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy *are ye*: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled (1 Pet. 3:14).

When reproaches come we are blessed:

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you (1 Pet. 4:14).

James uses it as a verb:

Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job (Jam. 5:11).

Job and the Hebrews writer refer to the blessings on those corrected by the Lord:

Behold, happy *is* the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty (Job 5:17; cf., Heb. 12:5-11).

The Psalmist records:

Happy *is he* that *hath* the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope *is* in the LORD his God (Psa. 146:5).

The wise man says:

Happy *is* the man *that* findeth wisdom, and the man *that* getteth understanding (Pro. 3:13).

Those who show mercy are happy:

he that hath mercy on the poor, happy *is* he (Pro. 14:21).

Those who trust in the Lord are happy:

whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy *is* he (Pro. 16:20).

Those who fear the Lord are happy:

Happy *is* the man that feareth alway (Pro. 28:14).

Those who keep the law of God are happy:

he that keepeth the law, happy *is* he (Pro. 29:18).

Contentment and joy are found in serving the Lord:

Happy *is that* people, that is in such a case: *yea*, happy *is that* people, whose God *is* the LORD (Psa. 144:15).

While *happy* and its different forms are used to translate the Greek and Hebrew terms it does not fully grasp the meaning of the original words which refer to that inner peace, gladness, contentment, and pleasure that is the result of freely committing ourselves to the service of the Lord and the accomplishments of His will in our daily lives.

Blessed is used in many familiar passages:

Blessed *is he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me (Mat. 11:6).

But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear (Mat. 13:16).

Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona (Mat. 16:17).

Blessed *is* that servant, whom His Lord when He cometh shall find so doing (Mat. 24:46).

Blessed *is* she that believed (Luke 1:45).

Blessed *are* they that hear the word of God, and keep it (Luke 11:28).

Blessed *is* he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God (Luke 14:15).

It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin (Rom. 4:7-8).

Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15).

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:13).

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty...but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jam. 1:25).

The seven blessings pronounced in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7-14) will be covered by other speakers during the lectureship.

Blessed is also prominent in the Old Testament as recorded by Robert Young's concordance where he defines the Hebrew *ashere* as, "blessed, happy, very happy" (98). He cites several encouraging passages (Psa. 1:1; 2:12; 32:1-2; 33:12; 34:8; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4-5, 12; 89:15; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1-2; 128:1; Pro. 8:32, 34; 20:7; Ecc. 10:17; Isa. 30:18; 32:20; 56:2; Dan. 12:12).

Many people are not really blessed as a result of their looking in the wrong places. Consider these reasons many do not possess that blessedness.

1. Looking to the world rather than getting their lives right with God causes many not to be blessed. Solomon tried everything, but concluded that blessedness is only found in serving God (Ecc. 12:13). Jesus came that we might have a more abundant life (John 10:10; Heb. 5:8-9).

2. Many are not blessed because they do not get their way. King Ahab wanted what he could not have (1 Kin. 20). We are to be content with our blessings (Phi. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:8; Heb. 13:5).

3. Many are filled with guilt and thus are not blessed. Judas hanged himself and Peter wept bitterly as a result of guilt. The blood of Jesus removes our guilt (Mat. 26:28; Eph. 1:7).

4. Some lack appreciation or self-worth and suffer from low self-esteem, which causes a lack of blessedness. Our souls are worth more than the world (Mat. 16:26). We were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and are to "love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mat. 22:37-40). We can only be blessed when we know who we are, where we came from, and what we are to do.

5. Because some fail to see God as the source of joy, the Bible as their guide, and their mind as the chooser of joy (Mat. 5:1-12), they do not receive God's blessings.

6. Many are not blessed because they fill their heart with anger and resentment. We must learn love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness (Luke 17:1-7; Eph. 4:26; 1 Cor. 13).

7. Many do not receive joy because they do not realize the fulfillment of our purpose in serving, worshipping, praising, and exalting God (Ecc. 12:13-14; Rev. 4:11).

8. Many remain without being blessed because they fail to learn the joy of giving (Acts 20:35). The stingy, those without benevolent

spirits, lovers of money, and the covetous are burdened as *keepers* (1 Tim. 6:10; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5).

9. Some are not joyous because they fail to deny self and to serve the Lord by faith (Luke 9:23; Jam. 4:15; Jam. 4:17; Heb. 11).

10. A lack of blessedness is the result of trying to make it without God (Mat. 11:28; 1 Pet. 5:6-7; Gal. 6:1-6; Mat. 6:34). Just as the kingdom of God is within us, so is true joy. It is a condition of the heart that is the result of serving God and thus enjoying the blessings that accompany the Lord's people. Joy is your birthright as a child of God. Are you joyous?

ARE THE PURE

Vine says that, "pure is from *katharos*, as being cleansed" (3:231). He defines *clean* as "free from impure admixture, without blemish, spotless; ethically, with significance free from corrupt desire, from guilt" (1:194-195). Strong defines it as "Clean, clear, pure" (38). In John 13, Jesus exposes the corruption of Judas:

Ye [apostles] are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean [Judas] (John 13:10-11).

Paul declares his freedom from corrupt desires and guilt:

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men* (Acts 20:26).

"I thank God, whom I serve from *my* forefathers with pure conscience" (2 Tim. 1:3).

Paul declared he was blameless, innocent, clean, free from guilt in preaching the gospel to the Jews as he turned to the Gentiles:

Your blood *be* upon your own heads; I *am* clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles (Acts 18:6).

Paul admonished the brethren to purity:

Now the end [purpose] of the commandment is charity out of a pure [free from falsehood, sincere] heart, and *of* a good conscience, and *of* faith unfeigned (1 Tim. 1:5).

Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience (1 Tim. 3:9).

Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22).

Unto the pure [free from sin and guilt] all things *are* pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving *is* nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled (Tit. 1:15).

Pure religion and undefiled...to keep himself unspotted from the world (Jam. 1:27).

In baptism our bodies are “washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22). We are to love one another “with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet. 1:22). The seven angels were clothed “in pure and white linen” (Rev. 15:6). Heaven’s gold is pure:

The city *was* pure gold, like unto clear glass...and the street of the city *was* pure gold, as it were transparent glass (Rev. 21:18, 21).

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1).

IN HEART

Thayer defines the heart as “(fig) the thoughts or feelings (mind)” (39). The heart is the chief organ of physical life, “the life of the flesh *is* in the blood” (Lev. 17:11). By easy transition the heart “came to stand for man’s entire mental and moral activity, both the rational and the emotional elements” (Vine 206-207). In the New Testament the heart is the seat of physical life:

And gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17).

It is the seat of moral and spiritual life and can be troubled (grieved):

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God (John 14:1; cf., Gen. 6:6).

That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart (Rom. 9:2).

For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you” (2 Cor. 2:4).

The heart can rejoice:

But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you (John 16:22; cf., Psa. 4:7).

Is any merry [cheerful, joyous]? let him sing psalms (Jam. 5:13; cf., Ruth 3:7).

Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).

The heart can have unlawful desires:

Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Mat. 5:28).

An heart they have exercised with covetous practices (2 Pet. 2:14).

It can burn with affection:

Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way (Luke 24:32).

What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart (Acts 21:13).

The heart has perception and understanding:

That they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted (John 12:40; cf., Mat. 13:15).

Having the understanding darkened...because of the blindness of their heart (Eph. 4:18).

The heart thinks and has intentions:

And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? (Mat. 9:4; cf., Heb. 4:12).

For the word of God... *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

The heart reasons:

But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts (Mark 2:6).

The heart imagines:

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts (Luke 1:51; cf., Gen. 6:5).

The heart stands for the conscience:

They were pricked in their heart (Acts 2:37; cf., 1 John 3:20).

The heart can purpose:

That with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord (Acts 11:23; cf., Dan. 1:8).

Our giving is to be from the heart:

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give* (2 Cor. 9:7).

With the heart man wills, chooses, decides, and obeys God:

Ye have obeyed from the heart (Rom. 6:17).

God's Word is to rule in it as the only source of religious authority:

Let the peace of God rule in your hearts (Col. 3:15).

We must believe, trust, and have conviction from the heart:

That whosoever shall say...and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe (Mark 11:23).

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness (Rom. 10:9-10).

We must guard our hearts from evil:

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12).

If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest (Acts 8:37).

Let each of us attune our hearts to the Word of God that we may obey the will of God from our hearts.

James Coffman comments on our text:

This refers not merely to those whose hearts are free from evil purpose and desire, but particularly alludes to those whose hearts have been purified by faith (Acts 15:9) and obedience to the gospel (1 Pet. 1:22). The heart in this passage is, of course, the mind.... They shall see God... This is true in two ways. (1) The pure in heart shall see God by faith, just as Moses endured, "as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). (2) They shall see God and Christ Jesus in the eternal world (Rev. 22:4; 1 John 3:2) (53-54).

THEY SHALL SEE GOD

Barnes says of this phrase:

There is a sense in which all men will see God, Rev. 1:7. That is, they will behold Him as judge, not as a friend. In this place it is spoken of as a peculiar favor. This is also in Revelation 22:4: "And they shall see His face." To see the face of one, or to be in the presence of any one, were terms among the Jews expressive of great favor. It was regarded as a high honor. So, here, to see God, means to be his friends and favorites, and to dwell with Him in His kingdom (45).

Guy N. Woods comments on 1 John 4:12:

The meaning is no man has seen the divine nature, the real essence of the Godhead inasmuch as it is invisible to the physical eye. Deity (God) can be seen only through its manifestations, and the revelation which it has made of itself in the incarnation (John 1:18).... Though God, deity, the divine nature, is not seen with the eye, this does not mean that he is not near us: on the contrary, he is so near he abides in us, providing we love one another as his love is perfected in us (*Commentary* 298).

In answering a question, "Did Moses literally see the face of God?" brother Woods harmonizes Exodus 33:11, Exodus 33:20, and other passages by stating:

It is written in Exodus 33:11, "And Jehovah spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." This verse must be understood in the light of Exodus 33:20, where it is said that when Moses asked to see the face of God, the answer came, "Thou canst not see my face; for no man shall see me and live." Centuries later, the apostle John was to write, "No man hath beheld God at any time." (1 John 4:12.) It must follow, therefore, that the words, "Jehovah spake unto Moses face to face," means that God addressed the great Israelite leader directly, positively, without equivocation. The words are de-

signed to show that God dealt with Moses with that degree of friendliness and familiarity characteristic of friends. Paul and Moses were privileged to have special "revelations" and "visions of the Lord," (cf. 2 Cor. 12:1-4), and these were indeed advances on the usual approach fallen man might make to God, but the opportunity to appear in his holy presence for them and us must await the day of full realization and in a sinless world, since God dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto," and "whom no man hath seen or can see." (1 Tim. 6:16.) However near we may be able to bring our lives to the divine standard, it must remain that while we are in this life we are sinful creatures and wholly unfitted for association with him of whom it is said, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity." (Habakkuk 1:13) (2:32-33).

In answering the question "Do the spirits of the righteous go immediately to heaven at death?" brother Woods uses 1 John 4:12: "No man hath seen God at any time" to explain Hades as the realm of departed spirits awaiting the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, and the reward of a heavenly home. He says:

The "hope" of the children of God is to "see him (God) even as he is." (1 John 3:1, 2.) It is unaccountable that the spirits of just men could occupy heaven and not be privileged to behold the face of God. But, when John wrote, this privilege had never been vouchsafed to man. It follows, therefore, that no man had entered heaven near the close of the first century (1:342-43).

Only the pure in heart "shall see God." That is, only the pure in heart are in a position to discern God by faith in this life, and actually "see His face" and live with God in heaven (Rev. 22:4; 1 John 3:2). We must be pure in heart to approach God and stand before Him (Psa. 24:3-4). Only the pure in heart can enter into communion and fellowship with God and enjoy a peaceful walk through time to eternity (1 John 1:7; Psa. 23).

FROM CORRUPTED TO CONVERTED HEARTS

When God created man, he was pure (Gen. 1-2), but through the course of time Satan used his influence to tempt and corrupt the thinking and actions of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3). Cain also drifted away from God in corrupting his worship and murdering his brother (Gen. 4). When man's desire for evil crowds out truth and honesty, this corruption of the heart provokes the wrath of God:

GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continu-

ally... And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created...
But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD (Gen. 6:5-8).

Jeremiah tells us that the existence of evil imaginations is one reason for the fall of Israel (Jer. 3:17; 9:14; 13:10). God hates the heart that deviseth wicked imaginations (Pro. 6:16-18). What we think determines how we live (Pro. 19:14; 23:7). The outward appearance does not always reveal the true state of the heart, as Ezekiel showed as he exposed the “holy men” who served God by day but worshiped idols in secret chambers in darkness (Eze. 8:1-18). Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees (Mat. 23). Carnal minds make us the enemy of God (Rom. 8:7). A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (Jam. 1:8). What we sow determines what we reap (Gal. 6:7-8). Good and evil originates in the heart (Mat. 12:35). The evils within man will be manifested outwardly, defiling him:

evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man (Mark 7:20-23).

Man’s thinking is what defiles him. This is the reason that repentance, which means to change the mind, is essential to salvation (Luke 13:3; 17:3-4; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30-31). This converted mind must continue to be renewed daily. Isaiah said, “Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose* mind *is* stayed *on thee*: because he trusteth in thee” (Isa.26:3). The Psalmist declared, “O how love I thy law! *it is* my meditation all the day” (Psa. 119:97).

Joyous Christian living is the result of seeking the mind of Christ (Phi. 2:5). We are to stir up our minds to remember the words of the prophets, the apostles, and the Savior (2 Pet. 3:1), renew our minds proving the will of God (Rom. 12:2), and seek unity of mind (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 4:1; Phi. 4:7; Rom. 7:25; Phi. 3:6). We are to focus on things above (Col. 3:2; Isa. 55:8) and emphasize things that are true, honest, pure, lovely, good, and praiseworthy (Phi. 4:7-9). Love is to think no evil (1 Cor. 13:5), and we are to exercise our minds to grow and develop spiritual strength (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). Let us with humility thank God for the joys of the Christian life.

Purity of heart is the result of our faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God or to come into His fellowship (Heb. 11:6). Faith is essential to pure Christian living and service (Gal. 2:20). We stand by faith (2 Cor. 1:24), walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7), endure by faith (Heb.

11:27), and subdue by faith (Heb. 11:33). We fight by faith (1 Tim. 6:12), and are victorious by faith (1 John 5:4). Our blessing are proportionate to our faith (Mat. 9:29). May our personal faith always be in harmony with the system of faith once for all time revealed (Jude 3).

ALL MUST PREPARE

Purity of heart will result in strong personal conviction about the existence of God (Gen. 1:1; Psa. 14:1; John 14:1-6; Heb. 11:6); the authority of the verbally inspired Word of God—the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17); the truth that Christ is the Son of God and Savior of sinners (Mat. 16:16-18; 1 John 4:14); that the church is the one body, the saved, the family of God (Eph. 4:4-6; Col. 1:18; Eph. 3:15; 5:23); that all the saved are added to the church (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23); that only the church can glorify God in worship and carry out the work of evangelism, benevolence, and edification (Eph. 3:21; 1 Cor. 11:18; Mat. 28:18-20; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 4:12); that there is a real heaven to be gained and a devil's hell to avoid (Mat. 25:46; 1 Pet. 1:4); that God hears our prayers and answers according to His will (1 Pet. 3:12; 1 John 3:22); that Jesus will return to raise the dead, change the living, and judge all men (Ecc. 12:13-14; Mat. 25; 2 Cor. 5:10). Let us be prepared and with the apostle John say, "Even so come Lord Jesus."

Each of us is challenged to become pure in heart so as to experience the supreme joy of Christianity. This joy can be shared within our family, a blessed family. This joy will accompany us to work, and the internal joy can empower us to handle work-related stress. Our co-workers need to see the salt of the earth and the light of the world through us. It can go with our young people to school and to college as they make the transition from youth to adulthood. Their friends need to see lives founded on the "Rock of Ages." Christian joy reminds us of the power of the gospel to change hearts and lives in preparation for eternity. Christian joy is the excitement of the heart that sings praises in worship, that offers fervent prayer, that discerns the Lord's body, that gives cheerfully, and that preaches the Truth in love.

BEWARE OF THE DEVIL'S ATTACKS AGAINST THE HEART

The devil knows about the heart (Luke 8:11-15); he wants to rob us of the Seed that produces spiritual joy. Jesus tells us the devil wants to take God's Word out of our hearts (way side), lest we believe and are saved. The devil seeks those who have no roots (rocky) and in times of

temptation fall away. The devil wants to choke us (thorns) with cares, riches, and pleasures of this life so we want bring any fruit to perfection. However, that good and honest heart (good ground) will hear the Word of God, will keep the Word of God, and bring forth fruit with patience.

There are many warnings about evil hearts that depart from God (Heb. 3:12-13). The devil put betrayal in the heart of Judas (John 13:2). Satan rejoices when he finds: hearts that are filled with evil continually (Gen. 6:5); hearts that devise wicked imaginations (Pro. 6:18); hearts that are hardened, and seared consciences that have no feeling (Mark 3:5; 10:5; 1 Tim. 4:2); hearts that are deceived (Deu. 11:16; Rom. 16:18); hearts filled with strife (Jam. 3:14); hearts that are blinded and veiled (2 Cor. 3:15; Eph. 4:18); and hearts that are filled with lies (Acts 5:3). Simon's heart was not right in the sight of God. He had been baptized, but now he needed to repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:21-22).

Peter's sermon on Pentecost *pricked* the heart and resulted in about three thousand repenting and being baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38-41). Their hearts were purified by the blood of Jesus, and they rejoiced (they were blessed) and praised God as He added the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). The gospel continued to bear fruit, and soon there were five thousand; then the numbers multiplied. More and more hearts were being purified and more and more souls were preparing to see God.

CONCLUSION

What is the condition of your heart? Do you believe in Christ with all your heart? Have you repented from the heart? Have you confessed with your mouth what you believe in your heart (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10)? Have you obeyed in baptism from the heart (Rom. 6:3-4, 17)? Are you enjoying the blessings of a pure heart ready to see God?

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Barnes, Albert. *Notes On The New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979.
- Coffman, James Burton. *Commentary On The Gospel of Matthew*. Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1998.
- Strong, James. *Exhaustive Concordance*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982.
- Thayer, Joseph Henry. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.

Vine, W. E. *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966.

Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary On The New Testament Epistles Peter, John and Jude*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1976.

---. *Questions And Answers: Open Forum*. Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman College, 1976.

---. *Questions And Answers: Volume II*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1986.

“BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS” MATTHEW 5:9

Eddie Whitten



Eddie Whitten worked in industry for thirty years before going into full-time preaching. He attended Brown Trail School of Preaching (1967-1969). He preached in San Antonio before returning to Brown Trail where he worked as the Administrator and Director of the School of Preaching from 1971-1989. He served as an elder of the Brown Trail church for 15 years.

Eddie was co-owner, president, and business manager of the Firm Foundation Publishing Company from 1990-1998. He is the author of a book on the Minor Prophets and has edited several lectureship books. He appears on lectureships and gospel meetings across the country each year and has preached in a

number of foreign countries.

Eddie now preaches for the Northeast Church of Christ in Hurst, Texas. He and his late wife are the parents of three daughters and have nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

A collection of the Bellview Lectureship books is truly a treasured possession. The current edition of that collection is desperately needed because of the religious confusion so prominent in our day. Departure from truth is tragic and is usually brought about by a lack of understanding of God's Word.

The study of the Beatitudes sets forth the basic “creed of Christianity” to which all the divisive doctrines of men should acquiesce. These principles are the guiding lights of righteousness personified in the Savior Himself. Therefore, all other treatises of religious authority stand condemned in the light of Divine revelation.

THE SUBJECT

Jesus said, “Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Mat. 5:9). Being a peacemaker is as vital to the Christian system as any principle taught in the Bible. While it is axiomatic that peace does not exist in the world, its very absence magnifies its need. It would be a wonderful thing if all the factions in the world

could sit down at the conference table and work out the ills that produce strife, conflict, war, poverty, suffering, and death. To be able to enjoy life without fear would be utopian. Since such a prospect is not possible, those who strive to bring about harmony deserve recognition, honor, and appreciation from all who benefit from their efforts. The principle of living in peace is biblical. Paul wrote, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). His teaching is that we should strive to live peaceably, but there are circumstances under which Christians cannot agree to be at peace with all men. The world recognizes men who exert their energy and talents in the quest for peace. The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to those who have excelled in their determination to initiate and pursue the process of peace in every facet of human existence.

The preponderance of the commentators of this passage limit the meaning of the words of Jesus to this context. Although the principle is surely taught that would include this noble goal, it is my conviction that the meaning of the words of Jesus, "Blessed *are* the peacemakers," delve much deeper than they may appear on the surface. Reasons for believing that Jesus was addressing a principle that transcends human relationships follow.

THE SOURCE OF SIN PRECLUDES PEACE

Humans are subject to the power of the prince of this world. The apostle John referred to Satan as the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Only those who have thrown off the shackles of Satan through obedience to the gospel of Christ are armed against his domination. No one, Christians included, is free from the temptation of Satan. The Christian has the power to overcome Satan through faith because Jesus is more powerful than he. Satan brought sin and death into the world. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Satan was conquered when Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

Christians are not immune from sin. Paul, writing to the church in Rome (Christians), said, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). John also declared, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Therefore, since Christians are subject to sin, and the masses of the

world are slaves to sin, then it is safe to say that sin exists and affects the hearts of the human race.

As long as there is sin in the world, there will be strife. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and James all refer to the tragic fact that there will always be hostility in the world. Jesus warned His apostles that there would be “wars and rumors of wars” (Mat. 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9). James said, “From whence *come* wars and fightings among you? *come they* not hence, *even* of your lusts that war in your members?” (Jam. 4:1). James points to the source of wars and fightings: It is lust in the heart of man. John identifies lust as an avenue of sin (1 John 2:16).

We can conclude from these observations that there will not be peace in the world, or between individuals, as long as sin exists. This means that as long as the world stands, peace will not prevail. Certainly, there can be peace between people, and there can be peace between nations, but such is not the principle focus of Jesus’ proclamation. Nevertheless, those who work to bring about peace deserve the accolades of all who benefit from their efforts.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF PEACE

Usually, when peace is mentioned, thought immediately turns to secular peace, peace between men. There is another kind of peace that supercedes physical peace. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). There is a contrast between peace, as the world knows it, and the peace that Jesus gives. Therein lies our hope. There are several aspects of this peace that need to be observed.

Peace Is Now Possible

Peace between man and God is now possible. Sin, the great separator, came into the world in Genesis 3. Man was separated from God because of sin. God drove them from the beautiful Garden, but the promise of a Redeemer was given. It is ironic that the incursion of sin into the human family evoked a declaration from God to Satan! Until sin entered the world, man was at peace with God. The relationship of Adam and Eve with God was one unsurpassed in beauty, peace, provision, and blessing. Sin destroyed that Holy relationship. It was not possible for man to heal the rift that resulted.

For the next four millennia, sin separated man from God (Isa. 59:1-2). God gave mankind direction and guidance. He separated for Himself

a people for the purpose of fulfilling His promise of a Redeemer (Gen. 3:15). When the time was right (Gal. 4:4), God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to save people from sin (John 3:17; Luke 19:10).

The account of the birth of Jesus as recorded by Luke gives us the news for which the world had been looking through the ages. As we study these verses, keep in mind (1) the sin of man, (2) the promise of God of a Redeemer to come, (3) God's love through the ages, (4) the selection of a chosen nation, (5) prophecies of the age and the Messiah to come, and (6) the burden of sin from which man could not free himself.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Luke 2:4-14).

This beautiful account of the birth of Christ brings with it the news for which man had been waiting for over four thousand years. Since the day of Adam, peace with God had been only in prospect. Sin could not be forgiven of men without the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22). Through all the years sacrifices had been offered for the forgiveness of sins, but the sacrifices of bulls and goats were insufficient for the removal of sin (Heb. 10:4). It would take more than that. It would take the blood of the Son of God.

By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God (Heb. 10:10-12).

Jesus was the only sacrifice that was suitable to obtain the actual removal of sin from the souls of men. Until His birth, it was not possible for men to actually experience the reality of peace between man and God! The Messiah, Jesus, who would “save his people from their sins” (Mat. 1:21) had been born! The vicarious, sacrificial blood of Jesus flowed backward, cleansing the sins of the faithful dead of times past, just as it would for the faithful in the future. The angelic band sang the wonderful herald that peace for man was now possible with God for the first time since Adam. What a glorious thought!

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

The peacemaker is one who teaches others of the wondrous reality of the past sins of men being completely and forever forgiven, washed away by being reconciled to God through obedience to the gospel of Christ (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; Heb. 5:8-9). One will notice that the peacemaker is **blessed**. There is a deeper sense conveyed in this expression than just being glad. In defining *blessed* W. E. Vine says, “In the beatitudes the Lord indicates not only the characters that are blessed, but the nature of that which is the highest good” (133). There is a sense of confident satisfaction of accomplishing that which is expected of the one blessed. He has accomplished, through the power of the gospel (Rom. 1:16), the reconciliation of one who had not previously availed himself of his proper relationship with God. He has been the instrument which has effected the desired conversion of the lost to the state of salvation. To be in the position of leading a lost soul to salvation through Christ truly is a blessing that brings forth joy beyond measure.

It is further evident that the peacemaker, in the context of Matthew 5:9, is one who is a follower of Christ. After the establishment of the church, it would be one who is a Christian. The blessings conferred in the beatitudes are **spiritual** in nature. The apostle Paul tells us that God “hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21). In the light of this ominous warning, it is obvious that Jesus is not pronouncing a blessing upon one who is merely active in bringing about secular or physical peace.

Peacemakers Shall Be Called the Children of God

Another indicator that this special person enjoys a favorable relationship with God is reflected in the consequence of his being a peacemaker. "They shall be called the children of God!" What does one have to do to be called a child of God? The apostle John gives the answer in 1 John 3:1. He wrote, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." He goes on to intimate that those of whom he speaks are Christians because he said that when He (Jesus) comes again, we will know what we shall be like for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

We know he is speaking of Christians because he writes to those who "walk in the light, as he is in the light" (1 John 1:7). Also, he states in 1 John 2:1: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." In these verses, John refers to those to whom he wrote as, "sons of God," being "like Him," those who "walk in the light," "My little children," and as those who "have an advocate with the Father." All of these identifications are unique to the Christian.

Therefore, as we study carefully the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:9, it is apparent that Jesus has reference to others than those who attempt to restore or maintain peace between individuals or nations. He is speaking of those who give their talents and energy to the reconciling of lost souls to the Giver of peace, the God of heaven.

BENEFITS OF BEING PEACEMAKERS

Being a peacemaker brings blessings far greater than just being joyous. Bringing the lost back to the fold of God is to experience joy indescribable. The parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15) all teach that restoration of a sinner that repents elicits more joy in heaven than over ninety and nine who need no repentance. Blessings abound for those who are called children of God.

Children of God are those who:

1. **Have conquered the power of Satan.** The apostle Paul inspired in his defense of the gospel of Christ and His resurrection, writing to the church in Corinth, gave ample proof that what he had preached to them was true. He reminded them that they were saved by the gospel and that the death, burial and resurrection of Christ constituted the good news (gospel) they had received, by which they were

saved (1 Cor. 15:1-4). He reasoned with them to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus was the basis for their salvation. Based on the indisputable evidence of the resurrection of Christ, he emphasized the blessing that follows: that death has no dominion over those who are faithful to Christ. Jesus told Martha, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). He had already spoken of those who were His followers:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29).

The contingencies of these passages are that those who would receive the blessings of eternal life are His faithful followers. That being the fact, Christians can be true peacemakers. He encouraged, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

Christians today take courage and comfort in the knowledge that by either being a peacemaker, or having been influenced by a peacemaker, the human elements of distraction have no power over them. Living amid worldly influences is a constant threat to the child of God. Many fall into the numberless traps Satan has and become involved in sin. John cautions against succumbing to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

2. **Enjoy the comforts of peace.** Having conquered the power of Satan through faith and obedience to Christ, the Christian enjoys the comfort and hope that contrasts the instability of the world. Paul’s letter to the Philippians is a wondrous expression of hope and confidence one has as a child of God. He tells them to be faithful—that they may have to suffer persecution—but not to be afraid. He says they can have the mind of Christ who is more powerful than all the powers in the earth. Also, he tells them they can forget about the past and focus on the future with confidence. He points out the difference between carnal and eternal citizenship. He says the Christian’s citizenship (Phi. 3:20—ASV) is in heaven where our bodies will be fashioned like that of Jesus.

One of the most comforting of all passages: Paul says not to worry about physical, earthly, or carnal things, but give thanks to God for the things He gives us. “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phi.

4:7). The Christian has peace the world cannot understand. One cannot have that peace without the intervention of the *Peacemaker*! Nothing can keep us from doing what we must to be saved—not even the power of Satan. The power to overcome Satan comes through our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me" (Phi. 4:13).

3. **Must be peacemakers.** Jesus said, in our text, that peacemakers shall be called children of God. We are taught in the Bible that to become a child of God one must obey the gospel. Paul defined the gospel as the death of Jesus for our sins according to the Scriptures, His burial, and His resurrection according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3-4). He stated that one must obey that form of doctrine to be a servant of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). Since the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus are facts, and facts cannot be obeyed, to obey the gospel, a form of the facts must be utilized. Paul provides that form in the earlier verses of Romans 6. He says we are baptized into His death, receive the washing away of our sins (Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21) and are raised from that figurative death to live as a new creature (Rom. 6:3-4). Having been baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) based upon our belief that Jesus is the Christ, the repentance that takes place in our hearts, and our confession that He is God's Son, we then become citizens of God's kingdom (Col. 1:13). Being children of God as a consequence of our obedience to the gospel, it is now possible for that one to be called a peacemaker.

Peace that comes to one as a Christian is not complete until he is able to convey to others the wonderful relationship he now has with God. All of the past life without God disappears in His forgiveness of our sins. Listen to the word of Paul as he writes to the Gentile Christians in Ephesus:

Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:11-13).

The abiding life of joy and peace comes from having the assurance that heaven can be our home when this life is over. Hope that looks forward to eternal peace is the product of God's grace in giving His Son, Jesus, to die for us. Paul reminded the Ephesian brethren that they

were once without God and without hope in the world, but now in Christ they are reconciled with Him.

Should this same message be worthy to preach to every person on earth? Jesus thought it would be. He said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Paul told Timothy, “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). He also told Timothy: “Preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). The responsibility for spreading the soul-saving word of God to all people of every generation falls squarely upon the shoulders of every Christian! No wonder, then, that Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PEACEMAKERS

Why is being a peacemaker with all the benefits thereof so important. Would it not be just as well for one to live his life, leave others alone, and prefer to be left alone by others? This is the prevalent attitude of many denominational bodies. The Anglican Church has a rather blasé attitude toward religion. Their unofficial motto is: “Leave me alone, and I will leave you alone.” Their attitude toward their church is they attend three times in life: First, when they are *hatched* (born); second, when they are *matched* (married); and third, when they are *dispatched* (buried). Needless to say, there remains neither place nor desire for a peacemaker.

Unfortunately, some in the church of our Lord demonstrate somewhat similar attitudes. Many are content to “go to church” perhaps on a fairly regular basis, but will not be called upon to work in any capacity to influence others to obey the gospel or repent of public sins.

Regardless of the attitudes of those who take the matter of the salvation of souls lightly, there is a tremendous significance attached to peacemakers. They are the ones who accomplish three very important goals:

1. **They place themselves in the favor of God.** One cannot be a peacemaker without being a child of God. Being right with God assures us of a home in heaven because we are doing His will (Mat. 7:21).
2. **They bring others into the favor of God.** The peace that passeth understanding comes as a result of faith, and faith comes by the

Word of God (Rom. 10:17). The peacemaker is the one who reconciles the sinner to the saving grace of God.

3. **They fight against the destroyer of peace.** Perhaps the most significant role of the peacemaker is his struggle against Satan. Since Satan is the enemy of peace, efforts to accomplish peace are contrary to his wishes. Peter warns concerning Satan: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan is an active foe, and action is necessary to thwart his influence. Paul talks about the armor of God with which to fight against the fiery darts of the evil one (Eph. 6:10-17).

To accomplish peace, either secular or spiritual, it is often necessary to take up arms in conflict. When that time comes, there is no more important fight to win than that of defeating the devil.

Preaching (teaching) the gospel of Christ is of paramount importance. The Word of God produces the one saving faith we read of in the Bible (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 4:5; Gal. 3:24; Heb. 11:6). Defending the faith against the wiles of the Devil is significantly important as well (Phi. 1:17; 2 Tim. 4:7; Jude 3). The peacemaker is one who will not shirk his privilege to exercise his influence not only in the teaching of the Word of God, but in defending God's holy Word from those who would destroy it.

CONCLUSION

The three areas of service, or work, of the peacemaker can be summed up in the following observations: (1) He serves himself in placing his soul in the power of God's love for His children; (2) He serves others in guiding them into the same love through the power of the gospel of Christ; (3) He serves the church in his efforts to bring peace and harmony within the family of God; and (4) He serves God in the fight we must wage against Satan and his angels while we are in this mortal life.

Consider the words of Paul to the Ephesians: "Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace" (Eph. 2:15). Paul does not speak of peace between the Jews and Gentiles in this passage. He is talking about both Jew and Gentile being reconciled unto God in one body, the church. Notice: "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain

the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh” (Eph. 2:16-17). The Jews were *nigh* under the law of Moses, but the Gentiles were *afar off*. Now, in Christ, they are both reconciled unto God in the church, and now both could be at *peace*!

Let us strive to love, cherish, preach, and defend the precious peace we have with God through Jesus our Lord and, in the process, be peacemakers.

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated. Vine, W. E. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1981.

“BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS’ SAKE” MATTHEW 5:10-12

Joel Wheeler



Joel Wheeler, a native of Tuscaloosa Alabama, graduated from Tuscaloosa High School. He attended Freed-Hardeman College from 1970 to 1972 and attended Williams College working towards a World History Degree. He graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1987.

He has done local work with the Antioch Church of Christ near Tupelo, Mississippi, for three years and the church of Christ in Thayer, Missouri, for seven years. He is presently working with the church in Foley, Alabama. He has held gospel meetings in Ohio, Mississippi, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and South Carolina. He has directed young people’s campaigns and VBS’s in Ohio, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. He has made mission trips to Murmansk, Russia, and St. Culthbert’s Mission, Guyana, South America. His local work includes a daily radio program.

Joel is married to the former Susan Midgett of Annapolis, Maryland. They have one married son who teaches at Arkansas State University, one married daughter, and one daughter at home.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Mat. 5:10-12).

The very words of our Lord give encouragement and hope in a time when it is needed the most. There is a tremendous need to edify and encourage the church which is going through great trials of doctrinal error. Our Lord reassures all of mankind of the great hope and blessings that lie in the gospel.

“Blessed” is translated from the Greek word *makarios* which is means “happy, fortunate, in a position of favor” (Strong 1513). One

must understand that blessed is an inward condition and not determined by outward circumstances. True happiness cannot be found in the material things of the world. It was said that a man sought to find the secret to happiness; so he typed in the words “true happiness” in the internet search. The computer search came up empty, meaning that true happiness cannot be found among the worldly things.

Blessedness is the universal aim of life. Children seek joy in toys while adults seek joy in wealth, power, and pride. Yet, the Bible teaches that true joy comes from God. *Blessed* as found in the beatitudes includes a deeper meaning than mere happiness. The word implies that true happiness or blessedness is an approval from God. Concerning this topic, literally, blessedness comes because God gives approval to those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. In the Old Testament, *blessed* or *blessing* was a formula for God giving life (McKenzie 98). The man walking in the way of righteousness (Psa. 1:6) is blessed of God and will enjoy eternal life.

Each of the beatitudes our Lord stated during the Sermon on the Mount is a paradox. Perhaps the greatest paradox is that the righteous will receive a great reward inasmuch as they have suffered great affliction and pain at the hands of the evildoer. Three times in three verses (Mat. 5:10-12), Jesus emphasizes that the righteous will suffer and God will be faithful to reward them. Could there be any greater statement of hope and encouraging words for God’s people who are going through trials in perilous times? Our Lord prepares us for the life of a Christian while on earth. Perhaps the greatest misconception of the Christian life is that one who obeys God and is faithful to Him will be free of the trials of this life. Many individuals believe that only the wicked will suffer evil things in this life and God will spare all of the Christians from persecution. Yet God’s people have been persecuted in all generations. Genesis opens with the persecution of Abel and Revelation closes with children of God being martyred. Jesus prepares us for the coming trials and afflictions.

WARNING OF PERSECUTION

A warning of the persecution of God’s people is stated by our Lord in three verses (Mat. 5:10-12). In fact, God on many occasions prepared the prophets and his servants with a warning for the persecution that would come. To be warned is to be prepared to endure it. Jesus warned

of the evil persecution that would come to Himself and to saints. Matthew records:

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day (Mat. 16:21).

Jesus also warned Peter of His coming persecution:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me (John 21:18-19).

About thirty years after the church was established, the problem of persecution among Christians was worsening. The great apostle Peter wrote, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind” (1 Pet. 4:1). The entire book of 1 Peter deals with a warning of persecution of God’s people. The apostle Paul wrote, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). One can only be warned that the righteous and godly will be persecuted.

REASON FOR PERSECUTION

The apostle Peter wrote, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters” (1 Pet. 4:15). A criminal cannot suffer persecution because he is a lawbreaker. In fact, the very definition of persecution is based upon innocence. Lenski made an interesting observation concerning first century Christians. Some Christian might not only be reproached but might have to suffer for an actual crime. Pagan enemies would connect his actions with the “name of Christ” for his crime (207-208). Thayer defines *persecution* as to “harass, trouble, molest one” (153), stating that it may be done with respect to one’s body or mind (5:14). Therefore, a person cannot suffer as a Christian if he is guilty of a criminal act and breaking the law. God ordained governments to punish the evildoer (Rom. 13:1-4).

Jesus stated that persecution would be for “righteousness’ sake... and...for my sake” (Mat. 5:10-11). To be persecuted for *righteousness’ sake* means more than just being innocent of doing evil or being a

bystander. It means that one is persecuted because of his character and life. James, the inspired writer, wrote, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam. 4:4). One cannot possibly serve the world and be pleasing to God. Yet many members of the church want to live as the world lives. The issue of divorce and remarriage for any cause has become accepted in our society today. In fact, those in the church have been affected by the world's acceptance, thinking that it should be allowed in the church. Many question the authority of the Bible and want to interpret the Scriptures to their liking (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Even many in the church will persecute the messenger because of the message he brings. How many preachers have been fired for preaching against divorce and remarrying for any reason? How many hate letters have preachers and elders received for withdrawing fellowship from the disorderly? Sometimes we find Christians who are living in a worldly state and in turn persecute those who speak against their conduct.

No Christian for any length of time will escape the fiery trials of persecution. The more a person is involved with the work of the church, the more frequent will trials and persecutions come. Paul was stoned at Lystra because the unbelieving Jews at Antioch and Iconium persuaded the people that he was teaching contrary to the law of Moses (Acts 14:2, 19). The apostle Paul suffered perils of journeyings, waters, robbers, his own countrymen, by heathen, in the wilderness, among false brethren, and still cared daily for the church. All of this was done because of his faithful devotion to God. Paul, before he was converted to Christ, persecuted the righteous. He became the persecuted after his conversion.

Peter wrote, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan is like a devouring beast seeking to persecute God's people. The devil has used men to do great harm to them and the church. Much of the church's problems derive from Satan using men to persecute it. The first century Christians were severely persecuted for their faithfulness to Christ. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ "did no sin" and "neither was guile found in his mouth," yet he endured the greatest persecution of all mankind (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

THE BENEFIT OF PERSECUTION

The fiery trials of persecution are never pleasant from a human point of view. One may ask, what possible good could come from persecutions? From a spiritual standpoint many good things come from persecution. Genesis opens with the persecution of Abel and Revelation closes with the faithful saints being martyred. First, one's faith is strengthened by the trials. The apostle Paul grew stronger in faith as he aged in years. He was stoned, mobbed, beaten, shipwrecked as he tirelessly work for the kingdom's sake. He wrote in his final epistle:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Paul's faith was steadfast and stronger at the end of his life than when he first began because of all the trials he faced as a Christian. Persecutions and trials strengthen our faith in God's plan to save us. The first-century Christians in Jerusalem were scatter by persecutions, but they carried the gospel of Christ with them (Acts 8:4).

Trials and persecutions also give us strength to endure other persecutions and persevere to the end. James wrote:

Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing (Jam. 1:2-4).

It is to our benefit that we are subjected to the trials of faith. Without any resistance one becomes weak and sickly. Exercise is needful to keep the physical body strong and healthy. Trials and persecutions keep our faith strong and build patience for the next one to come our way.

The apostle Peter wrote:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified (1 Pet. 4:12-14).

The trials and persecutions are no strange thing to Christianity. It is to be expected by those who hate righteousness. Even the middle eastern religions hate Christianity because of their pursuit of a false religion. It was said of brother C. A. Wheeler, who preached in middle Alabama and middle Mississippi in the depression, that he endured great persecution by denominational preachers. He was *rocked* out of town by many who loved not the truth. It is said that J. D. Tant often encountered persecutions by many denominational people.

The grace of humility is obtained through trials and persecutions. Any amount of pride is removed by the hardships of persecutions. The burdens of life almost become more than one can endure when tried. Peter wrote, “Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5).

One must realize that the reproaches in which we endure should give us some consolation in that we are partakers of the sufferings of Christ. The disciples fled at the arrest of Jesus in the garden, but later on the day of Pentecost preached the gospel to the Jews (Mat. 26; Acts 2). Today, Christianity is not persecuted in the free world as it was in the day of Paul and the apostles. Yet, many are mentally reproached for the stand they take against false doctrine and immorality in the church today. Many preachers have given up the pulpit because of the blast of insults and threats of harm. Often children of preachers and elders receive the blunt attacks of the cowardly servants of Satan.

THE EXAMPLES OF PERSECUTION

Human nature will often make us discouraged in the midst of persecutions. We must never feel alone in our persecutions and trials. Jesus stated, “For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Mat. 5:12b). There is great consolation knowing that others have gone through the same trials as you have. Many of God’s children have suffered great things for His name’s sake. The Hebrews writer states, “They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (Heb. 11:37). The first to suffer was righteous Abel (Mat. 23:35) who was murdered at the hands of his own brother, because he had offered a sacrifice that was pleasing to God (Gen. 4:4). The inspired Hebrews writer uses Abel as an example

of obedience, yet he was persecuted for his obedience to God (Heb. 11:4).

Another example is the prophet Elijah who was tormented by Jezebel’s passion to kill him. Elijah fled to Beersheba and down into the wilderness to escape the sword of his pursuers. He was so discouraged that he requested to die (1 Kin. 19:10). God saw fit to care and nourish him. Also, John the baptizer was thrown in prison and beheaded because he preached against Herod’s adulteress marriage. Daniel was persecuted for praying to the true and living God. Joseph, the son of Jacob, was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. The apostles Peter and John were thrown into prison for preaching the name of Jesus. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, was stoned at Jerusalem because he preached to Jews who rejected God’s message and rejected the prophets (Acts 7:51-52).

The Bible is filled with examples of God’s people suffering at the hands of their enemies. Our Lord suffered more than any because of the great burden He bore at Calvary. He was perfect and sinless, yet He still suffered for all of mankind.

THE REWARD OF PERSECUTION

The rewards of enduring trials are far beyond our concept of God’s love. Jesus stated: “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 5:10). Those that endure trials and persecutions for righteousness sake shall have access to the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13-14) through their obedience (Heb. 5:9). Eternal salvation can only come through Christ and His church or kingdom (Mat. 16:16-19; Eph. 5:23). Those that endure persecution for righteousness’ sake have possession of the kingdom which is to save man from his sins. Many have obeyed the steps to salvation but forsaken the kingdom when trials come. They are not in possession of the kingdom of heaven. Demas, having loved this present world, forsook Paul and the church; thus he was not in possession of the kingdom (2 Tim. 4:10).

We read “be thou faithful unto death,” and we shall receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Jesus admonished His followers to endure persecutions even if it cost them their physical life. During the reign of the very cruel emperors in the first three centuries, Christians faced torture, persecutions, and even death. Many forsook the Lord, but many remained faithful till the end. The encouraging words of James give us hope in the trials we face. He wrote, “Blessed *is* the man that endureth

temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (Jam. 1:12). The crown of life means the victory from this life. The end result is heaven, the eternal resting place of those who have endured and remained faithful to Christ.

Jesus said, “For great *is* your reward in heaven” (Mat. 5:12). God has prepared a place for a prepared people. Nothing on this earth can compare to the eternal reward that is awaiting God’s people. Much is written concerning what is in store for the faithful. John describes the eternal bliss in human terms, yet no amount of words can give us a complete understanding. It simply is not possible for the finite human mind to comprehend the infinite. There will be no more persecutions, trials, tears, pain, sorrow, or death to plague God’s children. In heaven, all of what we need will be there.

Paul wrote:

For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

This mortal body will be put off one day, and we will receive a body that is fit for an eternity. Paul desired to be with Christ (Phi. 1:23) and receive the eternal reward that God promised to the faithful. There is no greater reward one could receive than to be with Christ.

CONCLUSION

The inspired apostle Paul wrote, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). The life we live on earth is temporary. It is full of trials and afflictions, yet the reward which is promised exceeds far beyond our imagination and expectation. Many have gone before us and endured the persecutions of Christianity. We have examples in the Scriptures and some living among us. Persecutions are not pleasant and certainly not easy to endure, but God never promised that His children would be free from trials and afflictions of this life. He did promise the eternal reward if we will be faithful and endure to the end. For one to endure and persevere to the end, he must keep his eyes

on Jesus (Heb. 12:2). Christ died that we might live. What greater joy could we have than to hear the Lord say “well done” after enduring this life.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966.
- McKenzie, John L. S. J. *Dictionary of the Bible*. Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1965.
- Strong, James. *The Strongest Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Greek Dictionary Index to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.
- Thayer, Joseph Henry. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers and Authors Inc., n.d.
- Zerr, E. M. *Bible Commentary*. Vol. 5. Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1952.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE NOT OFFENDED IN CHRIST LUKE 7:23

Ronnie Hayes



Ronald Ethbert Hayes was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on November 26, 1954. He attended Freed-Hardeman University, Memphis School of Preaching, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He has done full time work in Aubrey, Arkansas; Barn Creek, Alabama; Falkville, Alabama; and is currently working with the Memorial Parkway Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama. Ronnie speaks on several lectureships and in several gospel meetings each year. He also works extensively with Indian Creek Youth Camp near Jasper, Alabama.

Ronnie is married to Cynthia (Reeves) Hayes, and they have three children: Leah, Kyle, and Anna.

INTRODUCTION

The subject, which has been assigned is: “Blessed Are Those Who Are Not Offended In Christ.” What are we talking about when we say one is *offended* in Christ? A. T. Robertson says of *skandalizomai* that it is “has the double notion of to trip up and to entrap and in the N.T. always means causing to sin” (103). Marvin R. Vincent says, “The word *offend* carries to the English reader the sense of *giving offence, provoking*. Hence the Rev., by restoring the picture in the word, restores its true meaning, *causeth to stumble*” (41). *The Analytical Greek Lexicon* defines *skandalon* as:

a trap-spring; also genr. a stumbling-block, anything against which one stumbles, an impediment; met. a cause of ruin, destruction, misery, etc., Ro. 9:33; 11:9; a cause or occasion of sinning, Mat. 18:7, ter; Lu. 17:1; scandal, offence, cause of indignation, 1 Co. 1:23; Gal. 5:11 (368).

So, when we are talking about being “offended in Christ,” this refers to one who for whatever reason or excuse has allowed the teachings or life of Christ to cause them to stumble or quit on Christ. They have forsaken the way of Christ. Probably seeking an easier way. Many forsake Christ looking for a way that will be accepted by the masses. Christ still says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the

Father, **but by me**” (John 14:6). He says, “I am the way,” if you come to the Father it is by *Me*. For that reason Christ is the Savior. If one is offended at or in the Savior, would it not be possible that he needs to examine himself and not blame the Savior?

How sad it is that there are those who are offended or ashamed “in Christ” or “at Christ” or “at His Teachings.” However, the truth remains that there are those who fit into this category. This is not new. Paul warned of this very thing: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). There are those who are ashamed of Christ and are offended at His teaching from the most infamous false teachers to the common lukewarm Christian. Rubel Shelly displays this attitude when he states:

My children will not stay with the church I grew up in. They will not be part of an irrelevance. They will not be a part of a movement which wastes its time arguing, and fighting and bloodletting and carping about things that are fundamentally irrelevant to the world’s Christless condition (Cates 14).

What are these matters which he calls “fundamentally irrelevant”? Have we in the church reached the point that we bind opinions? No, that is not the case at all. Rubel and his cohorts want to take matters of faith on the Holy Spirit, the one church, instrumental music, and even the expanding role of women in the church and make them into “fundamentally irrelevant” matters. Why? Simply put: so they can do them!

Maybe the most alarming fact about these *offended* is not the damage that one of these false teachers may do, but the magnitude of those who are lukewarm Christians. Yes, false teachers do damage, and we are warned of them (Acts 20:29-31). Still a congregation grows or dies because of the work of its members. When our members are ashamed of the teachings of the Scriptures and their shame is seen in indifference or immorality or even in a denial of Scriptures, then will the major damage be done in that congregation.

As we study this subject, allow this author to direct this study through these avenues. First, why individuals are offended in Christ. Second, why people should not be offended in Christ. Third, those not offended will be productive. And then last, we will consider the end of those who are offended in Christ.

WHY INDIVIDUALS ARE OFFENDED IN CHRIST

Maybe it would be understandable to be offended at Christ if He were a liar, murderer, or adulterer, but He is not! What offends most about Christ is that He is good and moral. The world is offended in Christ because His life exposes their sin.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil (John 3:17-19).

It is nothing new to be offended in Christ. Paul states, “As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Rom. 9:33).

The truth is everything about the Savior is offensive to many. Some will find His message too offensive. In John 6 there were those who said the message is too hard (v. 60). When the disciples complained and murmured He asked, “Doth this offend you” (v. 61). We observe that many turned and walked no more with Christ (v. 66). There are still those today who scrutinize and pick at the message of Christ and when it does not suit their need, then something has to be wrong with the message. There are those who do not want the truth on marriage divorce and remarriage, worship, the role of women in the church, or even on salvation. Therefore, when the message is presented in its pure and simple form, many refuse the message. This is exactly the reason Paul pointed Timothy to the message.

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

You can tell when a *preacher* becomes offended by the message. He will become selective in what he uses (Acts 20:27 forbids this) or he will quit using the Word altogether. Others look at the Savior’s manner of death and are offended. Paul told the church at Corinth, “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23). There are those who will look at the shame or curse that is involved with the cross (Gal. 3:13; Deu. 21:23)

and will allow this to keep them from being obedient to the Savior. His disciples had a difficult time in not being offended in Him about the cross.

Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all *men* shall be offended because of thee, *yet* will I never be offended (Mat. 26:31-33).

This attitude can be seen in Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other of His disciples when after Christ's death, Peter speaks and says, "I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee" (John 21:3). They had put their trust in Christ, thinking He was going to restore them to some earthly glory, and, now that He was dead, it was time to go back to work. Some today still stumble or are offended at the cross of Christ and will not remain faithful. Do you stumble at the cross?

We have previously seen that some are offended at His message, but in conjunction with that, some are offended at the method of delivery of His message. Seven times in Matthew 23 Christ says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" (vv. 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). Christ says:

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Mat. 15:7-9).

Notice the straightforward method of Christ. Christ has no difficulty in pointing out that they are hypocrites, who simply honor with their lips, that their heart is not in what they are doing, and that their worship is vain. There is no difference today for Gospel preachers. If they speak boldly and plainly, they are accused of having no love! Did Christ love these to whom he spoke? Notice that the disciples observed the Pharisees response, go to Jesus, and said, "Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?" (Mat. 15:12). This is just another excuse, not a reason, for someone to be offended at Christ. Just exactly when did telling the truth become such an ungodly thing to do? Paul asked, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). When plain speech becomes outdated, then so will the Gospel. This is the reason Paul warned Timothy of those that

will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Strangely enough, there will be those who are offended at Christ because of His lack of material possessions. Christ told a certain scribe, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head” (Mat. 8:20). To some it is easier to follow the *success* stories of our day and age. We look to the billionaires to tell us how to make money. We look at glamorous romance’s to tell us about love. We look to the one who has risen to the top in politics or business to tell us how to get ahead. It is certain that some would look at the life of Christ as a failure. It is imperative for all to realize that it is not what we have now that matters, but what we will have in the hereafter. Christ said:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know (John 14:1-4).

You can allow the meager existence of Christ here on earth to offend you and cause you to stumble, but if you do, then do not expect to receive the promised reward!

Christ’s motivation was another reason why some were and are offended in Him. What was Christ’s motivation? It simply was to do the will of the Father. “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). Because of His dedication to the Father He was accused of blasphemy.

But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy (Mat. 26:63-65).

These were not going to have Christ as the Son of God no matter what! There are still those who will claim that Christ lived and that He had a great influence on the world, but as far as being the Son of God: no He

was not. Some will never say as the centurion at the cross said, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Mat. 27:54).

WHY PEOPLE SHOULD NOT BE OFFENDED IN CHRIST

Someone could foolishly ask, “Is it worth not being offended in Christ?” Is it worth having to face everything the world is going to throw at us? Absolutely! In our text of Luke 7:20-23 we read:

When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of *their* infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many *that were* blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me (Luke 7:20-23).

Maybe these are asking the same question: “Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? Is it worth me committing my life unto you or is it a waste of my time?” When it is all boiled down, they are asking: “**Are you really the Savior?**”

In answer to this question, the Savior offers the proof.

Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached (Luke 7:22).

In a world that clamors for proof, here it is! Christ made mention of the fact that “the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me” (John 10:25). The Savior wants us to examine the evidence, to be convinced, and to allow it to cement our faith. These conclusions can be, or maybe, should be drawn. Nicodemus was able to see these things.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him (John 3:1-2).

Even a hardened Roman centurion could look at the things which were occurring around him and say: “Truly this was the Son of God” (Mat. 27:54). The proof is there for anyone who wants to see it.

Not only did the Savior offer the proof, he also reminded them of the promise. “And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me” (Luke 7:23). Those who are in Christ receive and will receive great blessings. Christ said, “I am come that they might have life, and that

they might have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10). The Christian life is without a doubt the best life that anyone could live. The principles of truth, honesty, justice, love, and all others principles which pertain to living and treating others properly are the best way of life, regardless of whether or not one is a Christian. Is it not ironic that those who are married and divorced fourteen or fifteen times say they are seeking what good Christians have always had? They want that one person who is a lifelong commitment. How can they get it? Live by the principles of the Bible!

However, there is a far greater promise being made here. To those who are not offended in Christ, those who will not stumble and fall, Christ offers eternal life. Christ has promised us that, if we stand for Him, He will stand for us.

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven (Mat. 10:32-33).

All of us can have the greatest blessing of all—**eternal life**—if we choose to obey Christ and then to remain faithful. “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Mat. 10:22). We should not allow anything to cause us to be offended and to rob you of your reward in heaven.

There is another reason why we should not be offended in Christ: the recognition of the price paid for us. Look at what Christ suffered for us and should we not follow His lead without question? “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb 5:8-9). Satan wants us to be ashamed. He uses everything at his disposal. It is our responsibility to keep our eyes on the Savior and to never be offended in Him!

THOSE NOT OFFENDED IN CHRIST WILL BE PRODUCTIVE

When one is offended in Christ, then his work will be affected. Take Peter as an example. Peter states that he is never going to be offended in Christ (Mat. 26:33). Then when Christ is taken and Peter’s faith is tried, he denies Christ, not once but three times (Mat. 26:70, 72, 74). Peter is ready to give up his work for Christ and to go back to fishing (John 21:3). Is it possible that his being offended affected his work for Christ? Absolutely! The same is true today. When we are offended we

are not going to put forth the effort that is required. There will be all kinds of excuses that we will offer: we are too busy, we do not feel good, we do not think we have the ability to do that, we do not want to. How many Christians are offering excuses to God today?

The opposite is true as well. When we are not offended in Christ but recognize Him as the Savior and Son of God, will we not sacrifice all to do His will? We see the drastic change in the lives of His disciples. Again look at Peter, from denial to determination. What caused the big difference? Why on one hand would Peter be denying Christ and then later boldly stand in defiance of the council and high priest (Acts 5:28-29). It has to do with the fact that Peter was now convinced that Christ is who He claims to be. Therefore, we must submit our will to His.

When we are not offended in Christ, we will stand for Christ and truth, even if it means that we will be standing alone. We, as Christians, have a responsibility to the truth. Paul tells Timothy that the church is the support mechanism of truth. “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). We are to love the truth because it is the truth that has the power to make us free. “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). We are to hold on to the truth. “Buy the truth, and sell *it* not; *also* wisdom, and instruction, and understanding” (Pro. 23:23). We are also told to defend the truth.

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

It is the truth which will prepare us to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness (Eph. 6:13-14).

When we are not offended in Christ we will be willing to proudly stand up and be counted—and not to shrink into the background and hope that no one knows whom we represent.

Those that are not offended in Christ are going to be diligently working in His kingdom. Christ has left us with the most important mission. It was His mission (Luke 19:10) and it is ours.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen (Mat. 28:18-20).

The first and primary mission of each Christian is to teach and make disciples (Mark 16:15-16). Now, if we see Christ as the Savior (Mat. 1:21), and His way as the only way (John 6:44-45), then will we recognize the urgency of teaching others about Him. Paul said, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel. He was not offended by what it taught. Why are we? What has happened to us today? Could it be that we are offended, therefore, we will not put forth the effort required to serve Christ? When we are not offended in Christ, nothing can keep us from spreading the glorious gospel of Christ. No threats of imprisonment, beatings, nor even the threat of losing ones life will keep us from proclaiming the gospel when we are not offended in Christ (2 Cor. 11:23-29).

Those not offended in Christ will be ones who live a life to glorify Christ. Why do some want “to be like the rest of the world” and are embarrassed or ashamed if not? This is nothing new. To Samuel the people said, “And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1 Sam. 8:5). We are warned about following the multitudes: “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to *do* evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest *judgment*” (Exo. 23:2). What kind of life are you living? Christ tells us that our life should be an illumination of Him. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 5:16). Even with the fact that we are to let our light shine, there are those who demand to be like everyone else. They are going to demand their right to dress like the world, act the world, and speak like the world. You can even see this in worship today. It is popular to entertain with dramas, choruses, and anything else that will tickle the ear because this is what the world demands. Is it not interesting that this is the way many in the church want to go? Why? They are ashamed of the truth! As Rubel Shelly said of worship, “The tired, uninspiring event we call

worship in traditional churches has to give way to the exhilarating experience of God that exhibits and nurtures life in the worshippers” (Cates 11). What is behind all of this: **“We want to be like everyone else”!** When will we learn that we cannot be like everyone else and be pleasing to God. “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10).

THE END OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT OFFENDED IN CHRIST

There will two results: one for those who are not offended and another result for those who are. For those who are not offended, listen to the words of Paul:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

For those who will not buckle under to the pressures of the world that crown of righteousness is waiting.

To those who are offended in Christ, they are giving up their hope. They are the ones who crucify afresh the Son of God (Heb. 6:6). They will be the ones who will be punished.

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: *Which is* a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 The. 1:3-9).

Notice in these passages that we have to endure even through the persecutions and tribulations. If we do not endure, then we will be punished.

Are we not thankful that God has not left us defenseless in these matters? We do not have to be offended in Christ! Along with everything that Satan is going to throw at us, there will be a way of escape.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it* (1 Cor 10:13).

Are you offended in Christ?

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Cates, Curtis A. *The Second Incarnation: A Pattern For Apostasy*. Memphis, TN: Cates Publications, 1992.
- Robertson, A. T. *Word Pictures In The New Testament*. Vol. 2. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1930.
- The Analytical Greek Lexicon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972.
- Vincent, Marvin R. *Word Studies in the New Testament*. 1887. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1973.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE WATCHING

LUKE 12:37-38

Jason Rollo



Jason Bryan Rollo began preaching when he was 18 years old. He preached part-time while attending Sam Houston State University and has preached for several congregations in Texas and is currently working with the Northeast Church of Christ, Hurst, Texas. In 1997 he finished his degree in business with an emphasis in secondary education. He graduated from Houston College of the Bible (now Spring Bible Institute) in 1999. After graduation he moved to Bryan/College Station and began a career in insurance with Farm Bureau Insurance along with starting a new congregation in that area. In January 2001 he began his work with the Northeast Church of Christ and in January 2002 became the

full-time preacher.

Jason is married to Bobbi Jan (B.J.) and they have two boys: Jackson and Josiah.

INTRODUCTION

Watch is used frequently in our vocabulary. Sentences such as: “Watch out!” “Hey, watch where you are going!” “Mom, can we watch cartoons?” and “Will you watch my luggage for a moment?” are common place and used in everyday language. *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary* provides this wonderfully detailed explanation of *watch*. Regarding the definition of our term, it states:

To look attentively, as to see what is done or happens; observe. To wait attentively and expectantly. To be careful or cautious. To keep awake, especially for a purpose; remain vigilant. To keep vigil. To view attentively or with interest. To contemplate or regard mentally. To wait attentively and expectantly for. To guard or tend. Watch out. To be cautious. Watch over. Safeguard, protect. Close, continuous observation for the purpose of seeing or discovering something. Vigilant guard, as for protection or restraint. A keeping awake for some special purpose. A period of time. A lookout, guard, or sentinel. To practice caution, discretion, or self-restraint (1504).

Certainly, these vivid definitions brighten our usage of *watch* as it pertains to the idea of watching as the children of God. Note again, *watch* means, **“to look attentively...to wait attentively...to keep**

awake, especially for a purpose.” Furthermore, the term means, “to view attentively or with interest...**to wait attentively and expectantly for...a keeping awake for some special purpose.”**

Two ideas seem to be prevalent. First we notice that the definition, *to watch*, carries with it the idea of alertness. Descriptions such as “attentively, keeping awake, a guard, to keep vigil” definitely emphasize the importance of a fully awake and sober looking toward. Second, the term stresses the point of why such soberness is needed. As *Webster’s* points out, a watch is necessary for “some special purpose.” Hence, terms like “wait... expectantly for” and “continuous observation for the purpose of seeing or discovering something” are used. Could Christ have chosen a better word in turning our minds to the grave importance of always being ready for His return? Could a stronger word have been employed in persuading men to realize the gravity of being ready for the day that will end all days—the Day of Judgment? **Watch! Watch! Watch!** Surely, this word has power. It has strength. It demands our attention. And so it is in our text that Jesus declares:

Blessed are those servants, whom the lord **when he cometh** shall find **watching**: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find *them* so, blessed are those servants (Luke 12:37-38).

It is the intention of this writer to briefly analyze this passage and then spend the majority of available space discussing the rich application that naturally flows from this sacred and inspired text.

THE TEXT

First, the purpose for our watching is so we will be blessed. *Blessed* means to be joyous. Christ is saying that the one who watches will be blessed or joyous because he is approved in the eyes of God. Yet, why? Why will watchers be blessed? Without doubt the text gives the answers. For as Jesus says, it is the ones who are watching that will be made “to sit down to meat” (Luke 12:37). In other words, those who are living for Christ, those who are anticipating Christ’s return, those who are ever hoping for the Savior’s appearing, it is they who will be eternally rewarded in a place that fadeth not away (1 Pet. 1:4).

Second, notice in both verses 37 and 38 our Lord declares that the ones who are blessed are *servants*. Yes, twice He says, “Blessed are those **servants**.” The non-servant or world (the world means anyone and everyone who is not a true follower of Christ in all that such

entails) does not watch. One can hardly expect less, for a non-servant would scarcely be expecting (much less waiting and watching for) his master's return. As the Messiah utters in Matthew 24:37-44, the world will not expect the Lord's glorious return.

But as the days of Noe *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.... **Watch therefore**: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.... Therefore **be ye also ready**: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

Along this same line, the inspired apostle Peter penned:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. **But the day of the Lord will come** as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up (2 Pet. 3:3-10).

Jesus is coming! This is a fact. Obviously the world will not be ready. Jesus is warning his servants to be ever mindful of His return, lest they too are found unprepared. As the above texts indicate, the question of the Lord's return is not one of "if," but of "when?" Matthew 24:36 clearly points out that no one on earth knows the answer to this question. Thus, it is our obligation as servants to watch! Again Jesus says, "But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up" (Mat. 24:43; Luke 12:39). A thief does not knock on the door and say, "Hello, I am here to rob you." He comes unexpectedly! Maybe the thief comes late at night as

most are deeply sleeping. Then again, maybe it is in the day when the criminal slips in the house as the occupants are away at work. No one knows when a thief will come. Likewise, as Peter says, “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.” Therefore, as servants it is our strict obligation to be ever watchful (alert—expectantly looking) for our Lord’s return. Jesus said that the **servant** who so does is the one who will be truly blessed! The connection is easy. Only the watchers will enjoy the feast. Yet, to be a watcher, one must first be a servant. Then, if one is a servant and a watcher he will reap the reward.

Third, notice the phrase, “whom the lord when he cometh.” Christ likens his return to that of a master returning home from a wedding feast (Luke 12:36). Christ (likened unto the lord or master in this text) is coming again. As verse 37 shows, it could be at anytime, hence the idea of the second and third watch is introduced. *Cruden’s Complete Concordance To The Old And New Testaments* relates some insight about the different watches:

Watch is used in three senses: (1) to watch in order to guard, (2) to watch, meaning to look for, (3) a watch in the night. The night was divided, not into hours, but into watches. In the Old Testament, three are named: the First Watch, till midnight; the Middle Watch, till 3 a.m.; and the Morning Watch, till 6 a.m. In the New Testament there were four watches of three hours each, from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. (731).

The point is a simple one. Christ is coming again and it could be at any time. The wise will be ever ready—ever watching! However, watching means more than just merely gazing into the heavens. As the Holy Spirit through Paul taught the Thessalonians, Christians must live not as “troubled... that the day of Christ is at hand.” Instead the job of saints is to daily attend to the necessities of life while ever keeping their spiritual focus on Christ. Simply put, “to watch,” means to conduct oneself in daily accord with Christian conduct, ever striving to fulfill the obligations required of a stranger and pilgrim in this fleeting world! The next section will help us see these obligations more clearly.

THE APPLICATION

Second Chronicles 23:6 states, “All the people shall keep the watch of the LORD.” Our watch must involve prayer, and it is to be set both at day and at night (Neh. 4:9). Christians, as the inhabitants of Jerusalem (that is, members of the one true church originally established at Jerusalem) must establish their watches (Neh. 7:3). Our Christian watch (duty) must involve our attention 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is up

to each person to secure his own place. In that place, we must watch and stand fast (1 Cor. 16:13). As Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:6: “Let us watch and be sober.” The reason Christians must watch and be sober is because our “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Paul summarizes the thought well in 2 Timothy 4:5 when he pens, “Watch thou in all things.” Our Lord through the Holy Spirit inspired hand of Mark declares, “And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:37). Sadly, some of God’s children are like the disciples of old and cannot even “watch...one hour” (Mat. 26:40). As we begin to draw some application, we need to ask ourselves the following questions. How do we watch our children as they perform some activity or receive some award? Do we engage in such action with distraction or do we do it with joy and mental focus? How does a good teacher watch her young children as they walk across a busy street? What of a proper soldier, how does he guard (watch) his post? The answers to these questions are obvious. Any decent person would do the things mentioned above with alertness, with caution, and with an ever-watching eye. Should it be any different concerning our soul? Are we so unwise as to strain our mental faculties, intently watching some man-made television show and yet turn around and ignore the need to watch our lives, to see if they comply with the Will of God? Surely, we realize that the world is this shallow, but are we as God’s children (servants—Luke 12:37-38) equally as shallow at times? To W.A.T.C.H we must be willing to perform our obligations before God. My dear brethren let us:

- W — Willing to examine ourselves
- A — Able to exhort our fellow saints
- T — Teaching lost souls
- C — Concerned with straying sheep
- H — Honest about false teachers

May we watch, lest our Master return and find us unprepared to bid Him in.

W—WILLING TO EXAMINE OURSELVES

The ability to honestly examine one’s heart is a rare commodity indeed. Such evaluation is commanded in 2 Corinthians 13:5 when Paul says, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” Part of watching most certainly includes the concept of watching (and remember what all the definitions of watching

includes) one's own heart. Do we alertly, attentively, and cautiously safeguard and protect our heart? If we are to be true watchers before God, we must. One may say, "Oh, yes, I safeguard and watch my heart." Yet, does that same person watch vile and filth on television or listen to garbage on the radio? If we as servants engage in immoral and worldly conduct such as dancing, drinking, smoking, cussing, and the like, are we truly watching our hearts? Will a servant be blessed if he or she is not honestly trying to lay off the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21)? Unfortunately, there are many *servants* among the Lord's people who live as a sinner six days a week and pretend to be a saint on the Lord's Day. Such conduct is despicable in the eye's of a Holy and Awesome God. For example, Christian parents who allow their teens to attend the local school dance or allow them to wear immodest apparel (like that of a cheerleading uniform or bathing suit) are not concerned about watching the souls of their children (1 Tim. 2:9; Eph. 6:4). Similarly, a child of God who engages in social drinking or jesting is not one who is watching his heart (Eph. 5:4, 18). In light of the Lord's certain return, and in view of the fact "*that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness*" (2 Pet. 3:11)? Most assuredly, we should be: "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" (2 Pet. 3:12). In view of such passages, how can any servant engage in sin that even the world recognizes? The only reasonable answer is that such servants are not guarding their hearts, and likewise they are not truly watching for the return of their Lord!

The servant who is not living a godly (watching) life should heed the words of Christ in Matthew 24:48-51, when He declares:

But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite *his* fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant **shall come in a day when he looketh not for him**, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The servant's problem is found in the phrase: "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart." The servant failed to watch his heart. Instead, he chose to "say [and then do the sins] in his heart." As servants of God, we must recognize that we can have assurance when we

examine (watch) our hearts. Although not sinless, faithful servants of God who are striving to live for the Master are able to feel confident and excited about Christ's return (1 John 1:7-9; Rev. 22:20). May the words of Luke 8:15 forever ring in our ears wherein Jesus says, "But that on the good ground are they, which in an **honest and good heart**, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience."

A—ABLE TO EXHORT OUR FELLOW SAINTS

The work of the church is saving souls which is done through evangelism, benevolence, and exhortation. It is the latter that we want to consider. To exhort, which is a command of God (Heb. 3:13), Christians must first **watch** for opportunities and needs among their fellow servants. Exhortation is a term of building and carries with it the idea of "building up" as if one is stacking one board on top of another. The obligation of every preacher (and Christian for that matter) is to reprove, rebuke, and **exhort** (2 Tim. 4:2). The importance of such exhortation is perhaps stressed best in Hebrews 3:13: "But exhort [build up] one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." This passage makes two things clear: (1) sin hardens, and (2) sin is deceitful. Hence the importance of exhortation is evident.

When a beloved brother or sister is experiencing a certain problem, we as siblings in Christ should stretch forth our arms of love and support them. Perhaps many would not leave the fold, if strong saints were more willing to exhort the "men of low estate" (Rom. 12:16) so "the brother of low degree [would be able to] rejoice in that he is exalted" (Jam. 1:9). Though the context of these two passages do not deal specifically with our subject, the principle stressed above is certainly true. We need to ask ourselves, when is the last time we have uttered an encouraging word to a weak brother or sister? Have we truly put forth the effort to strengthen those who are struggling with their Christian duty (1 The. 5:14)? Do we "give attendance... to exhortation" (1 Tim. 4:13)? Can it be said of us that we really "[confirm] the souls of the disciples... exhorting them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22)? Asking these questions is easy. The difficult part is examining oneself to determine if he is actually watching in exhortation!

T—TEACHING LOST SOULS

Another facet of watching involves that of teaching lost souls. Certainly no one has been a Christian for long without hearing of the

watchman in Ezekiel 3:33. As the watchman had to warn the wicked to remove the guilt of his blood, so we must share the gospel message with the lost, lest the blood of guilt rest upon our heads (Acts 18:6; 20:26). It is not our duty to save—it is our duty to sow. God will give the increase, but first we must water and plant (1 Cor. 3:6). There is no need to worry, God will do His part. God will add to the church all who will accept salvation by obeying the stipulations thereof (Acts 2:38, 40, 47). The problem is never God! The hindrance in evangelism, starts with us—His servants—when we fail to evangelize as we should. As Jesus says, “The harvest truly *is* plenteous, but the labourers *are* few” (Mat. 9:37). As Christ bids us, we should:

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest?....
 [Rather we should] Lift up... [our] eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together (John 4:35-36).

Again, let us ask ourselves some thought-provoking questions, lest we be found not watching in evangelism. To press the point, the following questions can be answered with a “yes” or a “no.” Please consider them carefully, for **we must be watching in evangelism** if we are to please our Lord at His return.

- | | | | |
|----|---|-----|----|
| 1. | If you are a young convert, have you attempted to set up a study between a lost individual and a faithful capable saint? | Yes | No |
| 2. | If you have been in the Lord’s church any length of time at all, have you conducted (or attempted to conduct) a Bible study with a non-Christian in an effort to convert him? | Yes | No |
| 3. | Have you conducted (or attempted) a study in the last month? | Yes | No |
| 4. | Have you conducted (or attempted) a study in the last 3 months? | Yes | No |
| 5. | Have you conducted (or attempted) a study in the last 6 months? | Yes | No |
| 6. | Have you conducted (or attempted) a study in the last year? | Yes | No |
| 7. | Have you handed a desperate (lost) soul a tract, tape, bulletin, or Bible in an effort to bring him to Christ within the last month? | Yes | No |
| 8. | Have you invited a sinner to Bible class or worship service within the last month, so he might come in contact with the message of salvation? | Yes | No |

The mission of our Lord was one of salvation of souls (Luke 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15). The very purpose of His death was so men could have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). His blood only saves those in His church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23), but salvation from sin is available to all who will partake (Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2).

Men cannot partake of salvation if they do not know of it. As a thirsty man cannot drink when he does not know the location of the well, so a lost man cannot be saved without knowledge of the true plan of salvation. Like exhortation, evangelism is one of the ways we accomplish the work of the church. The Lord's church was one of (if not) the fastest growing entities after World War II. Today, it seems the Lord's church is rarely growing in most places, especially in the United States. Why? Undoubtedly, liberalism is reeking havoc on our society as a whole and particularly on the spirit of evangelism within the church, but is that the real reason for stifled growth within **sound** congregations of God's people? Perhaps there is another reason—a reason—called lack of evangelism. Yes, there are numerous saints seriously engaging in saving souls. However, there are many side-liners who do absolutely nothing in the area of evangelism. The do-nothings discussed here are not those in apostate flocks, rather they are those in otherwise good congregations who never reach out to the lost of their community. These are the ones who say, "Well, we have a preacher don't we, let him evangelize the community." They say such things as, "I do not have time to door knock with the church, after all it does not work anyway." Then again, perhaps they say, "It does not matter if I talk to my neighbor as long as I go to worship." The reason the church does not convert more people is that we (as a general rule) very seldom (if ever) approach people about the necessity of obeying the gospel. At best we may make a passing comment or slip something in about being a member of the church of Christ. Very few genuine solicitations to set up studies with alien sinners are made. Many of Christ's servants are seriously lacking in the necessary area of evangelism! As anyone in sales will tell you, solicitation is a game of numbers. To a degree the same is true with evangelism. It is a game of numbers. We are to sow, and eventually if a heart is right, it will obey the one and only saving gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9-11). A faithful servant is one who watches for evangelistic opportunities. Will we, like Paul, hear the call of the lost as they shout in silence, "Come over into (*place the name of your city here*) and help us" (Acts 16:9)? Acts 17:16 says of

Paul as he waited in Athens that “his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.” Does our spirit still stir within us when we contemplate the lost masses within our cities that are unknowingly awaiting eternal doom? When we say “hello” to our friends from day to day, do we ever think of the words of that song we so often sing: “You never mentioned Him to me?” May the church as a whole do more in the area of evangelism.

The beloved and late brother Ira Y. Rice, Jr., several weeks before his death preached at the congregation where this writer serves as the local preacher. He preached a sermon on the church, largely referring to the ideology of the restoration movement that sparked the return of many to the Lord’s Way. He made a very important point, however, when he referred to the fact that restoration also includes restoring the New Testament pattern of evangelism. Brother Rice spoke of how he feared that many in the church had never restored the necessity of evangelism to their lives. In his unique way, the mind’s eye can still see him pleading: “Brethren, if we are going to be the New Testament church, then we must restore the same evangelistic fervor that the first century church had.” May the words of brother Rice not fall upon deaf ears as the saints of God **watch** for evangelistic opportunities.

C—CONCERNED WITH STRAYING SHEEP

Watching involves not only looking for alien sinners who are willing to come to Christ, but it also involves searching for straying sheep. Jesus uses the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, to stress this point (Luke 15). Anyone who honestly reads the Bible will come to two conclusions along this line. First, when a man becomes a child of God he can remain saved as long as he ever strives to do God’s Will. Second, a child of God, if he so chooses, has the ability to leave the flock and venture back into the wilderness of sin. The question is not one of whether this erring sheep is still a sheep; the question is whether or not this sheep is still counted faithful among the flock. Our Baptist friends have long said, “Once a sheep, always a sheep.” The problem they make, however, is that they fail to discern the difference between a **found** sheep and a **lost** sheep. Luke 15:4-7 clearly tells us that the sheep that strays from the flock is still a sheep. Yet, the text also unmistakably teaches that this sheep is a sinner in need of repentance unlike the other “ninety and nine just persons [sheep], which need[ed] no repentance.” It is our obligation to watch for the souls of

our erring brethren. Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19-20 forever point to the fact that faithful saints have an obligation to restore (or attempt to restore) their wayward brothers and sisters. Due to our love for lost brethren's souls, we should first engage in instructive discipline, realizing that if this action is fruitless, corrective discipline is the remaining step (1 Cor. 5; 2 The. 3). The answer to Cain's age-old question is abundantly clear. Cain once asked: "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" (Gen. 4:9). The answer is a most emphatic: "**Yes!**"

H—HONEST ABOUT FALSE TEACHERS

Children of God must be honest about recognizing and exposing false teachers, especially those within the church. In this modern era, the politically correct thing to do about false teachers is **nothing!** The same Jesus Who says, "Blessed *are* those servants...watching," also declares, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mat. 7:15). The inspired apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:26 speaks of being "*in perils among false brethren.*" It is no wonder, then, that he later admits of being "*in watchings often*" (2 Cor. 11:27). The sad reality is that false teachers exist and some of them are our brethren. This fact is nothing new. As 2 Peter 2:15 teaches there are wicked false teachers within Christ's body "Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray.... These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever." Truly, "it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (2 Pet. 2:21). False teachers are many, and those that pollute the bride of Christ seem to be ever growing in number (1 John 4:1). Christians must **watch** for false doctrine and the ones who promote it. A few examples of the types of lies being promoted in the body of Christ today are listed below.

First, scores of Christians have bought into the concept that a little unchecked sin will not really tarnish the congregation. Paul, however, seems to think differently when he asks: "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1 Cor. 5:6). The trendy thing within some flocks is to ignore or cover up small sins and local false teachers, as if such is approved of Jehovah. After all, one little old deacon promoting social drinking or one pushy brother teaching the young people that it is all right to dance is not really that big of a deal,

is it? Does God really mind if an eldership *lovingly tolerates* one nice couple living in adultery? The answers of course are obvious. **Yes**, it is a big deal when sin and false teaching are allowed at any level! **Yes**, God really does mind when an eldership *lovingly tolerates* (or better stated “openly endorses by their lack of rebuke”) a couple living in adultery! God expects, yea, He demands, His children to watch for false teachers within and without the church.

Second, many Christians believe that false teachers should not be marked. Some within the church say it is not loving and even judgmental to privately or publicly mark a false teacher **by name**. Interestingly enough, these same folks do not have a problem marking (even by name) the ones who note the false teachers. For one thing, they are guilty of hypocrisy. Furthermore, they are guilty of not obeying clear passages of Scripture. For instance, Romans 16:17 demands that false teachers be marked and avoided. One cannot properly mark without identifying. When a teacher grades a paper, she marks (identifies) the incorrect answers so the student will be able to learn from his mistakes. How would students know what they missed without the wrong answers being properly identified? Likewise, how can brethren *avoid* a false teacher if that individual is not properly *marked* in a clear way (i.e., like mentioning his name from the pulpit or writing of his error in some journal)? On several occasions, Paul calls false teachers (and these men were **brethren**) by name (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17). Jesus, Himself, notes particular sects of sinful men by name when He refers to them as Pharisees, Sadducees, and Nicolaitans (Mat. 23; Rev. 2). Some, in an effort to avoid the ramifications of such texts as those mentioned above, appeal to Matthew 18:15-17 for justification for not publicly marking false teachers before first going to them in private. Perhaps, never has a text been more abused than Matthew 18:15-17. If one will **watch** the context, he will realize that the sin under consideration is one of a private sin against another brother, not that of a false teacher (whether he is a brother or not) publicly spewing error. Saints need to guard against (watch for) the error of not being able to mark false teachers.

Third, the faithful of God need to be wary of the lie that says anyone who points out a false teacher is acting as if he is sinless and better than everyone else. Such thinking is contrary to the Bible. Furthermore, it is against common sense to say that a person has to be flawless to point out sin. For one thing, even if a person is living in sin

when he points out error, the fact that error is being pointed out does not change. Yes, the accuser is wrong in God's eyes because he is living in sin; however, so is the accused in this instance. The fact that the accuser is a sinner, in no way negates the truthfulness of the sin pointed out. In such a case, neither man would be acceptable to God.

Next, if it is true that one cannot point out sin, then it is impossible to correct anyone of anything at any time, and thus there is really no way of standing upon an objective standard of unchanging truth. This type of mentality is contrary to logic, but more importantly it is contrary to God's Word. The truth on judging is clearly laid out in such passages as Matthew 7:1-5 and John 7:24. In such passages, the Bible teaches us that there is a wrong judging (hypocritical judging) and a right judging (righteous judging—or judging based on the Word of God). The Bible clearly teaches that faithful men, though not perfect (sinless), must correct error. The Bible says that all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), which certainly includes men like Noah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Joel, Peter, and Paul. However, these imperfect (in that they did commit sin) men were commanded by God to point out sin in the lives of others at various times. Paul on one occasion even pointed out the transgression of Peter (Gal. 2). Did Peter say, "Oh, Paul, you do not have the right to judge me, after all you yourself are a sinner?" On the contrary, Peter corrected his error and later referred to his corrector as his "beloved brother Paul" (2 Pet. 3:15). Furthermore, if pointing out sin and rebuking is prohibited, then God commands people to sin when He orders them to rebuke error in such passages as 2 Timothy 4:2 and Titus 2:15. The lie of not being able to correct error because no one is sinless is laughable!

Fourth, God's servants must watch for the lie that says that there is not a real objective standard of truth that applies to all mankind. It seems that this lie is the worst of all. Without a changeless standard of truth, man is left without hope in this world. The idea of hazy gray in the area of God's essential commands is contrary to the very nature of God Himself. The religious division in existence today is not because those in the Lord's church are intolerant. Instead, it is due to the simple fact that men **will not** accept and unite upon the one standard of truth, namely the **Holy Bible**. In actuality, this lie has led to the three lies mentioned earlier. The concept of a subjective standard causes men to reason that judging and marking false teachers is an ugly and mean-spirited pastime undertaken by the bigoted and self-right-

teous. Reality, however, is that there is a standard of truth, and because it exists, all who will be godly **must** (and, yes, it should be with the right attitude) judge, mark, and point the finger at sin and those who promote it! As the Psalmist says, “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Psa. 119:104). Jesus again gives us the pattern when He expresses that we should not engage in hypocritical judging (Mat. 7:1-5). Instead He tells us: “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

Fifth, some in Christ’s flock believe elders are not responsible for the type of teaching they give a congregation of God’s people. This doctrine is directly opposed to Acts 20:28, Hebrews 13:17, and Titus 1:9-11. These texts read as follows:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and **to all the flock**, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to **feed** the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for **they watch for your souls, as they that must give account**, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able **by sound doctrine** both to exhort and **to convince the gainsayers**. **For there are many** unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: **Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not**, for filthy lucre’s sake (Tit. 1:9-11).

Elders are to “take heed...to all [their] flock” so they will be able to properly “**feed**” them. Elders must supply a balanced diet of necessary spiritual food (teaching). An eldership that neglects the feeding of balanced preaching, according to 2 Timothy 4:2, greatly errs. Additionally, godly elders need to realize that a flock can be improperly fed in two ways: (1) A flock can die by being fed the wrong thing (i.e., false teaching). Elders who allow false teachers (whether they are big name or no name) in their pulpits will one day answer to God. Elders are supposed to “watch for [our] souls.” The excuse of, “Well, we did not know he was a false teacher,” or “Well, he did not teach false doctrine here,” will hardly stand on the Day of Judgment. (2) Sheep can die by withholding certain food from them (i.e., leaving certain doctrine untaught). Withholding certain food (doctrine) from a fold of God’s sheep is just as damning to an eldership, as is outright giving them

poisoned food (false doctrine). For instance, to withhold vital teachings from God's Word on marriage divorce and remarriage, dancing, tobacco, drinking, immodesty, true worship, *et cetera* from a flock of God's children is to disdain the commands of God. When a group of elders (well intentioned or not) refuse to stop the mouths of false teachers, they are in clear violation of Titus 1:9-11. More elderships should take this obligation seriously. Elders need to consider methods such as questionnaires, interviews, and referrals when evaluating those who feed their flock. Sadly, one can almost hear the moans of weak *elders* as they say, "Oh, you cannot give teaching questionnaires to brethren because you might offend them." Realistically though, no honest and sincere Christian minds answering questions (1 Pet. 3:15). Honest truth-seekers are not afraid to put in print what they believe. Additionally, sound men and women are not scared to say "I do not know, I need to study some more." May God multiply the years of the godly elders who **care enough** to provide proper nutrition for the souls of the sheep they oversee.

If saints are to be blessed as watchers, then they must intently watch for the lies of false teachers.

CONCLUSION

Luke 12:37-38 stresses the positive aspect of watching. It teaches us that to watch is to be blessed (joyous and approved of God). Luke 12:37-38 shows the reward prepared for servants who choose to watch for Christ's return. Watching includes much more than merely walking around, gazing into heaven. Rather, it involves daily resolve to live and grow as a servant of God, always realizing that this world is not our home. The choice is ours. We can watch, or we can close our eyes to our obligations as children of the one true and living God. One thing is certain however: the Master will return. Blessed will be those who are found watching!

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Costello, Robert. *Random House Webster's College Dictionary*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 1992.
- Cruden, Alexander. *Cruden's Complete Concordance To The Old And New Testaments*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE JOHN 20:29

Rob L. Whitacre



Rob Whitacre was born August 19, 1974, in Carbondale, Illinois. He was raised near San Antonio, Texas, by two loving and God-fearing parents, Gerry and Cathy Whitacre. He is married to Nicole (Fudge) of Nashville, Tennessee. They have one daughter.

Rob preached his first sermon at the age of 19 in a campaign in Vermilion, Ohio. His education includes San Antonio College, Abilene Christian University, Southwest School of Bible Studies along with a graduate certificate in Sacred History, and Southern Christian University (B.A.). He has been preaching for the Poole Church of Christ, Poole, Kentucky, since 1997. He has written articles for numerous publications, conducted several

Gospel meetings, spoken on several lectureships, and has done mission work in Old Harbour, Jamaica. Rob has published two books titled: *The Old Testament Simplified* and *The New Testament Simplified*.

INTRODUCTION

Misunderstood, indeed! *Believe* is one of the most important yet misused words in the Bible. “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). *Believe* is found 305 times in the Bible in both the noun and verb form. Jesus said, “Blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed” (John 20:29). With such weight placed upon a word, it behooves the reader to investigate. Our title of study is found in the following pericope of Scripture.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas,

because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:24-31).

DIVERSITY OF BELIEF

The diversity of belief is seen in its translation. In our text, Jesus told Thomas, “Be not **faithless**, but **believing**” (John 20:27). Jesus identified Thomas’ lack of faith with his lack of belief. Two words are used to convey the same meaning. Notice the following examples. “I have not found so great **faith**, no, not in Israel. . . as thou hast **believed**, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour” (Mat. 8:10, 13). Jesus used *faith* to describe the belief of the centurion. Hence, the two words have the same meaning. Observe another example. “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). Belief is what God counted for Abraham’s righteousness. Now notice this *belief* was his *faith*. “Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness” (Rom. 4:9). The question may properly be asked: What determines the usage of *faith* and *belief*? The answer is simple: English grammar. Faith is never a verb and therefore has no force. Faith is a noun and thus has no ability to act by itself. The acting power of a sentence in English comes from the verb. The late brother T. W. Brents observed, “We can not say, ‘Abraham *faithed* God,’ but we can say, ‘Abraham *believed* God, and his *faith* was accounted to him for righteousness’” (169). Notice these other examples. We cannot say, “For if ye *faith* not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins,” but we can say, “for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). We cannot say, “He that *faiths* and is baptized shall be saved,” but we can say, “He that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). Brother Brents correctly concluded:

When the thought is expressed in the shape of a *command* to be obeyed, or as having been obeyed, or as a condition to be complied with as an act of the mind precedent to further obedience to the gospel, the style is: *believe, believeth, believest, believed, believing, etc.*; but when used as a *noun* to indicated the conviction which *exists* in the mind, with one single exception (2 Thess. ii:13), the word *faith* is always used (169-170).

You may ask, why is this important? If we can determine what *faith* means we can also determine what *believe* means. If faith requires

obedience, so then must belief. If faith requires works, so then must belief. The one word helps define the other.

DEFINITION OF BELIEVE

The main Greek word translated “believe” is *pisteuo*. Concerning this Greek word, the well recognized *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* records, “In classical Gk. literature *pistis* means the trust that a man may place in men or the gods, credibility, guarantee, proof to trust something or someone” (Brown 594). Notice the use of *trust*. This is a vital word when discussing belief. The Greek word *pistis*, translated “belief,” is also translated “faith.” Brother J. W. McGarvey in quoting Edward Robinson’s translation of Hebrews 1:1 wrote, “‘Faith is confidence as to things hoped for; conviction as to things not seen.’ Now that is as clear as a bell” (84). Again, if faith is confidence and conviction, so then is belief. While an instructor at the Southwest School of Bible Studies, Gary Colley often reminded his students, “faith is trust and obedience.” This is the definition I will use.

FOUNDATION OF BELIEF

“Doubting Thomas” he is sometimes called in derision. However, his Sacrificial Lamb did not disdain him for his faithlessness. Thomas simply insisted upon evidence. Is not this what Paul commanded: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 The. 5:21)? Thomas developed a visual belief in God. It was based upon his request to “see in his hands the print of the nails,” to put his “finger into the print of the nails,” and to thrust his “hand into his side” (John 20:25). This belief is based upon empirical evidence. By empirical I mean that which is based upon one or more of the five senses—touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing. There are many things we can know without empirical evidence. For example, I know gravity exists, but I certainly cannot know this by sight, touch, taste, smell, or hearing. The fact my feet are firmly planted on the ground, and the fact the tides move in and out confirm my *belief* in gravity just as sure as if I could see or smell it.

Many juries and judges every year convict criminals on prima facie cases. These are cases that are based upon factual knowledge and not empirical evidence. For example, a man may be convicted of murder without anyone seeing or hearing it. Do not our children learn about great historical figures based upon their **confidence** and **trust** in their teachers? No one living today can say he knows Abraham Lincoln lived

based upon empirical knowledge. One can say he *believes* Lincoln lived based upon **factual knowledge**.

You see, what Jesus wanted from Thomas, and what He wants from us today, is a faith (belief) based upon our **trust** and **confidence** in the **knowledge** of **His Word**. Our belief in God is not visual (empirical). Paul said, “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Of that “blessed belief” Jesus said, “blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed” (John 20:29). This is belief based upon **testimony** and **facts** as seen in the very context of the discourse between Jesus and Thomas: “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31). The testimony of God’s Word produces this blessed belief. Today apart from the Word of God there can be no belief and thus no faith.

While Thomas is an example of empirical faith, the Samaritan people are an example of factual, evangelical, or testimonial faith. After Jesus finished speaking to the Samaritan woman of John 4, she returned to her city and told the people about the Messiah. John records, “And many of the Samaritans of that city **believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified**, He told me all that ever I did” (John 4:39). Did the Samaritans have faith in Jesus? Yes, a faith produced by **factual testimony** and their **trust** in the woman. After this, the Samaritans came to Jesus and many more believed. In this later instance, their belief was based upon sight and their auditory senses. John said, “And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, **Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard *him* ourselves**, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:41-42). We do not have the advantage of seeing and listening to our beloved Savior, so we must build our **trust** and **obedience** (belief/faith) upon His testimony: the Bible. “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

A further example of this saving faith is seen on Pentecost. These believers (Acts 2:44) obeyed the Gospel based upon their trust and confidence in the **facts** presented by the Apostles. Luke recorded, “Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:37). Their faith was activated by repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38; cf. Acts 16:30-34). The faith of those on Pentecost was founded in testimony. It was based in their confidence of the Apostles and the

verification of the message. This is the faith that comes from hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

DEMONSTRATION OF DENOMINATIONAL BELIEF

For the purpose of clarification, let us classify the modern use of *belief* into two categories. The denominational usage is **mental assent alone**. The denominational faith is also known by the Bible as demonic and/or dead faith. The existence of this dead faith is seen several times in the New Testament. When Jesus came into the country of the Gergesenes, He met two possessed with demons who said to Him, “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” (Mat. 8:29). Are not these demons of which James spoke? They gave mental acknowledgment alone that Jesus was the Christ. Much like the demons, the chief rulers believed on the Christ, but because of the Pharisees they would not confess Him (John 12:42). In each example, belief was dead and ended in mental assent alone. Notice the following quote from the *General Baptist Statement Of Faith*, “Salvation can be received **only** through repentance toward God and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹ This is the doctrine of “faith only” or “mental assent” alone. Moreover observe the following from the *Church Manual* for Baptist churches:

We believe that the great gospel blessing which Christ secures to such as believe in him is justification; that justification includes the pardon of sin, and the promise of eternal life on principles of righteousness; that it is bestowed, not in consideration of any works of righteousness which we have done, but **solely through faith** in the Redeemer’s blood (Pendleton 48).

This faith is not biblical at all. It is demonic, dead, and truly denominational. It is worthless and has no saving power. It is of Satanic origin and will be the cause of eternal torment for many.

DEMONSTRATION OF DIVINE BELIEF

Our second category of belief is known by the Bible as divine and/or active faith and has no resemblance to that of denominationalism. Several passages will be given to support this thesis. First, “Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:28-29). Belief requires work and is not as the Baptist manual stated, void of its “consideration.”

Second, in the great chapter of faith (belief), the Hebrews writer attributes work and faith (belief) in every case.

PERSON	BELIEF	WORK
Abel	By faith	Offered (v. 4)
Enoch	By faith	Believed (vv. 5-6)
Noah	By faith	Prepared (v. 7)
Abraham	By faith	Obedied (v. 8)
Abraham	By faith	Offered (v. 17)
Isaac	By faith	Blessed (v. 20)
Jacob	By faith	Worshiped (v. 21)
Joseph	By faith	Commandments (v. 22)
Moses' parents	By faith	Hid (v. 23)
Moses	By faith	Refused (v. 24)
Moses	By faith	Forsook (v. 27)
Israelites	By faith	Passed (v. 29)
Rahab	By faith	Received (v. 31)

Third, in discussing belief, James set forth a clear distinction between demonic/dead faith and divine/active faith. In discussing dead faith, James wrote, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (Jam. 2:17). In discussing demonic faith, James wrote, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (Jam. 2:19). Now in stark contrast, in discussing divine active faith, James uses Abraham as an illustration.

Was not Abraham our father justified by **works**, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how **faith** wrought with his **works**, and by **works** was **faith** made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham **believed** God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God (Jam. 2:21-23).

Again *faith* and *belief* are used interchangeably. Furthermore, faith is connected with works. The Greek word for *by* in verse 22 denotes “exit or emission out of, as separation from, something with which there has been close connection...*from out of, out from, forth from, from*” (Thayer 189). In essence, James, by inspiration, is saying out of works is faith completed. How much clearer could one be! Yet, he is not done. To further pursue his point James wrote, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jam. 2:24). Denominationalism says justification is solely by faith. The inspired James wrote not by “faith only.” James or denominationalism—the choice is not a difficult one to make! Still further, in God’s infinite wisdom, knowing of the pending false doctrine that would surround faith, James

wrote, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Jam. 2:26). In vivid form, James gives us a living illustration of dead and divine faith. A man can no more have faith without works than can a man live apart from his spirit (Ecc. 12:7).

Examine this last demonstration of an active faith. Paul said, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but **faith working** through love” (Gal. 5:6—ASV). What more needs to be said? Faith **works!**

CONCLUSION

Can a man receive a higher compliment than to be blessed by the Savior of the world? “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet believed.” We have examined the diversity, foundation, definition, and demonstration of this weighty Bible concept. Our belief in Jesus Christ is paramount to our salvation. May it be based upon the factual testimony of God’s Word and not denominational heresy.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Brents, T. W. *The Gospel Plan Of Salvation*. Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987.
- Brown, Colin. *The New International Dictionary Of New Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996.
- McGarvey, J. W. *Sermons*. Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Publishing Company, n.d.
- Pendleton, J. W. *Church Manual Designed For The Use Of Baptist Churches*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1946.
- Thayer, Joseph Henry. *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1981.

ENDNOTE

¹The reader should know this information was taken from the following web site. <http://www.angelfire.com/mo/genbap/faith.html>. This information was printed February 22, 2001.

BLESSED ARE THE GIVERS

ACTS 20:35

Kenneth E. Ratcliff



Kenneth Ratcliff was born in Nashville, Tennessee. He is married to the former Eugenia Hollon and they have three sons and six grandchildren. He has a BBA from Texas Western College (now the University of Texas at El Paso), an MBA from the University of Texas in Austin, Texas, and a JD (Doctor of Jurisprudence) from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

Kenneth started preaching in 1952 and preached for congregations while furthering his education and serving in the U.S. Air Force, where he retired after 29 years with the rank of Colonel. He has been a part-time instructor at Southwest Texas State University at San Marcos and a Hearing Officer for the State of Texas Worker's Compensation Commission. He is currently working with the Schertz Church of Christ, Schertz, Texas, where he also serves as an elder. He has made three mission trips to Hungary and has conducted gospel meetings in several states. Kenneth is a member of the Board of Directors and the business manager for *The Gospel Journal*. He is the president of the school board for the Schertz, Cibolo, Universal City Independent School District, and is a member of the Texas Bar Association.

INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul was in the process of returning to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey. He was at Miletus where he was concluding his visit with the elders from Ephesus. In his closing remarks he made the following statement:

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:32-35).

The statement by Jesus that is quoted by Paul is not to be found in the accounts of our Lord's life, but there is no reason to doubt that it is what Jesus said.

The reason for quoting several verses is to obtain a better appreciation of what Paul is saying. His quotation of Jesus is further emphasis

to his preceding comments. He had pointed out several things regarding his work with them. He had not coveted the wealth of others. He had personally worked to supply the necessities for himself and his fellow travelers. They had been shown, by his example and teaching, that by their own labors they were to support the weak. The statement of Jesus is added as a concluding statement, which adds further credence to Paul's words. Their giving was far more important than what they might receive, and Paul was a living example. He had given in a variety of ways, and those of Ephesus had been among the recipients.

WHAT DOES *BLESSED* MEAN?

In this instance it is assumed that *more* is to be desired rather than *less*. However, what does *blessed* mean? If I am to be more blessed by giving than receiving, what is the thought? It is easier to grasp if *more* or *less* can be quantified. When speaking in terms of money, houses, cars, books, toys, etc., even children can quickly understand. Each individual may have some concept of what *blessed* means to them, but it becomes very important when it is presented as something so desirable that you can have more of it if you give. *Happy* usually comes to mind and is the meaning given by the *Thayer Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (386). *The Complete Word Study New Testament* also speaks of "fortunate and well off" (46). *The Complete Word Studies Dictionary New Testament* indicates that the thought differs from merely being happy. The one who is *blessed*, as used in this instance, is "one who is in the world yet independent of the world. His satisfaction comes from God and not from favorable circumstances" (937). The individual is not pleased, happy, or filled with self-satisfaction because of what he has given. Instead, he has the inner satisfaction that he has acted in a manner pleasing to God. There is no basis for boasting or feeling superior to others as he has done only that which he was obligated to do (Luke 17:7-10). However, the Christian who gives is reflecting a characteristic of God as well as being an obedient servant. This involves a deeper meaning than the emotional word *happy* often conveys. The individual has acted out of knowing God's will and purposefully sought to please Him. This is faith in action. From this flows a stronger relationship with God and an inner peace, satisfaction, and contentment. Herein is also true joy. It is not dependent on what others may think or do and cannot be taken away.

Surely, that which comes from such giving is far superior to that of being the one who receives. One may be ever so thankful for what they have received, but it is not likely to rise to the same level as that which comes from giving. Notice also the idea of giving and receiving as it relates to love: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:10-11). God’s love resulted in Him making the greatest possible gift. We who are recipients of that gift must be thankful for that which we have received. Our greatest expression of thankfulness is in giving to others, especially in sharing the gospel of salvation. It indeed is great to be the one who has given.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A GIFT?

Generally, the idea of a gift involves several factors. Basically, it includes the voluntary transfer of an interest in something by the donor to another without any consideration or compensation. Thus it may be distinguished from a contract between parties. For the gift to be effective it must meet three criteria: (1) There must be the present intent of the competent donor to make the gift, (2) The gift must be delivered to the donee, and (3) There must be an acceptance of the gift by the donee (Roszkowski 651). Any number of situations can and do occur which result in a determination that a gift was never intended or that it was not completed. It is not a gift, if unknown to me: you leave fish on my front porch when I do not like fish, I do not want them, and I throw them in the garbage. On the other hand, it is a most welcome gift to a person who is hungry, loves fish, and eagerly accepts them. God has given the gift of eternal life. Regrettably, most people are not interested, and some violently oppose all efforts to make the world aware of the gift.

At times we may pride ourselves that we have given when in reality there has not been a gift. Some people have received items, which they do not want. They destroy it, hide it, or pass it on to someone else. We may decide to do something for another person (or give something) because we think they will like it. It may be of no particular interest to them. As a result, we may feel hurt because they are lacking in appreciation. In truth, we were only doing that which pleased ourselves. Because we liked what we did, we expect that they should feel the same way. Christians sometimes leave property at the church building with

the indication it can be given to others. Most of the time what is given will be greatly appreciated by someone, but at times it is merely an easy way to get rid of unwanted items. There is no thought or interest in pleasing or assisting others. With the gospel, those who are not interested do not attempt to pass it on to others but usually quickly forget what they have been told. God is a competent donor who with unselfish love, and entirely for our benefit, has delivered to man the greatest and most precious gift. For the transaction to be complete, man must accept the gift according to the terms by which it was given.

WHAT ARE WE TO GIVE?

At times our initial reaction to a statement about giving is to assume that the reference is to money. It might have been assumed that this is what Jesus had in mind when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Clearly the giving Paul spoke of went beyond giving money. What Paul had given included his time and talents to provide for his personal support. In addition, he was able to assist others, which may have been financially. He was also giving in another way. He taught them the gospel publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20). Paul was entitled to be supported by others in preaching the gospel (1 Cor. 9), but it is clear that he frequently supported himself. He would not have it appear that in some way he made a profit from preaching. Although many aspects of giving can be listed, they ultimately mean little if in the end they do not play a part in the salvation of men. It was to this end that Jesus died and Paul earnestly labored.

SOME EXAMPLES OF GIVING

The Bible provides some fine examples of those who gave in a variety of ways:

1. Moses gave the last third of his life (40 years) in leading the Israelite people. To some this would not seem to be a burden. Being the one in charge seems to be the goal of many people. However, at times it was a burden for Moses as frequently nothing seemed to please the people. It might appear to be a thankless task with the people complaining, disobedient, and on the brink of rebellion (Num. 16; 20:1-6; 21:4-5).
2. David ordered the numbering of Israel, which resulted in God sending a pestilence upon Israel. God ultimately instructed David to rear up an altar to the Lord in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite. When David offered to purchase the threshingfloor, Araunah

offered it to him at no charge along with the oxen for sacrifice and the threshing instruments for wood (2 Sam. 24). To this David replied, "Nay; but I will surely buy *it* of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24).

3. The poor widow, who cast her two mites into the treasury. The purchasing power was virtually nil, but it was worth more than all that was given by others because it was all that she had (Luke 21:1-4).

4. The apostle Paul, who wore himself out in the service of the Lord, literally gave himself. He gave his time, the labor of his hands and talent in support of himself and others, the benefit of his education and intellect, his energy, his love and devotion to the salvation of man and for his Lord. Who knows what Paul might have been in this world if he had not followed Christ? Many may have thought he threw everything away when he became a Christian. If he had remained a part of the world, he might have been lost in history in spite of any great achievements. By giving himself to God, he will be remembered throughout eternity. The attitude of Paul is reflected in his statement that he counted all things but loss in order that he might win Christ (Phi. 3:8).

5. The people of Macedonia because they first gave themselves (2 Cor. 8:1-5).

6. The greatest gift of all is the Father giving His Son to pay a price that we could not and cannot pay so we might have eternal life. In a similar manner, the gift of Christ offering Himself as a sacrifice on our behalf (Mat. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

WHY DO YOU GIVE?

There are probably a variety of reasons why people give. Sometimes others expect it and we do not want to create a problem. We may feel pressured and have difficulty in saying "no." It may be the result of a family tradition of giving that we learned as children. People frequently give out of compassion for those who are less fortunate. On occasion, the ultimate gift has been given when someone gave his life while trying to save others. In such situations he may have acted out of the urgency of the moment without any thought as to why he was willing to take the risk. We may give to obtain a tax deduction or for the good publicity that it will generate. It may be just a part of doing business. In many such situations the person who gave did so for a purpose and has

already received what he wanted. As in praying to be seen of men, he has his reward and has no reason to expect anything from God (Mat. 6:1-4). We may also give one thing when something else was desired and possibly needed. People have been known to spend a considerable amount of money to purchase gifts to compensate for failing to spend time with their young children. In other instances visits are much more cherished than gifts or money. The purpose of the giving may be related more to soothing the conscience of the giver than to meeting the needs of the one who receives the gift.

There are a number of reasons why we should give. Hopefully, those listed will merely prompt the reader into thinking of many other reasons.

1. It is commanded by God (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7; Gal. 6:10).
2. What we are giving actually belongs to God, and we are merely sharing it with others (Exo. 19:5; Deu. 10:14; Psa. 24:1; 1 Cor. 10:28).
3. God first gave to us, and this serves as an example for us to also give (1 John 4:7-11).
4. Our giving is a part of developing the type of character that God desires.
5. It is intended that the giver obtain pleasure and satisfaction and the recipient obtain some benefit (2 Cor. 8:12-14; 9:7-15; Jam. 1:27).
6. Those who give of themselves today may need the assistance of others tomorrow.
7. It develops a feeling of caring and responsibility for others.
8. Giving helps to prevent one from becoming self-centered and greedy. It is difficult for us to hoard our time, money, and talents for self-gratification when they are also being expended on others.
9. It assists us in keeping our priorities in order and putting emphasis on those things which are more important.
10. It helps to generate an interest and a positive attitude towards others and life in general.

Hopefully, it will already be observed that there is both an outward manifestation of giving and also the mental attitude. This applies whether one is involved in giving of their time and talents in teaching, sweeping the floor, visiting, giving food, money, etc. However, the

mental attitude may not coincide with the outward appearance. One may provide transportation to take another to the doctor but be very unhappy that they had to give of their time. Another might agree to fix communion or teach but do it grudgingly as it obligates them for a period of time. It is easy to forget what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:3: "And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." This is an aspect that many in the religious world (including some in the church) have forgotten. As a result, they resort to every known means to raise funds including businesses, games of chance, plays, festivals, art shows, bake sales, etc. In the process they not only resort to means not reflected in the Scriptures but also ignore some very basic concepts. God does not need anything from us. This earth and everything in it, including ourselves, belongs to Him. It is man that has a need. Of what value and purpose is our giving. An obvious purpose is to benefit those in need, to support the preaching of the gospel to those who have not heard, and to spiritually strengthen those who are already Christians. If these were the sole purposes, it might make it a little easier to claim that it should not matter how money is raised as long as it is done within the law of the land. However, this is only a part of the reason for giving, and it relates not to how the money is to be obtained but the purposes for which it is to be used and those who are to be recipients.

The other aspect of giving pertains to the one who gives and the attitude with which it is done. In one form or another, all Christians are both givers and receivers. We do not get to heaven alone. Others have taught, strengthened, and encouraged us even if we have not needed financial or other assistance. However, an essential aspect of a Christian is that he learn to give of himself lovingly and unselfishly to others whether it involves money, property, time, or abilities. It is a part of that which reflects the nature of Christ with a love for God and man. When we resort to methods other than those approved in the Scriptures to entice people to give, we are destroying an element intended to mold us with an attitude that God desires.

There are some other attitudes which may be far more subtle but nevertheless have the same impact on the attitude of giving and may play a part in ultimately leading to raising money by games, etc. How many Christians are unwilling to give of their time and talents for the work of the Lord, but will give of these for a price? This is not ad-

dressing those who really need to earn a living, nor does it suggest that we should always be looking at getting something for nothing. However, there are definitely instances when Christians are not willing to help unless they are paid. To their shame, at times non-Christians have provided free assistance to congregations.

It would also be well for preachers to take note of the idea that it is more blessed to give than receive. Whether or not they like the idea, they are more closely observed than others and serve as an example. Preaching is something a man should feel he must do whether or not he receives support. The lack of support may hinder their efforts but they will still seek opportunities to teach and preach. Preachers may think that congregations are not hiring them but by providing support are making it possible for them to preach. However, when they begin to think in terms of what others in the world might earn who have similar education and experience, including medical benefits, vacation, hours work per week, etc., then their work takes on more the appearance of employment the same as any other occupation. This is not to question the need to properly support those who preach but to emphasize the fact that there is a distinction between one who preaches and is supported so that he can give his time to that work and those who are paid to preach. The one is giving himself and will be blessed for his efforts. The other is being paid for his work, and he has his reward.

But, why is it better to give than to receive? Why is it better for you to give of your time, talent, and/or money to someone else than it is for you to receive from others?

WHERE IS THE BLESSING IN GIVING?

This is a question that is rightfully asked, and to some it may appear difficult to answer. In many situations we may be likely to ask, "What do I get out of it?" or "What is in it for me?" Although in some respects such statements may sound self-centered, they are not necessarily unreasonable. If someone asks you to assist him on a project for which he is being paid, you might reasonably inquire as to what you are to receive. It is a factor in many aspects of life, such as, when we go to school, take a vacation, look for a job, contemplate marriage, etc. We are expecting something from our involvement, otherwise we are likely to turn our attention elsewhere.

Even in spiritual matters, in the back of our mind we are thinking of what is the ultimate benefit to self. Why am I involved? If there were

neither a heaven nor a hell or a heaven but no hell, would it make any difference in the way you live? This is not to suggest that we are unwilling to make sacrifices for the benefit of others. Possibly, it is no more than an evaluation process as we consider the facts and ponder any decision. Where is the blessing in giving? Why is it better to give than to receive? We can accept it as a truth because that is what we are told by God's Word. Some aspects of giving have already been discussed and may again be stressed. It is also assumed that the giving is being done with the proper attitude and is therefore pleasing to God. At the same time, it does not seem inappropriate to consider whether there might be some logical and reasonable explanations as to why giving is desirable. This is in spite of the fact that there will always be those who prefer to keep to themselves and hold tightly to everything they possess. Further, it is not intended that the references to giving relate only to material things, as it equally applies to our time and abilities.

1. Giving is a way in which we can demonstrate our interest and love for others. It seems very normal for one to demonstrate his love by giving. Even small children enjoy showing their affection by giving. In this situation, it is not done with any ulterior motive but with a sincere desire to give or do for another for the simple reason that you care for them. It brings joy to the one who is giving and even greater pleasure when the recipient is very appreciative.

2. Giving pays future dividends. Many parents have sacrificed to insure their children have an opportunity for a better future. It was done out of love and with no regrets, particularly when the children appreciate the sacrifice and make the best of their lives. In a similar manner, people have voluntarily worked with young people and their communities with the intent that it would help make this a better world in which to live. So much of the work within congregations is done without pay and frequently without recognition. The results are ultimately seen in the lives of future generations of faithful Christians who were taught and given a good example by those who went before them.

3. Giving helps to develop a positive attitude. Giving is a positive and outgoing act. It is difficult to think of one who is a giving person—but at the same time maintains a negative attitude. Of course, we are told that we are not to give “grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). Nevertheless, the act of giving to meet a need should bring a feeling of satisfaction. It is possibly similar

to that of praying for your enemies. It would seem almost impossible to pray for those that hate you without it having a positive impact on your own life. Thoughts of returning evil for evil would surely be banished from your mind. Our giving is a positive outward act that has a positive influence on our mind or heart.

4. Giving broadens and enhances our relationship with others. The very idea of giving implies that another is receiving. Although some giving is done by the congregation, it is important that, to the extent possible, Christians be involved in giving in addition to their contribution. In so doing, you become a part of the lives of others. There is a closer association and understanding.

5. By giving when we are able, we build a resource from which to draw in our time of need. This is not to suggest that giving is done with this thought in mind. However, everyone at some time or other will need to ask for assistance. It may not be for financial aid but for a ride to the doctor, a task that requires more than one person, the need for a skill not personally possessed, etc. If you have given freely of yourself, others are more likely to quickly respond when you are in need of assistance.

6. Others may think more highly of us because of our giving. This, of course, is not the purpose for giving, and it should not cause an individual to think too highly of himself. However, we do not live in a vacuum, and we establish a reputation by the manner in which we live. If one is known to give, it is a favorable characteristic. The opposite is the person who is known for trying to get all he can from others. The one is to be admired, and it is easy to anticipate that he also has other fine attributes. The other is likely to be shunned and considered to possibly have other undesirable traits.

7. It brings a greater peace to our life. This is not to suggest that the result of giving is a life free of any problems. However, the person who is giving is not trying to hoard material wealth and is not seeking to make himself the center of attention. He is not the rich man of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) nor the rich man whose concern was over building greater barns (Luke 12:16-21). Rather, he is the individual Jesus had in mind when He said, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Mat. 7:12). It is the same attitude that Paul spoke of when he said, "*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than*

themselves” (Phi. 2:3-4). Such conduct does not generate anxiety and strife but peace within and without.

RECEIVING IS NOT AS BENEFICIAL AS GIVING

If others are giving to us, we might not be so inclined to agree that it is better to give than to receive. Most people, especially children, enjoy receiving gifts. A certain segment of society relies on gifts from the government and others for their livelihood. Whatever the joy or need, there are still reasons why receiving is not as desirable as giving to others:

1. Receiving suggests there is a need, which we cannot or will not meet.
2. Receiving may make us lazy and willing for others to act and care for us.
3. Receiving can stunt our growth to inner/spiritual maturity and our desire to achieve.
4. Receiving tends to rob us of our independence in making decisions.
5. Receiving may ultimately cause others to think less of us.
6. Receiving may cause us to feel obligated to others.
7. Receiving tends to center our thoughts on self (what we want and what pleases us).
8. Receiving may cause us to think too highly of self, if we expect others to give to us.

In thinking about some of the above, it might help to consider what has been learned about the attitude of some who receive. Those who attend free programs are not as likely to attend and participate faithfully as opposed to those who are required to pay at least a small registration fee. Where schools and/or other facilities were built by the U.S. Government in poor areas overseas, they were not protected and maintained by the local people to the same extent as when they were required to provide the labor or otherwise assist in the construction within their capability. The December 2001 issue of the *Texas Bar Journal* gives some thoughts of a long-standing member of the Bar. One of his observations was that clients who received free legal services were not as appreciative and were more difficult to please than those who paid a reasonable fee (Ducloux 1048-1052). It has also been observed that those who receive with no obligation may ultimately feel it is due to them, and they are hurt or angry if that which was free is withdrawn. As

an example, several years ago someone wrote to an advice column complaining that they had been wronged by a friend who had given them a free ride to work for a lengthy period but had withdrawn the service. The complaint centered upon the additional costs and inconvenience to themselves and the lack of consideration by the individual who had already provided the transportation for several years. The same attitude does not usually exist where there is a reasonable charge. Likewise, we may not value what comes to us at no cost as opposed to those things for which we pay a fair price.

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:18-24) are examples of individuals who had their minds on how they could benefit instead of on the purpose of giving. Their thoughts hurt no one other than themselves, but God was clearly not pleased.

Look again at the list of reasons why receiving is not as desirable as giving to others. Nevertheless, there are times when we need to receive and to do so with an appreciative and thankful attitude. We need to be strengthened and edified by other Christians, and we need their prayers on our behalf. There may be times of illness, financial difficulty, or other situations where we honestly need to seek the assistance of others. This should point our thoughts to receiving the greatest gift of all, the forgiveness of our sins. Our sins separate us from God and doom us eternally. We lack the capability of removing a single sin and must rely upon God to provide the way of salvation and guidance through life. We are dependent upon Him, and we should be eternally thankful. Nevertheless, in His example, God set the stage for the concept that it is better to give than to receive. Most people enjoy receiving gifts and extra attention on special occasions. At the same time, it may be difficult to think of situations where we would be happy to have a need that can only be met by receiving from others. It is better to be in the situation where we are able to give than to be in need of receiving from others. However, in spiritual matters we must first learn to properly receive from God before we can rightly give to others.

There is a clear distinction between that which is of the world and that which is spiritual. (The world seeks self-gratification, which basically means during the life of the individual.) This is not to suggest that everyone who is not a Christian will do nothing worthwhile for others without expecting something in return. Nevertheless, their lives are not centered on obeying God. In spite of the good they may do for others, their lives will revolve around those things which are earthly.

The spiritual focuses on what can be given to God and others and looks to eternity. How can one properly love and serve God if his life is centered on himself? Are we thinking of giving or of receiving? Much of what we have to give cannot be stored away, is not tangible, and grows by being given to others. A smile and sincere compliments to others helps to make their day brighter and often is passed on. It has cost us nothing, but whether we are rich or poor, we can give it freely and be better for having done so. We may not be able to love others in the same way that we love those who are near and dear to us, but this should not prevent us from giving consideration and respect to everyone regardless of age or status in life. It is the idea of treating others as you would like to be treated (Mat. 7:12).

Our time and talents are very precious commodities. We only have a certain amount of each. We probably have a fair idea of our limitations, but we seldom know how limited our time may be. When we give of these to benefit others, we have actually given a part of ourselves. More than that, Jesus said when we have done for others, we have also done it for Him (Mat. 25:40).

Receiving when there is a need can be a great blessing if accompanied by the right attitude, but otherwise it may be a detriment. Even children are caught up in the expectation of receiving gifts, are disappointed if it is not what they wanted, and feel no thankfulness for what they receive.

If we fail to learn the proper attitude about giving and receiving, how are we likely to react with respect to the good things we enjoy in life and especially spiritual blessings? All of the good things we enjoy in life are gifts from God (Jam. 1:17). All that we are and have comes from Him. What kind of stewards are we? It is quite possible that many people have never considered this but think in terms of what they believe to be rightly due to them.

Assuming we live to an old age, our entire life will not be spent in being productive. In our early years it will be necessary for someone else to provide for our needs. In our declining years we may again reach the stage where we are highly dependent on others. During these periods our ability to give to others will be seriously limited, and we are primarily the recipient rather than the giver. We must therefore make the most of those years when mentally and physically we are capable of doing for others while providing for ourselves.

CONCLUSION

How might it be concluded that the giver is blessed? If it is material goods that are involved, it will all be left behind at death. Within the world only a very few will know us, and we, with our deeds, will soon be forgotten. Ultimately, it will not matter to those who remain whether or not we have given of ourselves. However, if one has been a good steward of those things which God has left in his keeping, then he has laid up treasures in heaven and not on earth. It will not be what we have received but that which we have given which will be of significance.

We are to be judged according to our works (Rev. 20:12) and not according to what we have received. Paul admonishes us to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service*” (Rom. 12:1). In writing the Philippian letter, he also stated:

Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account (Phi. 4:15-17).

Such is to be the nature and attitude of our giving that we lay up treasures in heaven where it will not rust, become corrupt, or be stolen (Mat. 6:19-21). Truly, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Ducloux, Claude. “10 Hard-Earned Lessons About Life and Law.” *Texas Bar Journal* 64.11 (December 2001): 1048-1052.
- Roszkowski, Mark E. *Business Law Principles, Cases, and Policy*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1987.
- Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986.
- Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1993.
- - -. *The Complete Word Study New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992.

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO ENDURES TEMPTATIONS

JAMES 1:12

Wesley Simons



Wesley Simons was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching (1972) and holds a B.A. degree from Tennessee Bible College. He also holds a M.A. degree in Christian Doctrine & Apologetics from Tennessee Bible College.

He is married to Elva May (Cook) of Luray, Virginia. They have two children and one granddaughter.

Wesley has been preaching for 28 years. He has served with congregations in Virginia and Tennessee and is currently in his seventh year with the Stoney Creek Church of Christ in Elizabethton, Tennessee.

Wesley has started two brotherhood papers and has had debates on the Godhead, baptism, instrumental music, and Catholicism. He has preached on various radio and television programs and taught extension classes for Tennessee Bible College. Wesley also served as one of the directors of the Crandull School of Preaching and Christian Development.

INTRODUCTION

One thing that is common to all responsible people is temptation. How we deal with this temptation will determine where we will be in all eternity. On Judgment Day, why will some people be on the Lord's right hand and some on His left hand? The answer is obvious. Some dealt well with temptation and others did not. If we endure temptation as set forth in the Word of God, then we will be blessed. If we give in to temptation, then we will be lost. We need to pray that we enter not in to temptation: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak" (Mat. 26:41). Often, we have the mindset that we really do not want to sin. However, because we have not worked on being stronger, we give into temptation.

BLESSED

Inspiration says, "Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (Jam. 1:12). The chief goal for all

people is to be happy, but how can one be happy if God is not pleased with his life? Here a blessing is being pronounced upon the one who endures temptation. This blessedness is not just the thought of one being happy. It carries with it the thought that God has viewed the way that one has dealt with temptation and says that he is blessed because he has handled correctly this facet of his life. Temptation is the hardest thing that man will face in this life. What a joy it is to think that God can look at the way that one has handled such and pronounce a blessing upon him! We should all desire to be viewed in the sight of God as was Elizabeth and Zacharias:

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless (Luke 1:5-6).

Notice, the Bible says they were *blameless*. It does not say that they were sinless. If we handle temptation correctly, we can be declared blameless in the sight of God. We realize that all of this is made possible because of the blood of Jesus Christ. If sinlessness was demanded, then none of us would be blameless.

The way we respond to God's commands will determine our eternal fate: "Blessed *are* they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14). No man can despise the guidelines of the Most High God and expect a blessing to be pronounced upon his life when time shall be no more. There are those who scoff at a pattern. They will not be laughing Judgment Day.

WHO IS BEHIND ALL TEMPTATIONS?

God is not behind man's temptation. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (Jam. 1:13). God is on our side. There are those who try to blame God when bad things come their way that caused them to be tempted, but God is not the source of temptation.

The devil is the one who tempts us. After he had tempted Jesus, the Bible says, "And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season" (Luke 4:13). In the parable of the sower, the Bible makes it plain who our adversary is:

Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and

be saved. They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away (Luke 8:12-13).

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

The devil is doomed to hell, and he wants to take all of us with him.

WHO CAN BE TEMPTED?

All responsible people are subject to temptation. As a matter of fact, all created beings are capable of being tempted. Even angels, who are created beings are tempted: “And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). Notice, the angels kept not their first estate. Therefore, they did not overcome temptation. Because they did not conquer temptation, they are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment. A blessing certainly cannot be pronounced upon these beings, but rather a curse. We are told that God did not spare sinful angels: “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell, and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Pet. 2:4). This chapter is making the argument that God did not spare the angels, the old world, or Sodom and Gomorrah when they gave into temptation and sin. Therefore, we will not be spared if we choose to live in sin.

If we wish to be blessed by God, then we must avoid the pitfalls of these people and beings. God did not spare Israel or Judah when they chose to succumb to temptation. Israel was carried away into Assyrian captivity and Judah into Babylonian captivity. The children of Israel gave into temptation in the wilderness and was not pleasing to God:

But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents (1 Cor. 10:5-9).

We have a God-given obligation to endure temptation. That is what this life is all about. We are here to prepare for eternity. We cannot prepare for eternity by yielding to temptation.

Any created being can be tempted. Here we are talking about Jesus in the flesh. For the Bible says, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (Jam. 1:13). When the Word became flesh, then He became subject to temptation. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). He was tempted in all points like as we are: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet without sin*” (Heb. 4:15). Our Lord did not give in to temptation. Therefore, He became the perfect Lamb of God.

SOME BELIEVE THAT ONE CANNOT ENDURE TEMPTATION

We have those who believe that one cannot endure temptation. In a debate on live radio with a Baptist preacher, I asked him if one had to keep the commandments of God to be saved. He said, “No!” He declared that no one could keep the commandments of God. The Bible says:

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (Heb. 5:8-9).

If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15).

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you (John 15:14).

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Mat. 7:21).

There is a connection between doing God’s will and going to heaven:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

Therefore, it is possible to keep God’s commandments and overcome temptation. God would not ask us to endure temptations if it were

not possible. The Baptist preacher has very little faith in God and His system.

SOME DOCTRINES SAY THAT MEN DO NOT HAVE TO ENDURE TEMPTATIONS

Mankind has come up with various doctrines which say in essence that one does not have to endure temptation. One such doctrine is that of *once-saved-always-saved*. Sam Morris wrote this in his tract: *Do a Christian's Sins Damn His Soul?*

We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul. The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatsoever to do with the salvation of his soul.... All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger...the way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul (1, 2).

However, the Bible teaches that a Christian can be overcome with a fault or sin:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (Jam. 5:19-20).

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

Sam Morris calls the Lord a liar. Jesus says (by inspiration) one must endure temptation. However, Sam says Jesus is wrong—one does not have to endure temptation. Sam says that “the way a man lives has nothing to do with the salvation of his soul” (2). The Bible says that the

pure in heart will see God (Mat. 5:8). James says we must endure temptation to receive the crown of life (Jam. 1:12). Sam is wrong!

Another doctrine which says that one does not have to endure temptation is the **Calvinistic doctrine of predestination**. This doctrine says that before the foundation of the world God elected certain angels and men to be saved without any consideration of their actions. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* states: “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death” (Smith 3:3).

It further states:

Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith of good works, or perseverance in either of them, of any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto: and all to the praise of His glorious grace (Smith 3:5).

I asked Jonathan Crosby, a Primitive Baptist preacher, on live radio, that if I were among the elect, could I commit adultery with every woman in Bristol, steal everything I saw, and kill everyone I came in contact with, and still go to heaven? He said, “Absolutely!” Notice, I would have no obligation given this doctrine to endure temptation. As a matter of fact, I can do anything and be right in the sight of God according to this man and his doctrine. Try to harmonize that thought with: “Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (Jam. 1:12).

Another false doctrine which says a man cannot endure temptation is **total hereditary depravity**. Ben Bogard said, “The depraved sinner cannot act except by enabling grace of God through the Spirit” (13). If one cannot act upon the temptations that confront him, then he cannot endure temptation. There are other false doctrines which we could list, but these are sufficient to prove that many man-made doctrines take away the free moral agency of man.

THE AVENUES OF TEMPTATION

There are three major avenues of temptation. John put it this way:

Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

Adam and Eve were tempted through these three avenues:

(1) **The lust of the eyes:**

And when the **woman saw** (Gen. 3:6).

(2) **The lust of the flesh:**

that the tree *was* **good for food** (Gen. 3:6).

(3) **The pride of life:**

and a tree to be desired to **make *one* wise**, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Gen. 3:6).

Jesus was also tempted through these three avenues:

(1) **The lust of the eyes:**

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and **sheweth him** all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me (Mat. 4:8-9).

(2) **The lust of the flesh:**

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these **stones be made bread** (Mat. 4:3).

(3) **The pride of life:**

And saith unto him, **If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down:** for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone (Mat. 4:6).

Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are (Heb. 4:15). Jesus knows what it is like to be housed in the flesh (John 1:14).

We are also tempted in these three ways. There might be new ways to appeal to these three avenues, but the temptations are the same. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man” (1 Cor. 10:13).

THE ANATOMY OF SIN

It is not a sin to be tempted. One is tempted when he is draw away of his own lust and enticed. If one should stop here, no sin has oc-

curred. However, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin. We must make sure that lust does not conceive in our hearts. James said, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jam. 1:14-15).

We must keep our hearts: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life” (Pro. 4:23). The Proverbs writer also states, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so *is* he” (Pro. 23:7). In the great sermon on the mount, Jesus taught, “Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Mat. 5:8).

The Bible says, “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jam. 1:15). If we give in to temptation, then we will die spiritually.

OUR PROMISE FROM GOD IN DEALING WITH TEMPTATION

God has made us certain promises when it comes to temptation:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it* (1 Cor. 10:13).

We want to notice some great facts and promises based on this verse.

He has promised us that temptation is a **fact of life**. “**There hath no temptation taken you.**” A responsible person faces many temptations. The tempter is always after us. The devil is out to destroy us by causing us to give in to temptation. The Lord warns us that this battle is real.

This verse points out the **fairness of life**. “There hath no temptation taken you **but such as is common to man.**” One cannot say that no other person is going through what he is. This lays the responsibility for one’s sins squarely on his shoulders. One must realize that all men have their own battles with temptation. Jesus faced this same onslaught from Satan: “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb. 2:18). The way one faces temptation shows his love or lack of it for God.

We also see the **faithfulness of God** in this verse: “**God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.**” God will not allow Satan to paint one into a corner. God knows what man can endure. God would not be fair if one could be tempted above what he could stand. One gets into trouble because he thinks that he can

handle some things which in reality he cannot handle. “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Tim. 6:9).

In this verse, we see the **fate of the tempted**: “**but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.**” With every temptation, there is a way to escape. Sometimes, one does not look for the way out because he enjoys the pleasures of sin. God is faithful. He will help one if he desires His help. The Bible teaches that God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pet. 2:9). We must always remember that God is on our side. He gave His Son so that we might have life and that eternal. The only way that we are going to receive the crown of life is to endure temptation.

WAYS TO ESCAPE TEMPTATION

One might ask, how does one endure temptation? How can we escape the snares of the devil? God has given us various examples in the Bible of how men and women endured temptation.

1. **We might have to run like Joseph**: “And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth” (Gen. 39:13). Joseph had to run, but he got away from the lewd woman that was trying to seduce him. Many times we do not want to put forth this kind of effort to avoid the sins we enjoy.

2. **We will have to use Scripture like Jesus did**: “Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Mat. 4:10). David put it this way: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11). The more Bible one knows and puts into practice, the better he can handle temptation. Those who study the least are those who are in and out of faithfulness, and they claim that they cannot understand it. It takes spiritual strength to withstand the devil.

3. **Pray like Paul**:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me (2 Cor. 12:7-8).

It is always right to pray as a child of God. However, we need to pray fervently when faced with temptation. To give in to temptation and live in the same is to forfeit one's soul.

4. **Leave like Lot** (Gen. 18-19). Lot had to get out of Sodom and Gomorrah to be pleasing to God. We might have to walk out of various situations in which we find ourselves. This also means that we might have to leave the company of some. "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33). The American Standard puts it this way: "Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals." Many people are led astray by others. The company we keep says a lot about the temptations we may or may not face.

5. **Resist with all your might:** "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jam. 4:7). If we are going to endure temptation, then we must be willing to put up a fight. Too many people, just give in to temptation. We need to serve the devil a notice that he is in for the fight of his life if he thinks he is going to cause us to serve him.

6. **Draw close to God:** "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded" (Jam. 4:8). We cannot be double-minded. We cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve the devil by giving in to temptation and serve God at the same time. The closer we are to God, the better we will be able to endure the devil's attacks.

OUR GOAL FOR ENDURING TEMPTATION

We have a great goal for enduring temptation. Listen again to what James wrote, "Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall **receive the crown of life**, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (Jam. 1:12). We have been promised the crown of life by a God who cannot lie if we will endure temptation. We have a choice to either enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season or be with God in all eternity. Being faithful to God is more important than life itself:

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

The entire message of Revelation is that the overcomers will get to come over: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto

the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). This promise has been made by Jesus.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

What a glorious reward for enduring temptation for a small time here on this earth!

THE DAY OF TESTING OR TRYING WILL COME.

Notice another aspect of this verse: “Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: **for when he is tried**, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (Jam. 1:12). The verse says that we are going to be judged according to the way that we have lived in this life: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). The Bible further states:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

Of what would one need to repent? One would need to repent for giving in to any temptation. Listen to these verses:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (Jam. 1:13-15).

If we are drawn away of our own lust and enticed and give in to that enticement, then we sin.

We cannot fool God: “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). He even knows the secret things that we do:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring

every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil (Ecc. 12:13-14).

We have one chance in this life to secure salvation for ourselves. Where we will be in eternity will depend on how well we have controlled our vessel: “For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour” (1 The. 4:3-4). If I am lost, it will be because I chose to practice that which God declared to be wrong. It might be the case that I will have gained much in this world in giving in to temptation. However, Jesus commented on that: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37).

THOSE WHO ENDURE TEMPTATION ARE THOSE THAT LOVE GOD

Once again notice what James writes, “Blessed *is* the man that **endureth temptation**: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them **that love him**” (Jam. 1:12). The Lord has promised the crown of life to those who endure temptation and those who love Him. One will not endure temptation if he does not love the Lord.

Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). He also stated, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). The real issue is, do we love Jesus? Are we His friend?

May God help us to endure temptation that we might receive the crown of life. The next time you are tempted, ask yourself the question, do I want to give in to this or do I want my crown of life which God has promised me?

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Bogard, Ben. *Total Depravity*.
- Morris, Sam. *Do A Christian's Sins Damn His Soul*. N.p.: n.p., n.d.
- Smith, M. H. *Westminster Confession of Faith*. electronic ed. Christian Classics Foundation, 1996. Greenville, SC: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Press, 1990.

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO IS A DOER OF THE WORK

JAMES 1:25

Daniel Denham



Daniel Denham was born in Pensacola, Florida. He is married to the former Barbara Kay Stancliff, and they have three children: Shawn, Trevor, and Megan. He graduated from the Bellview Preacher Training School under the direction of William S. Cline in 1977. Daniel has served as an evangelist for congregations in Florida, Tennessee, and Texas, and has done mission work in Taiwan. He currently serves as evangelist with the church of Christ in Rutherford, Tennessee. He has authored numerous articles for the *Defender* and other brotherhood publications and appears on several lectureships each year. He has authored two tracts published by the Bellview Church of Christ in Pensacola.

INTRODUCTION

James 1:25 declares: “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” The epistle is concerned with the many tests of faith that Christians will be faced with in life. Among these tests is the attitude that one has (or will have) toward the word of God. Beginning in James 1:17 and going through the end of the chapter, James stresses certain things relative to the Christian’s response to the Word.

THE BACKGROUND OF OUR TEXT

First, James states the great principle truth that all good things ultimately come from God. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam. 1:17).

Second, James shows that one of those gifts is the Word of God by the which Christians are begotten of God “of his own will” (Jam. 1:18). The great Benefactor of men gave His Word as the means or mode by which they could be born again into His spiritual family by the new birth (cf., John 3:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:22-23).

Third, James emphasizes that there must then follow the proper attitude and response to the life-giving Word. One must be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (Jam. 1:19). The reason? “For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (Jam. 1:20). The need for self-control and the avoidance of unbridled passions, such as anger (wrath), is paramount in one’s approach to the study and use of Scripture. Being hotheaded and practicing genuine obedience are incongruous with one another! The latter gets in the way of the former so that one cannot be in a right relationship with God. Righteousness involves doing that which is right or righteous in God’s sight (1 John 3:7). It is in the gospel of Christ, the New Testament, that “the righteousness of God”—i.e., the means by which God makes man righteous or by which man is deemed righteous by God—is revealed (Rom. 1:17). For that reason the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. 1:16).

Fourth, James thus (note the use of “wherefore”) teaches that Christians are to “lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save” their souls (Jam. 1:21). They must simultaneously (Hiebert 128, Wenham 152-153, Woods 81-82)¹ set aside sin in their lives and receive the Word. The former is the effect of genuine repentance and involves in the imagery the stripping away of sin from one’s life as one would strip off or away the filthy rags of clothing that hitherto has covered his body, while the latter response accomplishes the needed cleansing and thus brings forgiveness (cf., Psa. 119:11; John 15:3). The “engrafted word” has therefore the inherent power to save souls. God has so designed it and adapted it to the human personality in such a way as to accomplish this grand purpose.

The sacred Scriptures are the seed of the kingdom of God (Luke 8:11). The well-known biological fact that each seed reproduces after its kind is stressed in the Word itself (Gen. 1:11-12). The same truth is taught relative to that spiritual seed, the Word of God, that produces Christians and Christians only! Furthermore, as the biological seed possesses in itself the germ of life that, given time and the proper conditions, will generate a new plant, even so the Word of God possesses in itself sufficient power, given time and the proper conditions, that will produce a child of the living God! By hearing and heeding the Word one can be saved (cf., 1 Tim. 4:16). It is “able” (has the sufficient power) to “build” one up in the faith and to “give” him “an inheritance

among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). The nature of the information it contains has been so composed by the Divine Mind that the power resides inherently in the seed of the Kingdom itself to accomplish its purpose in the scheme of redemption, just as when God spoke literally and orally to command certain things to happen in creation expending power through His creative fiat. Surely, if God could verbally speak and the spoken Word accomplish its grand purpose in generating the creation, He can speak—and indeed has spoken—through His written Word the life-giving message expending sufficient power to accomplish the grand purpose of regenerating the souls of men! The essential difference between the two actions is simply this: by the former He established natural law, and by the latter He exercises His spiritual law. The former then involved a direct, supernatural, and therefore miraculous action even anterior to the natural order it thus established, while the latter involves an indirect, spiritual operation through means by way of the spiritual order already then established but now exercised in the gospel system. *Engrafted* emphasizes the importance of the internalizing of the Word of God within the moral framework and faculties of man to produce the desired end.

Fifth, James admonishes, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jam. 1:22). The warning reminds the reader of the obligation to follow through in action what is believed in the mind. Obedience to the word is essential to salvation (Mat. 7:21ff.; Heb. 5:8-9; Rev. 22:14). He who knows the truth but does not do it is especially under condemnation (Jam. 4:17). He also, as James notes, deceives himself. He believes himself to be all right in his relationship with God, but is sadly mistaken. Faith without works of obedience is a dead faith (Jam. 2:18-26). One must both believe and obey the truth (John 8:31-32).

THE ILLUSTRATION OF THE MIRROR

At this juncture, James explains and thus illustrates (hence “for” translated from the Greek *hoti* with the indicative) the reason for doing the word as well as hearing it. He hearkens to the example of a mirror. In New Testament times polished metals, like copper, tin, or brass, were the most common materials out of which mirrors were constructed. Glass actually would not come into use until some time later (Green 370).² The brass would have to be polished extensively to provide a good reflecting surface. The mirror relates to the Word of God, also

called “the perfect law of liberty” (Jam. 1:25) stressing its complete nature in God’s revelatory scheme (cf., 1 Cor. 13:8-13).

In the imagery that James employs, a man stands before the mirror “beholding his natural face.” He examines himself carefully—the word rendered “beholdeth” (Jam. 1:24) involves more than a cursory glance. It means to “consider carefully” (Abbott-Smith 236, Davids 41, 54-55) It is thus not the fact that the man only glances into the mirror and then immediately leaving forgets what is the condition of his appearance. Rather it is the purpose for his looking into the mirror that is under consideration. The one who looks at himself through the reflection of God’s Word, even carefully, but who does not do the work commanded by that Word is the one who corresponds to the man in the analogy or extended simile (“like”—Jam. 1:23).

The careful examination then is for some seemingly important purpose at the time, but it is not for the principle purpose that James has in view—the need to see one’s self as he really is in God’s sight and to make the proper corrections when and where needed. As Peter Davids states:

It is like someone who carefully examines his or her face in a mirror in the morning. The beard is trimmed, the hair carefully combed into place, or the make-up applied. For the moment looking at his or her human face is an absorbing occupation. But once the morning ablutions are complete, no more thought is given to the matter; the person immediately forgets what he looks like, often operating during the day on the basis of a self-image at odds with his or her physical reality (41).

The practical end of this examination would necessarily be the doing of God’s Word in one’s life. It is the practical and personal application of God’s message to one’s life that is paramount in the text. Everything else hinges upon that basic point. The man who *looketh* (Greek *parakupto*) into the mirror looks intently but even more so than the former. The word vividly stresses in its root the idea of stooping to get as close a look as possible, even at things “out of the normal line of vision” (Kent 68). Mayor renders it here as “bending over in order to examine minutely, peering into” (67). It is intensified in scope by the fact that the man “continueth therein” (Kent 69).³ He does not depart and then forget, but concentrates all his faculties on knowing and applying the knowledge he has gained. He is in position to put himself in order in keeping with God’s perception of him and to correct himself better as need arises. He will not be a “forgetful hearer.” He will be

conscientious in applying the knowledge of God's Word to his life. He will both *hear* and *do* the sayings of Christ, which is the essence of godly wisdom (Mat. 7:24-27).

THE PROMISED BLESSING

James adds that the man of James 1:25 is thus a “doer of the work,” and as such he “shall be blessed in his deed.” His doing of that which he hears will prosper. The work itself will bring blessedness (from *makarios*) to the performer. God has always tied the appropriation of the benefits of His loving favor to man to His Word and to man's obedience. Examination of every one of the beatitudes found in Scripture shows the relationship between divine blessing and man's proper response to God's Word. God has always blessed man when he will hear and obey. The approbation and acceptance of God for man are tied to man's response to the revelation of His will in the Word. Sectarian and denominational preachers fail to recognize and appreciate this correlation between blessing and obedience. The errors of “faith only” and “grace only” salvation are diametrically opposed to this great principle. Jesus says, “Blessed *are* they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14). Do you desire to go to heaven? Then obey God's Word.

James then stresses in view of this blessing some practical applications that flow from the blessing/obedience correlation. (1) One should bridle his tongue (Jam. 1:26). (2) One should practice “pure religion and undefiled” (Jam. 1:27). (3) One should avoid prejudice and social bigotry (Jam. 2:1-13), etc. He demonstrates that the Christian religion is one that governs and regulates all relationships. It sets forth a rule of conduct—dare we say, *law* (cf., Gal. 6:2; Jam. 1:25)—for moral and ethical matters, and includes these under the scope of *religion*. Man seeks to separate morals and ethics from religion, but God binds them together: so failure to behave in the right way toward others invariably affects one's relationship with God. One, for example, cannot truly love God while hating his brother (1 John 3:15; 4:20-21). Right relationship with God is due in part to a right relationship with ourselves and one another.

This practice of genuine, heartfelt obedience is the ultimate expression of receiving the Word of God and thus properly appreciating all the good things that God, the bountiful Giver, makes available to us

(Jam. 1:17-21). Where there is no proper obedience to the Word, then the Word has not been truly received (Acts 2:41).⁴

CONCLUSION

We have examined briefly James 1:25 and its immediate context. We have taken note of the specific background that concerns this beatitude. We have also considered the expressive imagery used to illustrate the importance of the Word of God as our mirror in life and stressed the blessing that God has in store for those who will obey—ultimately a home in heaven for all eternity (Heb. 10:38; 1 Pet. 1:4).

James pronounces a wonderful blessing upon those who will hear and heed the Word of God. Let us recognize the fact that blessing is predicated upon genuine obedience from the heart. We must seriously and sincerely examine the Sacred Scriptures which are “able to make” us “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15). The soul that abhors God’s Word or that takes it for granted shall not share in the bounty and riches of His grace, but is impoverished indeed.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Abbott-Smith, G. *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, n.d.
- Burton, Ernest DeWitt. *New Testament Moods and Tenses*. Chicago, IL: University Press of Chicago, 1893.
- Dauids, Peter H. *James*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.
- Goodwin, William Watson, and Charles Burton Gulick. *Greek Grammar*. Boston, MA: Ginn & Co., 1930.
- Green, Jay P. *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*. McLean, VA: Macdonald Publishing Co., n.d.
- Hiebert, D. Edmond. *The Epistle of James*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1979.
- Kent, Jr., Homer A. *Faith that Works: Studies in the Epistle of James*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986.
- Mayor, J. B. *The Epistle of St. James*. London, UK: Macmillan & Co., 1892.
- Turner, Nigel. “Syntax.” Ed. James Hope Moulton. *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*. Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1963.
- Wenham, J. W. *The Elements of New Testament Greek*. London, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1965.
- Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Publishing, Co., 1964.

ENDNOTES

¹The text employs the aorist participle with an aorist imperative verb. Some take the action of the participle (rendered “putting off” or “lay aside”) here as preceding the action of the verb “receive.” However, the action of an aorist participle not only can precede the action of a main verb, it often coincides with it, especially when the verb

is an aorist tense verb as here (aorist imperative). Incidentally, Guy N. Woods observes that the aorist tenses in the participle and the verb show that a determined “once-and-for-all-act” and “once-for-all action” is what James enjoins in each respectively in the text.

²The term rendered “glass” in the KJV is better translated “mirror.”

³The Greek employs in verse 25 the gnomic aorist in summarizing the actions of the man in his obedience in looking “into the perfect law of liberty.” The term “continueth” describes “a remaining in the activity” (Kent 69).

⁴Note that the Greek text of Acts 2:41 employs an aorist participle (“received gladly”) modifying the action of the aorist indicative verb (“were baptized”) showing that the action is coincident and not linear in nature. Cf., Wenham cited earlier; “The aorist participle in certain constructions (generally with a verb in the aorist) does not denote time past with reference to the leading verb, but expresses time coincident with that of the verb when the action of the verb and of the participle is practically one” (Goodwin and Gulick 274). “An Aorist Participle of Identical Action most frequently accompanies an Aorist verb, both verb and participle thus describing the action indefinitely as a simple event” (Burton 65). “There are numerous examples of the aor. ptc. denoting coincident action, where the time of the action is not antecedent to that of the main verb” (Turner 79).

BLESSED ARE THE READERS AND HEARERS REVELATION 1:3

Michael Shepherd



Michael Shepherd is a native Alabamian. He attended the International Bible College in Florence, Alabama. Michael has preached for the Westside Church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida for the last seven years. He speaks on numerous lectureships and in gospel meetings each year.

Michael and his wife Luverne have two children: Eunice and Michelle.

INTRODUCTION

This lectureship book covering the beatitudes will long live to aid, succor, promote, and advance the furtherance of the distinctive quality and characteristics of a Christian. Let us honestly appraise ourselves in the light of this overall composition: the “b” attitudes.

This book is like a great musical symphony. The whole is greater than any part, even any collection of its parts. Revelation 1:3 is just another verse added to this galaxy of traits and qualities, (the “b” attitudes) that guarantee joy and effectiveness as a Christian.

The “b” attitudes describe for us the strategy of effective, effectual, productive, adequate, active, dynamic, wide-awake servanthood. The “b” attitudes are the panoply, the complete arms and armor for the Christian. This is the magnificent shining array of righteousness in a progressive fashion.

No “b” attitude stands alone. Each “b” attitude is vital in relationship to all of the other attitudes that have come before and that come after Revelation 1:3. The “b” attitudes show the way to reconstruct a man from the inside out. We can conceptualize these words for ourselves: this preamble. These words are the real birth marks of ser-

vanthood. We must capture the correct lifestyle by crucifying self, then these traits will come flooding in the human soul.

The “b” attitudes comprise God’s psychiatry for the disorders of the mind. This is God’s mental help program. This is the way to live that we might have the applause of heaven. God’s blessings will accompany our acquisition and appropriate employment of the knowledge gained from this lectureship study. These particular blessings will enable our labors to produce good spiritual fruit and allow our souls to someday return to God with favor. The blueprint for Christian living (the “b” attitudes) is really the constitution of Christian religion, because it is the most impressive summary of what it means to live a Christian life. The description of the Christian character this author has been assigned to discuss is found in Revelation 1:3.

EXEGESIS AND EXPOSITION OF REVELATION 1:3

The verse reads, “Blessed *is* he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time *is* at hand.”

The first word in this verse—*blessed*—opens the door to the discussion at hand. The Holy Spirit used this word to introduce the benefits that we receive in having certain character traits which are called beatitudes.

Beatitude is from *beatus*, the Latin word for “blessed.” A careful study of blessed and happy reveals some important factors. *Happy* depends upon one’s physical circumstance. In calling our attention to 1 Peter 3:14, these words are found: “But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy *are ye*: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.” *Happy* in this verse is from the same Greek word elsewhere translated “blessed.” It informs men about a prosperity which will not pass away. This blessedness is sustained by one’s willingness to submit to heaven’s Will by developing and maintaining certain character traits. The blessedness in this life leads to the ultimate spiritual prosperity in the next life. There are divine eternal blessings upon those possessing these traits.

Blessedness depends upon inward qualities—not outward circumstances. The Holy Spirit gives fundamental laws to which we must submit for producing in us the Christian character. The Christian receives blessings because of obedience to said laws. There is no joy unless one obeys God, and continues to live to please Him.

A Blessing Is Invoked on the Reader!

While this verse no doubt shows us that the words of this prophecy were read to different congregations by a public reader, a blessing is given to the reader.

“Blessed [that is fortunate] *is* he that readeth” also indicates that truth was imparted through reading the Scriptures in public assemblies. This public reading would partly be necessary because of the limited copies of the Sacred Writings.

“Blessed *is* he that readeth” may also indicate that few early Christians could read well. The best reader would be selected to read, and he would be considered fortunate to have this privilege.

Blessed Are They That Hear

A blessing is also received by the hearers, those who heard the Word read. The reading of the Scriptures is also seen from Colossians 4:16. We conclude that upon receiving the inspired epistles, they were read aloud to the assembled congregations of Christians in Asia Minor to give them comfort and strength in their persecutions (Rev. 1:9).

“He that readeth” refers to a reader in the public assemblies. He, the reader, is singular, while “they that hear” is plural. It might be that there was only one book provided (Rev. 1:11) which was to be read publicly in each congregation. We see a blessing is pronounced on one who reads this book and the ones who hear the book read.

One must Keep the Words of the Prophecy to Be Blessed

A blessing is invoked on the reader, the hearers, and on those who keep, or do, whatever is enjoined upon them. No one can expect a blessing unless what they have read, or have heard read, is acted upon. Hearing embraces more than mere listening to what is being said; it involves hearing with a view to doing. Not only was this revelation to be read and heard, it was to be kept.

Jesus said, “If ye know these things, happy [blessed—*makarios*] are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17).

James says:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and

continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jam. 1:22-25).

The hearing embraces more than merely listening to what is being said. We must hear with the view of doing (John 14:15; 15:14; Mat. 7:21-27; Luke 6:46—just to name a few passages to substantiate this Bible fact). The blessings lie in accepting and doing that which one hears. No one can expect a blessing unless what they have read and what they have been taught are acted upon in proper obedience.

Blessed Are Those Who Keep the Things That Are Written Therein

This confirms the above conclusion that hearing involves keeping, abiding in, and doing that which is revealed.

The Words of the Prophecy

Prophecy is synonymous with *revelation* in verse one. The words of the prophecy identify that the message is inspired. It is a revelation from God to man. We are to keep this revelation. We should also keep in mind all the blessings of which we read in this revelation—especially the description of the holy city, heaven. Reading this prophecy should cause the reader and the hearer to do everything possible to obtain these blessings.

For the Time Is at Hand

The things which John writes about are about to begin to unfold. For the time is at hand provides strong motivation for obedience in keeping the things heard, and read. The hearers and readers should not forget the future as a matter of encouragement and warning. They should be obedient to any mandate, any duty that the book required.

DISCUSSION

Blessings Are Still Invoked on the Readers

“Blessed *is* he that readeth” encourages one to study the Word of God. One can read without studying but cannot study without reading. When we study the Word of God, we are applying the mind to acquire knowledge. Paul read and studied the Word of God as did his son in the faith Timothy (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:13). Paul instructed Timothy: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

The Description for Studying

Paul described the student as a **workman**. It is fine to skim a few chapters of the Bible or to reflect upon a few verses, but this is not studying. Studying involves reading. Paul also told Timothy: “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Tim 4:13). We must dive deep into the Word to obtain truth. Studying is a work: it takes time and effort.

The Benefit of Studying

When we study as we should, Paul says we needeth not be ashamed. However, we should be ashamed not to study, not to read. We must be ready “always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). Our sword must stay sharp, ready for battle against Satan and his evil forces (Eph. 6:17).

The Motive for Studying

We must be able to rightly divide and handle aright the Word of truth. We should study to know God’s Will. Paul revealed that when we read the Scriptures we can have an understanding of his knowledge (Eph. 3:3-5). We will be great students of the Bible if we follow this pattern.

The Object of Studying

Paul simply tells us that the object of our study is the Word of truth. It is when we know the truth that it will make us free (John 8:32). When we spend all of our time reading about politics, sports, and also listening to Oprah Winfrey and other talk shows, we will never find spiritual truth. Why not spend more time listening to what God has to say. “Blessed *is* he that readeth” encourages the study of God’s Word.

Great love for God’s Word will make time for much meditation therein. The precepts of the Bible that the reader meditates on produce the blessings. “But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psa. 1:2). Blessed are the readers who seek the word delightfully, regularly, diligently, consistently, and studiously. Blessed are those who read the Word of God constantly. Christians love to meditate upon the Word both day and night. He reads it by day and thinks upon it by night. What a man meditates upon determines the real inner man (Pro. 4:23; 23:7). When opposition comes from those in high places, we are to still meditate upon God’s Word (Psa. 119:23). David describes several things that he encountered (Psa.

119:48, 78, 148), but showed how that none of them would stop him from meditating in the Word of God.

There are tremendous blessings upon the reader who meditates upon the Word of God. Paul tells Timothy:

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.... Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:13-16).

“Blessed Are the Readers” Includes the Reading of the Old Testament

The Old Testament, though having been done away, still is profitable, according to Romans 15:4: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

Whatsoever things were written aforetime, there is profit thereto. But what is the profit? The Old Testament Scriptures were written for our learning. They give instruction and from that instruction we learn patience or endurance, and thus will be able to forbear under adverse circumstances. Through the instruction given in the Old Testament we receive comfort. It is comforting to read such passages as Psalms 27:1, 37:25, 103:1, 18:19, 46:1, 126:3, 124:3, 121:1-2.

Through the patience and comfort of the Old Testament Scriptures we have hope. When we read passages such as the twenty-third Psalm and especially verse four: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me,” we receive hope. Thus, in reading the Old Testament I have hope, I have patience, and I have instructions.

These are three of the many benefits of which we are the recipients when we read the Old Testament. From reading the Old Testament we can learn to have a good character and qualities. When we read about the courage Daniel exhibited, it makes us want to be more courageous. We learn from Moses how to be meek, and it gives us the desire to be meek. When we read of Joseph running away from Potiphar’s wife it makes us want to be more pure. Reading of Abraham’s faith causes us to want to increase our faith. When we read the Old Testament, we get a knowledge of the nature of Almighty God. We can read and study His many attributes.

By reading the Old Testament, we come to see the many types and shadows that are found therein. We also read about all the prophecies concerning Christ and His church. Truly there is an abundance of blessings in reading the Old Testament (Isa. 34:16; Neh. 8:1-8).

Blessed Are the Hearers

Blessings are not only invoked on the reader but on the hearers and on those who keep and do whatever is enjoined upon them. No one can expect a blessing unless what they have read and have heard read is acted upon.

There is a condition to our being blessed of God which is our keeping His Word. Knowing that we will be blessed if we hear will encourage us to attend worship, Bible classes, Gospel meetings, lectureships, and other activities which will allow us to hear God's saving message.

"*Blessed are the hearers*" implies and encourages obedience to God's Word. Hearing involves more than just listening; it embraces the fact of hearing with the view of doing. James informs us that we must be "swift to hear" in the midst of instructing us to be doers of the word and work (Jam. 1:19-25). Faith comes by hearing God speak (Rom. 10:17) which He does through His Word the Bible.

Hearing involves doing: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only" (Jam. 1:22). We must exhibit ourselves as a doer of the Word of God. To be blessed by hearing means to keep on demonstrating yourselves as a doer of God's Word. James calls our attention to the fact that it is not enough to hear; one must also be obedient to it. We have to be doers of the Word and not hearers only to be blessed by God. We are blessed when the Word that we hear is demonstrated by a "Christ living in me" life.

"But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (Jam. 1:25). To be a blessed hearer, we must continue in the law of God; we must do the Word of God. James says blessedness belongs only to those who are obedient to the Lord's Will. The truly blessed people are those who have found freedom through obedience to God's Word. "If ye know these things, happy [blessed, Greek *makarios*] are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17).

As Jesus ends the marvelous sermon on the mount, He makes a contrast between simply **saying** and those who are **hearing and doing**

(Mat. 7:21-27). The man who simply says, “Lord, Lord, shall not enter into the kingdom,” but “he that doeth the will of my Father” is the one who will enter the kingdom. Then He tells us about the wise man being the one who hears His sayings and does them. “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.” Without question, the commandments of God must be kept to be blessed by God.

John, the apostle of love, stresses our obedience numerous times in His account of the life of Christ (John 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:10, 14). As he writes his epistles, we again read about obedience time and time again (1 John 2:3-5, 29; 3:24; 5:3; 2 John 4, 6; 3 John 3-4).

In the sermon on the plain, Jesus said, “And why call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like” (Luke 6:46-47). Truly, **blessed** are the hearers, who not only read and hear, but also **do**.

CONCLUSION

The readers and hearers of God’s Word will produce every spiritual and moral change necessary to a “b” attitude type of life. The more we read, the more we learn. The best way to get more out of reading the Bible is to read it more.

The more we read, the more God is going to be able to teach us. The more we read the Bible, the greater will be our appreciation of God’s message. The more we read, the more we will be profited. God declares His intention to teach His Word and does so by means of and through-out the Bible. God, through the prophet Isaiah, says, “*I am* the LORD thy God which **teacheth** thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way *that* thou shouldest go” (Isa. 48:17). Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you, and **learn** of me” (Mat. 11:29). In John 6:45, Jesus says, “Every man therefore that hath **heard**, and hath **learned** of the Father, cometh unto me.” One cannot be a disciple of Christ without becoming one of His pupils. Disciples of Christ are students of Christ: learning of Him. To get more out of reading the Bible, we are going to have to start **reading** it more, **hearing** it more, and being **obedient** to it. “Blessed Are The Readers and Hearers!”

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

BLESSED ARE THOSE DYING IN THE LORD REVELATION 14:13

Guss Eoff



Guss Eoff, Jr., was born March 7, 1923, in Fort Worth, Texas. In February of 1942, he married Lila Laine Norris. They have one son, Larry, also a gospel preacher. Guss began preaching in 1942.

Guss attended Pepperdine College in Los Angeles and Southwest State Teachers College in San Marcos, Texas. He has preached for local congregations in California, Oregon, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Missouri. He also has preached in over twenty-five countries and twenty-six states. He served as a missionary in Hong Kong for two years. In 1974, he went on a preaching Safari in Tanzania, East Africa, that covered 20,000 miles before he returned home. In 1995, he held his tenth campaign in Malaysia and Singapore and conducted a Soul Winning Work Shop.

He conducted the first television program for churches of Christ in Northern California and has conducted weekly programs in California and Texas. He also conducted daily radio programs as well as weekly programs in California, Oregon, Texas, and Louisiana. In 1997, Guss and his wife, Laine, moved to Llano, Texas.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, in early afternoon, I turned on the television, sat in my big chair, and heard a statement that caught my attention. “We all know that we are going to die.” The host of that program is a popular lady that is seen several times each week on television. Two things surprised me. First, she was so positive with her statement, and second, that she was so sure that everyone agreed with her. I do not disagree with her statement, but I was amazed with her assured acceptance. As it usually happens, I was called to do something and did not hear her statement discussed any further.

“We all know that we are going to die.” The statement was not disputed, so far as I heard. The statement is true, with one exception. We are all going to die, unless Jesus comes first. In that case, the living will not die, but they will be changed.

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for

the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:51-54).

Paul the apostle helps us to understand more fully in the following statement to the Christians in Thessalonica.

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 The. 4:13-18).

WE ALL KNOW

As the television host said, “We all know that we are going to die.” I did not hear one dissenting voice in that audience. How could she be so positive? “We all know.” The statement was all-inclusive, and it was so final. If we all know, how did we come to know it? Could it be that we have learned this fact by experience? Every family has been touched by death. It happens to our families, to our friends, to world rulers, to great athletes, to the most talented, the most popular. Death is a reality. “We all know we are going to die.” We have also found this conclusion from the oldest Book in the world. The Hebrews’ writer said, “And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this *cometh* judgment” (Heb. 9:27). This truth is as old as Genesis 3:19: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

WE ALL KNOW THAT WE ARE GOING TO DIE

This is an appointment that we are all going to keep. When are we going to die? We do not know! Die, yes we will! It is certainly going to happen. Death is a journey into the unknown; we have never made the trip before! We have to make it without the company of our wife or

children. The fear of the unknown makes this a dreaded move. What can we expect in this launching into death? Will death be a leap into nothingness, oblivion, or unconsciousness? Thank God! We have not been left in ignorance. Job asked, “If a man die, shall he live *again*?” (Job 14:14a). Later he made the statement, “And after my skin, *even* this *body*, is destroyed, Then without my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:26). The question asked by Job so many hundred years ago is still a timely question: “If a man die, shall he live *again*?” The only answer to this question comes from the Bible, the Word of God. David said, “Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of my life; And I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever” (Psa. 23:6). Solomon wrote, “And the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7). The great apostle Paul said, “For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1).

Our Lord Jesus Christ answers Job’s question.

Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

Again Jesus said, “Yet a little while, and the world beholdeth me no more; but ye behold me: because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19). Notice the Lord’s statement to Martha, “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

Not only can we be sure that we are going to die, but we can be just as sure that we are going to live after death. The text for this study is found in Revelation 14:13: “And I heard the voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them.”

BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD

If we know that we are going to die, surely we want to be blessed in that death. But how are we to be blessed? Who are those who will be blessed? What does it mean to be blessed? *Blessed* is translated from the Greek *makarios* in Revelation 14:13. This is the same word found in the beatitudes in Matthew 5 and Luke 6.

This same word has been mis-translated *happy* in several versions. “Happy” lacks the full thrust of the bliss, the extreme joy, the perfect delight, the exalted gladness, and the heavenly felicity of this beneficial decision.

There is blessedness for some who die. If we know that we are going to die, we should desire to be among those who will be blessed. Who are those that are blessed when they are dead?

THOSE WHO DIE IN THE LORD ARE THOSE WHO WILL BE BLESSED

What does it mean to be in the Lord? Here the Lord has reference to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. “Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). The apostle Peter said, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified” (Acts 2:36). An angel of the Lord told the shepherds, “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

How does one get into the Lord? One must believe on the Lord. “And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). John explains how belief or faith comes:

Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

To be in the Lord, one must change his life by repentance. “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish” (Luke 13:3). Again we read, “The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent” (Acts 17:30). Our Lord said, “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

We must confess that Jesus is the Christ. The apostle Paul said, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10). We see an example of this confession by the Ethiopian: “*And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*” (Acts 8:37).

Then one is baptized into Christ.

Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).

Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Mat. 28:19-20).

For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

A person who is in Christ is one that is born again.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God! (John 3:3-5).

Those who are born again are those living a righteous life.

For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works (Tit. 2:11-14).

Those who live righteous are servants of God.

Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves *as* servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18).

If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of him (1 John 2:29).

My little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous (1 John 3:7).

WE SHOULD DESIRE TO DIE FAITHFUL IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Balaam spoke the words that God put in his mouth to Balak king of Moab. He said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, And let my last end be like his!" (Num. 23:10). Notice that the Psalmist said, "Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints" (Psa. 116:15). The wise man proclaimed, "The wicked is thrust down in his evil-doing; But the righteous hath a refuge in his death" (Pro. 14:32).

Christians no longer live like the sinful man of the world. "But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12). What are the unrighteous things the Christian must avoid?

Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

To avoid sin, a person must follow God's Word.

Every scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The apostle Paul counted everything of the flesh a loss if he could gain Christ. Things of the flesh were as worthless as refuse if Paul could gain the reward of the righteous.

Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, *even* that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (Phi. 3:7-9).

The faithful Paul was only concerned with being found in Christ. He realized the reward was worth the price. His desire was to live the righteous life that he might gain the promise of eternal life with God.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things (Phi. 4:8).

Likewise the apostle Peter was striving for righteousness. “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and *the* Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1). John wrote in 1 John 3:7: “*My* little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.”

OUR DESIRE SHOULD BE TO DIE IN THE LORD

The Christian should have one goal in life, which is to die faithful in the Lord. From the time one turns his life over to the Saviour, his constant aim should be to cross the goal steadfast in Christ.

Yea what assurance comes from reading the following words of Paul. “For God appointed us not into wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him” (1 The. 5:9-10). Paul tells us, if we live or sleep, we should live together with Christ. Here sleep has reference to death. In death, the righteous will be together with the Lord. This is the state that Paul desired to obtain.

For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing (2 Tim 4:6-8).

We read of the apostle Paul’s confidence in his continuing to serve Christ in his life—or even if he must die. He was sure that in death his blessing of being with the Lord was much better than living in this life with Him.

According to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing shall I be put to shame, but *that* with all boldness, as always, *so* now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if to live in the flesh,—*if* this shall bring fruit from my work, then what I shall choose I know

not. But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better (Phi. 1:20-23).

When the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, he admonished him to continue faithful in living the Christian life that he might receive the reward of eternal life. “Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal, whereunto thou wast called, and didst confess the good confession in the sight of many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:12). This same charge is what Paul said he did when he wrote to the Christians at Philippi.

Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing *I do*, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phi. 3:12-14).

Because of this hope, the blessing of being with the Lord in death, Christians continue to serve God.

Because of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel (Col. 1:5).

If so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and stedfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven; whereof I Paul was made a minister (Col. 1:23).

The apostle Peter informs us that God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness in His Word. “Seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3). God has also given precious and exceeding great promises.

Whereby he hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in that world by lust (2 Pet. 1:4).

Christians are to follow God’s teachings to obtain a divine nature. They are to become Godlike and no longer live after the corruption of the world. God’s people are to add the seven Christian characteristics to their lives.

Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in *your* virtue knowledge; and in *your* knowl-

edge self-control; and in *your* self-control patience; and in *your* patience godliness; and in *your* godliness brotherly kindness; and in *your* brotherly kindness love (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

If the child of God adds these traits to his life, he will be fruitful in God's service. "For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:8). Then Peter concludes his exhorting with 2 Peter 1:10-12.

Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble: for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Wherefore I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and are established in the truth which is with *you*.

BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD

God help us to love Him enough to serve Him faithfully as long as we live. The Devil may tempt us in so many ways, yea, even to the giving of our lives, but we must remain faithful to be blessed when we die. Note the challenging words of Jesus to the church at Smyrna.

Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

Jesus said be thou faithful unto death and Jesus will give us an eternal home with God in heaven. Even if Christians have to die for the cause of Christ, they are to be faithful. Yea, the prize is worth the price. The crown of life is the reward. What a promise! "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13a).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

BLESSED IS HE WHO WATCHES AND KEEPS HIS GARMENTS

REVELATION 16:15

Lynn Parker



Lynn Parker is a native of San Marcos, Texas. He and his wife, Mary Ann, have five children: Caroline, Hannah, Garland, Rebekah, and Elijah. Lynn has been preaching the gospel since the age of 14, and is currently one of the evangelists for the Spring Church of Christ at Spring, Texas. He is the Assistant Director of the Spring Bible Institute and a staff writer for *Contending For The Faith*. Lynn has also done local mission work in Virginia.

INTRODUCTION

“(Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame)” (Rev. 16:15). Jesus has here pronounced a blessing on those who (1) watch, and (2) keep their garments. By looking at the background to the Revelation letter, studying the pertinent words and phrases as they appear in the Scriptures, giving careful examination to the requirements of this passage, and finally applying those requirements to your life, you can be among those blessed by the Lord.

Every sincere follower gives serious consideration to his current state as seen by God and measured by God’s Word. “What must I do to please God?” “How must I conduct my life?” “Who will be saved?” We view heaven through the pages of the Bible. We walk toward it by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). We know that walking by faith involves more than mere mental assent to the deity of Christ—the Bible so teaches. Our text under consideration is Revelation 16:15. It contains commands to follow, a well-known fact concerning Christ’s coming, a promise to the obedient, and consequences for the negligent. It holds up the life of faithfulness and contrasts it with a life of regret.

BACKGROUND

A message of triumph! The Lamb will conquer His foes. The battle is not finished; yet we know of a **certainty** the victors. “These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they *also shall overcome* that are with him, called and chosen and faithful” (Rev. 17:14). The epistle known as *Revelation* is filled with symbols and language with which we, in our contemporary society, are generally unfamiliar. It would be unwise to be absolutely dogmatic on every single symbol in this book. Still, the Bible student looks at the entire book with the aim of understanding the general theme, and interpreting any symbolism in light of historical facts and biblical truths. “If one becomes enamored with every symbol, then one will fail to see the great message that the revelation of Christ has to offer us, that being, the ultimate triumph of the people of God” (Laws 3).

As one reads through the Revelation, sounds of battle are heard. The scenes of war are unmistakable. The church is under attack. The battle is raging between the army of light and the emissaries of darkness. God’s people are persecuted. The enemies of righteousness will eventually fall. So in the record of the greatest conflict is a beatitude—a promise to the faithful that lets them know that indeed, “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward” (Rom. 8:18). Foy E. Wallace stated:

Among the portents of persecution and catastrophe of the apocalypse, there are to be found declarations of consummate bliss and blessedness in a series of beatitudes. This cluster of precious and promising assurances to besieged, encompassed and beleaguered Christians shine through the text of Revelation with the brightest luster, like diamonds that flash and send forth a thousand rays as the sun falls upon them (333).

The language in our text (Rev. 16:15) is familiar to one who is conversant with the Bible, and especially to the one who is reading through Revelation. Compare the following passage with Revelation 16:15 and notice the similar words, phrases, and pictures as the Lord addresses the church at Sardis.

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead. Be thou **watchful**, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine perfected before my God.

Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep *it*, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not **watch, I will come as a thief**, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. But thou hast **a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments**: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy. He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels (Rev. 3:1-5).

Now consider Revelation 16:15 in more detail.

“BLESSED IS HE THAT WATCHETH AND KEEPETH”

While we do not want to become bogged down in needless grammatical points that serve no practical purpose, it is pertinent to make a few observations concerning the words used in our text. Both *watcheth* and *keepeth* are present active participles. The importance of this to Bible students is seen in the fact that “the present participle expresses continuous or repeated action” (Zodhiates 867). Practically then: “The present tense, ‘watches’ and ‘keeps,’ indicates a constant conflict necessitating a daily watchfulness; one must be continuously on guard” (Hailey 335). Here then is a picture of one who continues to watch and continues to keep his garments.

“Watcheth”

Watch demands from us some type of action. “Watcheth” comes from the Greek, *gregoreo*, key number 1127.¹ It appears more than 20 times in the New Testament. Thayer defined the word and gave some examples of its use when he wrote:

Metaphorically, to watch, i.e. give strict attention to, be cautious, active:—to take heed lest through remissness and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one, Matt 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:35, (37); Rev 16:15; or lest one be led to forsake Christ, Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38; or lest one fall into sin, 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Peter 5:8; Rev 3:2f.

The same word is used by Peter when he commands, “Be sober, be watchful [vigilant—KJV]: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). A soldier asleep at his watch endangers his life as well as the lives of others. So serious was the offense of sleeping on duty that harsh punishment was doled out to violators. Vincent quoted from Edersheim:

During the night the captain of the Temple made his rounds. On his approach the guards had to rise and salute him in a particular manner. Any guard found asleep when on duty was beaten, or his garments

were set on fire. The confession of one of the Rabbis is on record that, on a certain occasion, his own maternal uncle had actually undergone the punishment of having his clothes set on fire by the captain of the Temple.

A lethargic, unobservant child of God is not prepared to do battle. He is asleep on duty. He will succumb to the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:10). In commenting on 1 Peter 5:8, Barnes wrote:

It means that we should exercise careful circumspection, as one does when he is in danger. In reference to the matter here referred to, it means that we are to be on our guard against the wiles and the power of the evil one.

Consider other passages in which this same word is used. On the evening in which He was betrayed, our Lord told three sleepy disciples, “**Watch** and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mat. 26:41). In Matthew 24:42, Jesus answers the second of two questions, this latter one concerning His second coming, with a sober warning: “**Watch** therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh.” Three times in these four verses *watch* appears:

For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch (Mark 13:34-37—KJV).

Paul told the carnal Corinthians, “**Watch** ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). To the Colossians he wrote, “Continue stedfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2). The brethren in Thessalonica were reminded that they were children of light and of day and, as such, were to be watching.

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that aught be written unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief: for ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us **watch** and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night: and they that are drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, since we are

of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation (1 The. 5:1-8).

Notice that Paul here joins together sobriety and watchfulness (v. 6), as did Peter in his first epistle (1 Pet. 5:8).

We must be watchful for the Lord will return as a “thief in the night” (1 The. 5:2; Mat. 24:42ff; 2 Pet. 3:10). Recorded in Revelation 3 is this message to the church at Sardis:

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead. Be thou **watchful**, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine perfected before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep *it*, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, **I will come as a thief**, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee (Rev. 3:1-3).

We see the graphic imagery of Jesus’ coming as a thief in our lesson’s text of Revelation 16:15. And in Luke 12:37ff, the Lord makes the clear connection between watchfulness on our part and His unpredictable return.

And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not (Luke 12:39-40—KJV).

“Keepeth”

The inspired penman John writes, “Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame” (Rev. 16:15). The word translated “keepeth” in our English translation of the Bible comes from the Greek, *tereo* (Key number 5083), meaning to “attend to carefully; to take care of” and specifically in Revelation 16:15, “not to throw away” (Thayer). Vine tells us that it includes “to watch over; to preserve.”

The same word is used in John 14:15 where Jesus commanded, “If ye love me, ye will **keep** my commandments.” Shortly thereafter Jesus declared:

He that hath my commandments, and **keepeth** them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him. Judas (not Iscariot) saith unto him, Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will **keep** my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me

not **keepeth** not my words: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me (John 14:21-24).

The same Greek root is translated "be preserved" in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body **be preserved** entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Again, it is used by Peter to tell Christians of a heavenly home that is "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, **reserved** in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4).

"Keepeth His Garments"

Seen here is the implied reward to one who keeps his garments and, conversely, the shame to the one whose garments are soiled. A few in Sardis had not "defiled their garments" and Jesus states that "they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy" (Rev. 3:4). The metaphor of garments to represent one's spiritual condition is used elsewhere in Scripture.

I will greatly rejoice in Jehovah, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the **garments of salvation**, he hath covered me with the **robe of righteousness**, as a bridegroom decketh himself with a garland, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels (Isa. 61:10).

Now Joshua was clothed with **filthy garments**, and was standing before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take the filthy garments from off him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have **caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with rich apparel**. And I said, Let them set a clean mitre upon his head. So they set a clean mitre upon his head, and **clothed him with garments**; and the angel of Jehovah was standing by (Zec. 3:3-5).

And some save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear; hating even the **garment spotted by the flesh** (Jude 23).

And I say unto him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they that come of the great tribulation, and **they washed their robes**, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14).

Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And it was given unto her that she should array herself in **fine linen**, bright *and* pure: for the **fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints** (Rev. 19:7-8).

So then, one who is keeping his garments is one whose life is free from sin. He does not make sin the habitual practice of his life. He is unspotted from the world (Jas. 1:27). He lives a holy life.

PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

Every victorious soldier in this great spiritual conflict will have these traits in common: he was both watchful and he kept his garments. Now, practically speaking, what is a watchful person? Who is the one that keeps his garments? What will a watchful, garment-keeping Christian do differently from members of the church who are neither watchful nor concerned about keeping their garments? We will call these faithful watchers and keepers.

1. **The watchers and keepers remain constantly prepared for the second coming of Christ.** Others will never find the time, interest, or energy for spiritual matters. On the attendance roll of congregations in the brotherhood you will find folks who are faithful, and they are all that *faithful* implies. They love the Lord with all their hearts. With the apostle Paul they say:

According to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing shall I be put to shame, but *that* with all boldness, as always, *so* now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if to live in the flesh,—*if* this shall bring fruit from my work, then what I shall choose I know not. But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better (Phi. 1:20-23).

They also say:

Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens. For verily in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but that we would be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life. Now he that wrought us for this very thing is God, who gave unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Being therefore always of good courage, and knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by sight); we are of good

courage, I say, and are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord. Wherefore also we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto him (2 Cor. 4:16-5:9).

These faithful are not attached to this world but realize all things here perish with using (1 John 2:15-17). The attraction of material things means nothing to these fine souls because they “looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). The siren call of power, the applause of human hands, and the glitter of riches has no appeal for the watchers and keepers—each moment may be their last. Their aspirations are nobler than those of the world; their single goal (heaven) infinitely loftier than ever devised in the mind of man.

2. **The watchers and keepers are stalwarts for truth.** These brethren are not afraid of where the chips might fall. They are not enamored with seeking popularity in or out of the church. They realize that the Christian life is a fight (1 Tim. 6:12). Jesus stated, “Woe *unto you*, when all men shall speak well of you! for in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). Paul wrote, “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? or am I striving to please men? if I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). They contend for the faith even if other well-known brethren are as silent as oysters (Jude 3). They do not support truth *from afar* but are involved in the battle. God help us to raise our children to love truth and be counted in this fight!

3. **The watchers and keepers know “The Book.”** How can anyone be prepared for eternity when he is ignorant of the Bible? Generally, learning curves seem to fall off sharply after one has been in the church just a few years. Real growth in knowledge and Christian maturity mark too few in the kingdom. “Give diligence [study—KJV] to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Certainly this includes the need to study and learn the Bible. People watching for the Lord’s return and diligently keeping their garments spotless are all zealous Bible students—every single one of them. Those who are not Bible students will be lost.

4. **The watchers and keepers are faithful in attendance at worship assemblies.** It is amazing how some in the Lord’s church miss assemblies for the silliest of reasons while others are faithful to attend

through the most challenging circumstances. Do you suppose this is a reflection of the heart? Watchers and keepers do not forsake the assembly to watch television, baby-sit company, attend civic events, or watch the kids play baseball. The faithful do not allow children to forsake to attend band camp, senior trips, or a long-awaited cruise. These good people would not think of forsaking assemblies when on vacation. They take to heart Matthew 6:33.

5. **The watchers and keepers are prayerful.** “Pray without ceasing” (1 The. 5:17). Those prepared to meet God are prayerful people day by day. They realize their keen dependence on God, and that He is the source of blessings (Jam. 1:17).

6. **The watchers and keepers are evangelistic.** While we walk through this proving ground, there is vital work to do. We know that every saved person will have been one who loved the souls of others and made efforts to teach them the truth. Like the watchman of old, our task is to warn the wicked to turn from his evil ways. To remain silent or indifferent is to meet God with the sinner’s blood on our hands (Eze. 3:18ff). This is not the work of only the preacher and the elders—it is inseparable from the Christian life.

7. **The watchers and keepers are consistent in application of God’s Word.** They do not change their convictions to justify erring family members. They are no respecters of persons when it comes to truth and godliness (Acts 10:34; Jam. 2:4).

8. **The watchers and keepers rear their children to fear God and keep His commandments.** How sad to see how little professed Christians care for their children’s spiritual well-being! Generations grow into adulthood without a thorough knowledge of the Bible. Children see parents who make only a pretense of faithful service to God. Is it any wonder that we lose many young people to denominationalism and lives of materialism? When discipline in the home is neglected, then expect the end product to show contempt for God’s authority. “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; *But* the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Pro. 22:15). “The rod and reproof give wisdom; *But* a child left to himself causeth shame to his mother” (Pro. 29:15). The permissiveness of Eli is a scourge upon our nation and the church (1 Sam. 3:13).

9. **The watchers and keepers do not give up in times of persecution.** The faithful walk with God during days of happiness as well as nights of adversity. They realize that “through many tribulations we

must enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). The trials of life cause their faith to grow and the promises of a heavenly reward seem all the more precious. Like saints of old, they will give up their physical lives to hear the Lord welcome them into a heavenly home.

10. **The watchers and keepers are humble enough to receive correction.** Do you know how to find the spiritually mature people in a congregation? Find the ones who (1) examine themselves, and (2) are willing to receive correction without pitching a temper tantrum. James gave a pertinent imperative when he wrote:

Ye know *this*, my beloved brethren. But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls (Jam. 1:19-21).

These people under consideration are willing to listen to truth that saves, even if it rebukes their actions. This is a measure of how much they want to go to heaven.

11. **The watchers and keepers seek to restore the erring.** No person is ready to meet God that has neglected his duty toward an erring brother or sister. The command of James 5:19-20 combines with the urgency of Hebrews 9:27 to move us to do all that the Bible commands to restore the prodigal before it is too late—for the prodigal and us!

CONCLUSION

Right now—this very moment—you stand before God as one who vigilantly watches for that Great Day coming or one who lethargically plods through life with no thought for preparation. Your garments are white as snow or soiled by unforgiven sin. There is no middle ground. Fanny J. Crosby’s words beg us to carefully consider our state before God.

When Jesus comes to reward his servants
Whether it be noon or night,
Faithful to Him will he find us watching,
With our lamps all trimmed and bright.

O can we say we are ready, brother?
Ready for the soul’s bright home?
Say, will he find you and me still watching,
Waiting, waiting when the Lord shall come?

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version (1901) unless otherwise indicated.

Barnes Notes. Biblesoft. Electronic Database, 1997.

Hailey, Homer. *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979.

Laws, Jim. Foreword. *The Book of Revelation*. Ed. Jim Laws. Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1998.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon. Biblesoft. Electronic Database, 2000.

Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament. Biblesoft. Electronic Database, 2000.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. Biblesoft. Electronic Database, 2000.

Wallace, Foy E., Jr. *The Book of Revelation*. Fort Smith, AR: Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Publications, Inc., 1997.

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984.

ENDNOTE

¹Key numbers are a system of numbers assigned to Bible words and applied uniformly through reference works such as *Strong's New Exhaustive Concordance*, thus enabling those with no knowledge of the Hebrew or Greek languages to be able to determine the original words used in any passage and subsequently be able to research the word meanings and usages.

BLESSED ARE THOSE CALLED TO THE MARRIAGE FEAST REVELATION 19:9

Bobby Liddell



Bobby Liddell, a native of Birmingham, Alabama, is married to the former Joan Loe, and they have three children and one grandchild. Bobby received his education at Walker College; University of Alabama, Birmingham; Memphis School of Preaching (awarded Outstanding Student, 1979; Alumnus of the Year, 1997); and Southern Christian University (B. A., Summa Cum Laude, 1985; M. A., 1986). He has preached for twenty-four years, serving locally in Alabama, Florida, and Tennessee. Bobby also has spoken in lectures and meetings, and on radio and TV in the states, as well as in missionary trips to Singapore, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Latvia. He worked for fifteen years with Indian

Creek Youth Camp, and served on the Board of Directors for several years.

Brother Liddell has written extensively, having been Editor of *Defender*, Assistant Editor of *The Christian Sentinel* (with a monthly circulation of 15,000), as well as serving on the staff of other papers. From 1989 to 1994, he directed the Bellview Lectures, Pensacola, Florida, and edited the Annual Bellview Lectureship Books for six years. He has written chapters for numerous lectureship books, and has written several quarterlies for Bible class use (unpublished).

Since August, 1994, Bobby has served as Dean of Admissions and Instructor with the Memphis School of Preaching. He works with the Cordova congregation, Cordova, TN, as Educational Director. In addition, he preaches in several meetings and lectures each year across the nation.

As we, in this chapter, consider those who are blessed by having been called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb, we also reflect upon the blessings of association with the Bellview Church of Christ. First, there is the blessing of pleasant fellowship and productive co-labor with all the faithful saints who are the Bellview congregation. Second, is the blessing of having served under the godly oversight of the Bellview bishops, whose wisdom, instruction, and encouragement have been so helpful and so appreciated. Third, is the blessing of the opportunity of working with a congregation seeking faithfully to please God by fulfilling the work of the church in saving souls. This writer's life has been greatly enriched and my hope has been fortified by having been blessed to be associated with the Bellview congregation.

INTRODUCTION

Blessed are those called to the marriage feast; that is, the marriage supper of the Lamb. Immediately, our minds implore who are those so called and blessed, what is the marriage feast, what is the time of its occurring, and who is the Lamb? Let us begin by noting these verses, key to our study.

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God (Rev. 19:7-9).

From these verses, we consider these pertinent points: (1) Rejoicing for the marriage supper of the Lamb is come (v. 7), (2) Readiness for the marriage supper (vv. 7-8), and (3) Rewards for those called to the marriage supper of the Lamb (v. 9).

This passage begins with the record of a great voice of much people saying Alleluia (from *hallelujah* which means “praise ye Jehovah”). In the New Testament, only here does *alleluia* occur (vv. 1, 3, 4, 6). Why is the Lord to be praised? Revelation 19 presents the Lord in His magnificent power and marvelous might, having vanquished the deadly foes of His people. Salvation, glory, honor, and power are His: “For true and righteous *are* his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand” (v. 2). Thus, again, praise rings out: *Alleluia* (v. 3), and the four and twenty elders and the four beasts, worshipping God, say, “Amen; Alleluia” (v. 4).

From the throne comes a voice which commands all God’s servants, small and great, and those who fear Him to praise God (v. 5). Once more, the cry of *Alleluia*, this time sounding forth as the “voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia,” resounds through Heaven, “for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (v. 6). Christ has gained victory over the violent persecutors of the church: namely the beast, the dragon, and the false prophet. The Lord has exposed all pretenders to the throne and usurpers of authority for what they truly are and has decisively defeated them. Those who claimed to reign now lie in the dust and the Lord God is victor. Jesus reigns as “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD

OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:16). Hence, the time has come that all is ready for the marriage feast.

REJOICE FOR THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB IS COME

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7). Why rejoice? God has blessed mankind with the offer and opportunity of salvation through the precious shed blood of Jesus Christ, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Acts 20:28; Rev. 1:5; John 19:34; Rom. 6:3; Mat. 26:28; Acts 2:38). There are many other passages which refer to Christ as the Lamb (Isa. 53:7; John 1:36; Acts 8:32; Rev. 5-7; 12:11; 13:8; 14:4; et al.). **In** Christ Jesus, there is “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7). With forgiveness, there is peace (Phi. 4:7, 9; Eph. 2:14-17), hope (Tit. 1:2; Eph. 2:12-13; 1 Tim. 1:1), love (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16; 4:7-21; Rom. 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 1:22; John 13:34-35; Heb. 13:1), and fellowship (1 John 1:6-10; Gal. 3:26; 2 Cor. 6:18).

There is real reason for rejoicing because of what God has done for man (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 5:8), what God wants for man (Luke 19:10), and what God has offered to man (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; Mat. 11:28-30). In addition, God wants man to rejoice. The Creator of all things did not create man to be sad, dejected, hopeless, or forlorn! Why some have chosen to live lives devoid of rejoicing is puzzling for such lives are so different from what our Heavenly Father intended and intends.

Paul wrote by inspiration, “Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again I say, Rejoice” (Phi. 4:4). This is the theme of the epistle to the Philipians which Paul wrote while imprisoned in Rome. Eighteen times in this brief letter, the words joy or rejoice appear. Notice how Paul concentrated on rejoicing, and encouraged others to rejoice in the Lord, instead of his lamenting his current difficulties. Earlier, having been beaten and cast into prison, he, with Silas, “prayed, and sang praises unto God” (Acts 16:25). For the Christian, there is always reason to rejoice, even in the midst of trial and heartache, or when pain and suffering fill the day. So, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him” (Rev. 19:7).

How can we understand the rejoicing at the marriage supper of the Lamb? First, we must understand to whom the Lamb is married. Let us

begin by looking at this idea as expressed in the relationship of God and Israel under the Old Testament law. God said He was married to Israel (Jer. 3:14; 31:32). Later, she was guilty of spiritual adultery, going after others instead of keeping herself true to her husband—God (Jer. 3:6). God gave her (Israel, the northern kingdom) a “bill of divorce” (Jer. 3:8). Interestingly, God did not give to Judah (the southern kingdom) a bill of divorce, but was from her estranged (Isa. 50:1). To illustrate further, Hosea was to marry a “wife of whoredoms” as a symbolic expression of God’s relationship with His people (Hos. 1:2; 3:1), to whom He betrothed Himself (Hos. 2:19-20). Again, the sin of spiritual adultery, on the part of the one to whom God was married, prompted this symbolic action.

In a reference to the Jews and the Law of Moses, Paul penned the following:

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to *her* husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of *her* husband. So then if, while *her* husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, *even* to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God (Rom. 7:1-4).

The picture is this: the woman (representing the Jews) was bound to her husband (the Law of Moses) so long as the husband lived (so long as the Law continued in effect). When Paul wrote Romans, the husband was dead, and the Jews were free to marry another. If, during the period of the Law’s validity (cf., Gal. 3:19-25), they had been married to another, they would have committed (spiritual) adultery. The Old Law was no longer in force, for it was *dead* (Mat. 5:17-18; Col. 2:14); thus, they were “dead to the law by the body of Christ.” Therefore, they were free to marry another. To whom were the obedient married? To the resurrected Christ. Note they were not married to Christ prior to His resurrection. This shows beyond doubt that the church, the bride of Christ, was not established during the time of Christ’s personal ministry, nor before!

The bride of Christ is the church of Christ. This, of course, means that Christ—and no other—is the bridegroom which is exactly what

John the Immerser said. John the apostle recorded, at God's instruction and by inspiration (John 16:13), the words of John the immerser:

Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled (John 3:28-29).

John (the Immerser) was not the bridegroom, but was the "friend of the bridegroom." Christ is the bridegroom. He is the husband and the church is His wife (cf., Eph. 5:22-33). Therefore, when we consider the marriage supper of the Lamb, we know from Scripture that the Lamb is Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords (John 1:29; Mat. 16:16; 1 Tim. 6:15). Likewise, from God's holy Word, the one to whom Christ is married is the church.

The bride of Christ is the church of Christ which was established on the first Pentecost following the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Acts 1:9-11; Dan. 7:13-14; Acts 2). Any other religious group founded at any other time is not the bride of Christ, nor are its members invited to the great marriage feast. Peter referred to the day the church began as "the beginning" (Acts 11:15): that is, the beginning of the church age, the Christian age, when the Word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem confirmed by the outpouring of the Spirit (Isa. 2; Mic. 4; Joel 2). Any other religious group founded at any other place is not the bride of Christ, nor are its members invited to the great marriage feast.

Paul wrote about the relationship of Christ and the church in comparison with the relationship of husband and wife:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two

shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-32).

Christ, presented as the husband of the church, is the head of the wife. Colossians 1:18 shows Christ is the “head of the body, the church.” To the Ephesian brethren, Paul penned, “And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). There is but one body (Eph. 4:4); thus, there is but one church, the one Christ promised to build (Mat. 16:18), and the one for which He shed His blood as its purchase price (Acts 20:28). There is but one body, the church (1 Cor. 12:13, 20), and there is but one head, the Christ; therefore, there is but one bride of Christ, and Christ is the one bridegroom. In this one church are **all** the saved (Acts 2:47). The Lord adds all the saved to His church, not to some man-made religious organization. If all the saved are in the one church, then there are no saved outside the one church. If all those added to the church are all those, and only those, who are saved, there is not one added to the Lord’s church who is not saved. If all those saved are in the one church, having been added to the church by the Lord, then one cannot “join the church,” nor does one’s membership in the Lord’s church depend upon the majority vote of other members. If all those saved are added to the one church by the Lord, then all those in other *churches* are not added to them by the Lord, nor are they saved.

To make it plain, though offered lovingly and with great care for all souls, lest anyone should misunderstand and continue in a false hope based upon the false teachings of a false religion (Mat. 15:9, 13), no one who is a member of any church other than the Lord’s church is saved. Why? He is not in the body of which Christ is the Savior (Eph. 5:23). He is not in the body which is the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16), which is the bride of Christ. The truth is one cannot be saved in a denomination, nor can one be saved by a denomination. Since such a person is not a part of the bride of Christ, he is not married to Christ, and has no part in the marriage feast.

For all those married to the Lamb, by being baptized into the one body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:16; Col. 3:15), there is reason for great rejoicing. When the Ethiopian nobleman was baptized, “he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:36-39). When the Philippian jailor (and his household) were baptized, “he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:30-34). To the faithful, penitent immersed, the

saved (Mark 16:15-16; 1 Pet. 3:21), the invitation, engraved in Heaven and with the stamp of divine approval, comes. Such are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Into this feast they can enter with joy and gladness. "Let us be glad and rejoice."

READINESS FOR THE MARRIAGE SUPPER

The bride must be ready for the great feast with the Lamb. "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:9). "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

To be ready to enter in to the marriage supper, she must be the one who wears the name of the bridegroom. When I asked the beautiful, sweet, and godly Joan Loe to marry me, she agreed, and became, at our marriage, Mrs. Bobby Liddell. Suppose she had said, "I want to be married to you, and I want to have the benefits that come from being your wife, but I do not want to wear the name Liddell. It sounds funny. Most people misspell and mispronounce Liddell, and besides, I do not think Joan goes as well with Liddell as it does with, say, Smith. So, I want to be your wife, but I am going to wear another name, the name Smith. I am going to be Mrs. Joan Smith." Be assured, if such had taken place, the result would have been that Joan might have become Mrs. Smith, but she would certainly not be married to me, and would not, today, be Mrs. Liddell. In like manner, why would anyone think he could be married to Christ and wear the name of another?

What *name* (designation) should those married to Christ wear? Should not they wear a name which signifies their relationship with Christ? Should not they have a designation which indicates they are His? Individuals in the church are designated as Christians, which is a name that honors Christ, the husband and head of the wife. Consider the following passages which speak of the name which the bride wears, showing that individuals are called "Christians" and that collectively they are the "church of Christ."

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the

church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian (Acts 26:28).

Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:16).

Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? (Jam. 2:7).

Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you (Rom. 16:16).

These designations were given by God, not man. The false assertion that men gave the followers of Christ the name *Christian* in derision is foolish and contrary to the Scriptures. Isaiah prophesied of a better and everlasting name (Isa. 56:5), a different name (65:15), and a “new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name” (62:2). The Lord selected Saul (Paul) as “a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). The same three groups (Gentiles, kings, and Israel) to which Paul would bear the name were the ones specifically named by Isaiah more than seven centuries earlier (Isa. 62:2). Paul, the chosen vessel, was the one who bore the name to Antioch where the disciples were called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Sadly, many want to be married to the Lamb, but refuse to wear His name. They prefer to wear in religion names and designations which come from men, not from God. Dear reader, is the name you wear from God or from men (cf., Mat. 21:25)? The Christian’s prayerful plea is for all men to forsake all man-made designations, be content to be God’s people, be united in the one faith (Eph. 4:5), and truly be one in Christ (John 17:20-21). Wearing a man-made, man-given name honors some man instead of Christ; acclaims some humanly devised doctrine as equal to, or superior to the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9; Mat. 15:9); lauds some particular creed, order, method, or organizational aspect devised by man; and drives a wedge between religious people. There is no real, lasting advantage to being more than just a Christian, a member of the church of Christ, the bride of Christ, but there is great danger.

Wearing the divinely given name, the name of the bridegroom—Christ, is a blessing and an honor. God revealed through His prophet that He would give this new, different, better, everlasting name—and

He did. It is the designation of the saved whether Jew or Gentile (Acts 9:15). When Jew and Gentile were made one in Christ (Eph. 2:11-22), the name was given (Acts 11:26). This name, Christian, was not given by men, but by God, as evidenced by the very word selected by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 The. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The word chosen to show the way by which the disciples of Christ were *called* Christians was not the word *kaleo*, which would indicate a common call, but was the word *chrematizo*, which means a divine call. Thus, the name Christian is the name which Isaiah said, “the mouth of the LORD shall name” (Isa. 62:2).

What is wrong with the bride’s wearing a name given by man? So doing shows disrespect for the husband, the bridegroom, Christ (Eph. 5:23). Wearing another name is divisive (1 Cor. 1:10-13), is unauthorized (Col. 3:17), and is unscriptural (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16; Jam. 2:7). Does it really make a difference what name we wear in religion? Some say one name is as good as another. We do not believe this in any other area of life. Why pretend this to be true in the area of religion? Suppose a parent went to the local school and, because of being in a great hurry, decided, based on the idea that one is as good as another, that instead of waiting for his child (who was always among the last to leave the building), he would just take home the first child who came out the door. Is one child as good as another? Neither the child’s real parents, nor the police would think so. At the mall, a harried husband decides he has waited on his wife long enough and he grabs the next woman who comes by and takes her home. Is one wife as good as another? The cashier does not have the four twenties necessary to make change for the one hundred dollar bill you gave him, so he gives you four ones instead. Is one bill as good as another? Your neighbor comes over, takes your brand new Buick, and leaves a note saying you can have his old, worn out Yugo. “The keys are in it.” Is one car as good as another?

On your wedding day, you stand with the preacher awaiting the entrance of the bride. Down the aisle comes a woman dressed in a bridal gown, looking very much the part of a bride. Her face is concealed by the bridal veil, she is carrying a bridal bouquet, and she is, indeed, a bride. Only when she comes closer and stands right next to you do you realize she is not **your** bride! Is one bride as good as another? Your first child’s birth draws near, and you are discussing with your spouse, the name you will give to your darling child. To your

shock and surprise, your spouse says, “If it is a boy, I want to name him Judas, and if it is a girl, I want to name her Jezebel.” Is one name for your child as good as another (Mark 14:43-46; 1 Kin. 21:23)?

No, one is not as good as another. One church is not as good as another (Mat. 16:18; 15:13). One name is not as good as another. Why not wear a name that is scriptural, honors Christ, and glorifies God? To whom shall we go to find the name we are to wear, or the designation which shall identify us? To men? To the phone book? Or, to Christ the husband of the bride; that is, to the New Testament, the Word of Christ (John 6:68)? Let us put aside all names of division, be just Christians, members of the church of Christ, the bride of Christ, and look forward to the summons to the marriage supper of the Lamb!

All men must understand, if they would be saved, that denominations do not make up the bride of Christ. Some argue that John 15 teaches there are different denominations who are the different branches in the true vine—Christ. A cursory glance at this passage will show immediately the error of such an idea.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples (John 15:1-8).

Jesus was not talking about different religious groups following different doctrines, wearing different names, and adhering to different practices. He did not say, “If a denomination abide not in me,” but said, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch” (v. 6).

Others try to find in Romans 16:16 the proof for their denomination’s existence. Paul penned: “Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.” The “churches of Christ” are not different religious bodies. The reference is to different congregations in different geographic locations. For example, there were seven churches in Asia to whom the Lord directed John the apostle to write.

Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send *it* unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea (Rev. 1:11).

These seven churches were not different denominations, but were different congregations in different locations. The epistles to the churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, Thessalonica, and Jerusalem and Judah (Hebrews) were written to churches of Christ. Not one was written to a man-made denomination.

Denomination means a part of the whole, a division. God clearly condemns division (1 Cor. 1:10-13), affirming that Christ is not divided, no mere man was crucified for us, nor were we baptized in the name of a mere mortal man. God authorizes no such organization as manifested by denominationalism. In the Bible, there is record of the church universal, comprised of all those in Christ (Gal. 3:26-ff), which is the church Jesus said He would build (Mat. 16:18), and did build (Acts 2). It is “the church” (Eph. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:15). In it are all the saved (Acts 2:47). The church universal is made up of local congregations known as churches of Christ (Rom. 16:16). These local congregations are, in the Bible, often designated by geographic location (1 The. 1:1; Phi. 1:1). They are separated only by location, not by name, doctrine, practice, organization, or worship—if they are true churches of Christ. They are **not** different denominations for the very fact that the body of Christ is not made up of different denominational groups.

Admittedly, a denomination is larger than the biblical aspect of the local congregation. Yet, obviously a denomination is smaller than the church universal. The Word of God speaks of no such group, of no such organization. If one were to listen to the multitudes of false teachers parroting the erroneous claims of the myriads of man-made religions, he would be led to believe that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ delighted in the diversity of religions. No, Christ does not approve of denominationalism. While He purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), He did not shed one drop of blood for any denomination, nor for all denominations combined. One cannot be saved in a denomination, nor can one be saved by a denomination.

Can we identify who is the bride? The bride is the church, and *church* means “the called out.” Thus, the bride consists of those called out of the world by the Gospel (2 The. 2:14). Our older brethren said,

“The church is made up of baptized believers, called out of the world by the Gospel, over whom Christ is head, and in whom His Spirit dwells.” While we have emphasized the bride is the church of Christ, God’s people are also known individually by designations such as sheep, disciples, saints, children of God, brethren, members, and priests. Collectively, the New Testament presents the church, among other things, as the temple of God, the house of God, the kingdom, and the church of the firstborn.

We can know who the bride is, and we can know who the bride is not. She is not a division or part of the whole which is what a denomination is. She is not divisive as are denominations who preach diversity and champion the idea: “Attend the church of your choice,” instead of the church of Christ’s choice. The saved in the first century were Christians and were not members of any denomination (Acts 2:47). The bride does not teach religious diversity, does not divide followers into sects and parties, nor encourage people to find a church that pleases them. Rather, the true church emphasized and emphasizes pleasing God (cf., Gal. 1:6-10).

The simple, plain, unanswerable truth is that denominations exist because of a lack of respect for the authority of God. One cannot defend denominationalism by using the Bible. One can defend the precious, beloved bride of Christ, but who can defend a name, faith, practice, worship, or organization which arose from the imaginations of the disobedient and the rebellious hearts of the self-willed? When Jeroboam, first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, changed the object of worship (from God to golden calves), the place of worship (from Jerusalem to Dan and Bethel), the time of worship (changing the feast from the seventh month to the eighth month), and the priesthood (from Levites to the lowest of the people who were not Levites), the people followed his pattern and forsook the pattern given by God. Who can rightfully say what Jeroboam did was right? Who dare affirm his actions were approved of God? Who would be so foolish as to say it did not really matter? Who would be so bold as to defend his changing God’s plan? Now, who dares to assert that man can change God’s plan **today**, and that such changes are good for man and acceptable to God?

Surely, none are ready for the marriage feast who are not faithful members of the one body. For the bride to be ready, she must have “made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7). She must be “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (v. 8).

The bride must be pure, clean, holy, unspotted, and unblemished. Her clean, white clothing represents what she is. Paul wrote:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

The bride must be pure in word, in work, and in worship (1 Pet. 1:22; Jam. 1:27; 1 John 3:3). Her garments must be clean and white in righteousness (Psa. 119:172; 1 Tim. 6:11; 1 John 2:29; 3:10), having been washed and made pure in the blood of the Lamb (Tit. 3:4; Rev. 1:5; 7:14). She must be watchful and ready for the bridegroom's coming.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. They that *were* foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, *Not so*; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh (Mat. 25:1-13).

The bride must be ready, prepared, pure, and patiently awaiting the call to enter the home of the groom to partake of the marriage feast.

REWARDS FOR THOSE CALLED TO THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

When the Lord returns, there will be, for the faithful bride, rich and everlasting reward. Some years ago, after this author had made a similar statement in a sermon, a young man strongly denied the truthfulness of this idea. He said Christians were not promised a *reward*. To his objection the author answered with a few verses such as the following.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Mat. 5:12).

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven (Mat. 6:1).

That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly (Mat. 6:4).

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly (Mat. 6:6).

That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly (Mat. 6:18).

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works (Mat. 16:27).

For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward (Mark 9:41).

Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets (Luke 6:23).

Yes, for the Christian, there is not only reward promised, but great reward. It is the reward of which Peter wrote: “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). It is the eternal life of Matthew 25:46, Mark 10:30, and Titus 1:2. It is the wonderful bliss of Heaven for which the children of God long. When will this reward be given to the Christians; that is, to the church, the bride of Christ? While one is married to Christ when he obeys the Gospel (Rom. 2:8; 2 The. 1:8), the marriage supper of the Lamb will take place when the Lord returns (1 The. 4:13-18). The triumphant church will be bidden to the wedding feast of the Lamb in Heaven itself.

In accord with the customs of the Hebrew people, marriage involved several steps. First, the betrothal was a formal, legally binding agreement of marriage. While we might try to parallel the betrothal with our step of engagement, it was far more. It was a bond which could only be broken by divorce. The bride and groom were considered as married.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things,

behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS (Mat. 1:18-25).

Joseph and Mary were espoused (betrothed), and when he found her to be with child, thinking she had been with another man, he would have put her away (divorced her) secretly. The angel of the Lord told him not to be afraid to take unto him “Mary thy wife.” This passage shows the strength of the espousal. Likewise, Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2). *Espoused* means “betrothed,” and the church is the betrothed bride of Christ.

Second, the friends of the bridegroom would come for the bride (and her party) to bring them to the home of the groom (cf., Mat. 25:1-13). There, the feast would take place, hosted by the father of the groom (cf., Mat. 22:1-14). Just so, the bride of Christ will be taken to His home in Heaven where the marriage supper shall take place, according to the preparation of our Heavenly Father. Third, the marriage supper was the celebration of the coming together of the betrothed pair. In it, the bride is called to the home of her husband, the home she will share. Without it, the marriage was not completed.

In view of this, the completion of the marriage relationship between Christ and the church will come when the Lord returns (John 14:1-6). With the marriage supper comes the invitation to the bride to come to the home of the groom, to the home which she will share. In this case, the home is Heaven which the bride of Christ will share with Him for eternity. The rewards are all the blessings of Heaven and the ones bidden are all the faithful, obedient children of God who make up the bride of Christ.

CONCLUSION

When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, He will welcome home all those who have heard the Gospel (Rom. 10:13-17), believed in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (John 8:24), repented of all past sins (Acts 2:38), confessed faith in Christ (Acts 8:37), and have been baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27), to have their sins washed away (Acts 22:16), have been added to the Lord's church by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47), and have continued faithfully thereafter. These constitute the pure bride of Christ, and they, of all accountable people, shall be blessed to be welcomed to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The Lord will be true to His marriage vow. He will be faithful (2 Tim. 2:13), and we must be true and faithful as well. The everlasting kingdom (Dan. 2:44), the church (Mat. 16:18-19), shall stand, and its citizens (Phi. 3:20) shall enter into the blessed state of the eternal aspect of the kingdom. Since the Bridegroom is faithful to His bride, no one, not even the devil himself, can break the marriage bond and come between Christ and the church (Rom. 8:35-37). Of this, we can rest assured for: "These are the true sayings of God" (Rev. 19:9).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

BLESSED ARE THOSE OF THE FIRST RESURRECTION REVELATION 20:6

Clifford Newell, Jr.



Clifford Newell, Jr., was born and reared in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. He attended the Memphis School of Preaching, Alabama Christian School of Religion (B.A. and M.A.), Kentucky State University (M.P.A.), and Southern Christian University (D.Min.). He has taught religious courses at colleges, universities, and schools of preaching. His preaching has involved radio and television programs, lectureships, and mission trips overseas.

Clifford is married to Diane Elaine (King), and they have two children: Joy Wooten and Clifford III, and three grandchildren. He has been preaching since 1976 and is currently working with the East Bristol Church of Christ in Bristol, Virginia.

INTRODUCTION

The passage under consideration is taken from the last book of the Sacred Volume: “Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6). This year’s theme the *Beatitudes* is both interesting and challenging. It must be admitted that any attempt to understand verses 4-6 will have some difficulties. The reason is that the book of Revelation is a vision. From the opening words to the final syllable, we are reminded that which is revealed to John was to be unfolded before his eyes. Thus, we are not to take these visions as real physical events, but as figurative. My assignment is taken from one of the most abused and misused selection of Holy Writ.

One final plea is made before we enter in this particular study: let us remember that, as long as one does not bind an opinion upon others, there is room for study and serious contemplation. We are suggesting that, as long as one does not promote false doctrine with his understanding, there can be diversity in unity, inasmuch as the teaching is not a salvation issue! Whatever Revelation 20 teaches, it absolutely must not conflict with clear concise Bible doctrine. Revelation is a sealed

book to many. It puzzles and baffles the reader. Therefore, many avoid the reading and studying of it as it makes no sense to them. However, there is a blessing that is promised to all those who hear and read this section of Holy Writ.

THE STYLE AND PURPOSE OF REVELATION

It is fundamental to our study that one must recognize the importance of the style and purpose. The Apocalypse (Revelation) is written in highly symbolic language. This is seemingly for a two-fold purpose. As Jackson observed:

First, it was designed to reveal, in a dramatic and very vivid way, truths to those who were initiated in the significance of the word pictures. Secondly, at the same time, these truths could be concealed from those who would abuse them if the message were clearly understood (337).

It is generally perceived that highly symbolic language was the means of conveying or expressing the message of hope to the people of God in a time of extreme danger. However, this language was selected by the Holy Spirit and was used by the prophets. A good working knowledge of Ezekiel, which we will study later, will greatly aid the serious student as in the pursuit of God's will.

MILLENNIAL CONTENTIONS

Revelation 20 is the heart and soul of the Bible as proclaimed by the dispensationalists. George Murray states: "It is called the very citadel and bulwark of premillennial eschatology" (175). Albert Barnes wrote:

It is admitted, on all hands, that this doctrine, if contained in the Scriptures at all, is found in this one passage only. It is not pretended that there is, in any other place, a direct affirmation that this will literally occur, nor would the advocates for that opinion undertake to show that it is fairly implied in any other part of the Bible. But it is strange, not to say improbable, that the doctrine of the literal resurrection of the righteous, a thousand years before the wicked, should be announced in one passage only (428-429).

Howard Winters quotes Warfield as saying:

Nothing, indeed, seems to have been more common in all ages of the Church than to frame an eschatological scheme from this passage, imperfectly understood, and then to impose this scheme on the rest of Scripture (225).

Wayne Jackson states: "Dispensationalism suggests that as the original creation week consisted of seven days, so all history will be divided

into seven dispensations, the final one of which is the millennium” (343).

There are ten crucial points that the millennialists contend for based on Revelation 20 that are not even mentioned. Therefore, Revelation 20, the sugar-stick of millennialists is not as sweet as its advocates have contended. Revelation 20 does not mention: (1) the second coming of Christ, (2) Palestine and national Israel, (3) the throne of David, (4) the establishment of the kingdom for a literal thousand years and the end of the church age, (5) the coronation of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords, (6) Jerusalem, (7) a Messianic reign on earth, (8) the rapture, (9) a thousand year interval between the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, and (10) a golden Utopia on earth void of sin and violence. Thus, Revelation 20 is not a refuge or haven for millennialists. Quite to the contrary it stands as a thorough refutation of this massive materialistic system.

CONTEXT OF REVELATION 20

The context of Revelation 20 must be respected or it will be greatly abused. Jackson divides the chapter as follows: “This chapter is naturally divided into four parts or sections: in verses 1-3 Satan is bound; in verses 4-6 Martyrs reign with Christ; in verses 7-9 Satan is loosed; and in verses 10-15 the final judgment” (338). Jackson further summarizes:

John saw an angel descending from heaven with a great chain. Satan was bound and cast into a pit where he was consigned to remain for 1,000 years. As a consequence of this, judgment was granted to those faithful martyrs who had neither worshipped the beast nor his image. They were said to partake of a resurrection; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. Satan is then loosed to make a last ditch attempt to war against the saints, but he and his unholy allies are banished to torment. All the dead are then ushered before the great throne for final judgment (338).

Revelation 20:1-6

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand” (Rev. 20:1). In this vision, John writes of the destruction of the Lord’s last enemy, Satan. An angel comes down out of heaven to bind Satan, thus the action takes place on earth. There is some dispute as to the name of this angel. Some believe it has reference to Christ, others believe it refers to an unnamed angel. John further observed that this angel had power over Satan, binds him

with a chain, casting him into a bottomless pit or abyss, and seals or chains Satan so he cannot escape. We conclude that what John saw was assurance of the victory—victory over its enemies, trials, and tribulations, because of strength.

“And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:2). Satan is bound for a thousand years. Two questions are in order: In what sense was Satan bound? and What does the thousand years mean? Satan was bound or restricted in some way and to some degree, but the text does not necessarily indicate that he will be rendered completely inactive as far as man is concerned. The meaning of the thousand years or millennium has several possible views, and these do not conflict with other passages in the Divine Volume. One view that is popular holds that the millennium is co-extensive with the Gospel Age. William Cox argues that, “The kingdom—in its present phase—and the millennium are practically, if not altogether, synonymous terms” (180). Morris saw the one thousand years “as representing completeness. One thousand is the cube of ten, the number of completeness, or simply an indefinite period of time” (235). Roy Lanier, Sr., believed that the one thousand years:

is that period of duration, however short or long it may be, from the binding of Satan and the coronation of Jesus on David’s throne on Pentecost after his resurrection to the destruction of Satan and his followers on the day of judgment (232).

These men and their views would suggest that the “first resurrection” would refer either to the new birth or the translation of souls to be with Christ Jesus.

Another view is the idea that the millennium is a symbolic description of the revival of Christianity from a period of bloody persecution. This position sees the “souls” of the martyrs “under the altar” crying out for justice (Rev. 6:9-11) as they become the *souls* on *thrones* reigning with Christ (Rev. 20:4). Men such as Homer Hailey, Wayne Jackson, and W. B. West hold to this position. This view suggests that the “first resurrection” represents the overcoming triumphs of persecuted saints and that over these reigning ones “the second death hath no power.”

And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand

years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season (Rev. 20:3).

Thus, Satan is bound and shut up with a seal upon him. The stated purpose is “that he should deceive the nations no more.” He certainly is called a deceiver and an accuser of the brethren. Since God’s Word has been revealed, confirmed, and recorded, there is no need for one to be deceived by him today. Those who do not receive nor obey the love of the truth or those who have delight or pleasure in unrighteousness and are willing to be deceived are the ones hurt by the devil. There is a discrepancy among writers here regarding the thousand years and a little season. Some advocate that both the thousand years and the little season cover the same period of time. Plummer believes that Satan is bound as respects the saints, but he is loosed as respects the unbelievers (471). John, by inspiration, states that Satan is to be loosed after the thousand years are finished. The literal idea would embrace things which are about to occur after these things. This writer has concluded that the loosing of Satan for a little time is to follow the binding of Satan for a thousand years. Workman observed:

Let us notice a sequence of three events: (1) Satan was “cast into the earth” as the result of the cross (Rev. 12:9), then (2) he was “cast...into the abyss” (Rev. 20:3), and finally (3) he will be “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” (Rev. 20:10) (198).

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Rev. 20:4).

The ones sitting upon thrones exercising judgment remind us of Paul’s words to the Corinthians: “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?” (1 Cor. 6:2). Our Lord said that the apostles would sit upon 12 thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mat. 19:28). It seems that Rome had far too long been in the saddle as the judge. Throughout Rome’s vast domain her judges sat upon many thrones judging the children of God, but now the tables are turned; things are reversed and the children of God are now sitting on thrones judging those who are not God’s children. The children of God were the ones judged before, but now they are the judges.

John saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God, who did not worship the beast (no doubt the Roman emperor) or his image, who did not receive his mark on their foreheads or hands (Rev. 13), and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. W. E. Vine says *behead* “denotes ‘to cut with an axe’ (from *pelekizo*)” (113). There is also a time factor here, the verse states that they lived. That is past tense; it was they who reigned, that is in the past tense, with Christ a thousand years.

There are difficulties understanding the thousand years as mentioned by John and the various interpretations that have been assigned. Workman summarized the interpretations under five major views:

- (1) a future reign of Christ on earth with his saints for a literal 1,000 years, (2) a golden age of peace and prosperity and conversions prior to the Lord’s return, (3) a spiritual reign of individual Christians in this life during the entire gospel age, (4) a resurrection of the cause of Christianity by coming out of Roman persecution, and (5) a present reign of the souls of deceased Christians with Christ in heaven (200-201).

There is a real danger because of the false teaching associated with the first interpretation.

“But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5). This phrase is a parenthetical statement and refers to all those who have no part in the first resurrection. Cox contends, “These are sinners who will not experience a resurrection of any kind until the end of time” (166-167).

“Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6). So wonderful is the first resurrection that the vision pronounces a blessing—*blessed* and *holy*. He that is a partaker of the “first resurrection” (the resurrection of the cause for they had passed through tribulation and for which the martyrs died), is blessed.

Wallace notes: “The fact that they had to be told that it was a resurrection is proof that it was used in an unusual sense of the word; it was a figurative use not a physical employment of the word” (416).

In regard to the statement, “on such the second death hath no power,” a study is in order to be made as to its application. Could the first resurrection apply to baptism? This is the application Augustine, one of the early theologians of the Catholic church, advocated. However, there are consequences with such a view. If it refers to baptism

what becomes of the phrase, “on such the second death hath no power”? Accordingly, if they are once saved, they will always be saved. If the first resurrection is baptism, it is impossible to apostatize. If you are once resurrected from the watery grave, the second death will have no power over you. As long as you live, regardless of what you do, all things will be right for you concerning the end of time. Be assured, dear friends, this is Calvinism, for the Bible does not explicitly or implicitly teach such.

THE MEANING OF THE FIRST RESURRECTION

The resurrection of the twentieth chapter of Revelation was a figurative or spiritual resurrection, and of the same character described by Ezekiel concerning Israel in captivity. The prophet Ezekiel was in Babylon with exiled Israel and prophesied their return from Babylon in the vision:

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which *was* full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, *there were* very many in the open valley; and, lo, *they were* very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but *there was* no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye

know that I the LORD have spoken *it*, and performed *it*, saith the LORD (Eze. 37:1-14).

Here was the description of a resurrection. Taking Israel out of the land of their captivity and bringing them back to their own land was called a resurrection. They were in the grave of captivity in Babylon, yet they were a living people. God said that He opened their graves and brought them out and caused them to live—in their return and restoration to their land and their religion.

Isaiah prophesied the Babylonian exile about one hundred years prior:

O LORD our God, *other* lords beside thee have had dominion over us: *but* by thee only will we make mention of thy name. *They are* dead, they shall not live; *they are* deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish. Thou hast increased the nation, O LORD, thou hast increased the nation: thou art glorified: thou hadst removed *it* far *unto* all the ends of the earth. LORD, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer *when* thy chastening *was* upon them. Like as a woman with child, *that* draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, *and* crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen. Thy dead *men* shall live, *together with* my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew *is as* the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead (Isa. 26:13-19).

The reference here was to the wicked lords of the Old Testament. They were exercising dominion over God's oppressed people. In reference to the persecuted people of God, the prophet said, "Thy dead *men* shall live." When Israel was in the bondage of the captivity of these lords, they were said to be dead—they were dead as a people in captivity, and the wicked lords were said to live—that is in power and dominion. This reference indicates a coming out of the grave of their captivity represented by a resurrection, but not a literal resurrection—it was a figurative resurrection. It seemingly is exactly the kind of resurrection pictured in Revelation 20.

When John saw the souls of the martyrs, slain for the testimony of Jesus and the Word of God "under the altar" as per chapter 6, then saw the same souls "on thrones" as per chapter 20, it was a vision of victory. Taking the souls from beneath the altar and elevating them to the thrones was called a resurrection, seemingly in the same sense that

bringing the people of Israel out of bondage in Babylonian exile was opening their graves and causing them to live—a figurative death and a figurative resurrection.

SUMMARY

In our study we have sought to: point out the style and purpose of the book of Revelation; observe the millennial contentions; set forth the context of Revelation 20; briefly analyze Revelation 20:1-6; and declare the meaning of the first resurrection. In keeping with the theme or purpose of Revelation, it is a vision, much of which is not to be received in a literal way, but figuratively.

Revelation 20 is included with that body of material known as the *beatitudes*. The idea from beatitude is joyousness or blessed is he that has received the moral and spiritual virtues taught by Christ. According to James Tolle, “In the Bible there are actually a full one hundred beatitudes, or statements that begin with the word blessed” (6). We understand that blessed or blessing or one of its derivatives occurs six hundred times in the Divine Volume. Thus, the Bible is indeed a book of beatitudes. As these terms and ideas are applied to the book of Revelation, we understand that blessed (*makarios*) is used to describe the state of spiritual and moral prosperity and blessedness, the highest possible joy that men can enjoy in this world.

Therefore, it should be of no surprise that Revelation contains beatitudes. It is the general scope and teaching of the Bible that God desires His people to be joyous. And this quest for joy can only be found by the pursuit of character. Many seek joy through circumstances (which is happiness) rather than through character. In every beatitude recorded, its very design is to pronounce a blessing upon those who strive for perfection in and surrender to Jehovah God.

In Revelation 20, “Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection,” there is the pronounced blessing, and what follows is the reason for being blessed: “on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” Because of their character, they have **overcome!** That is blessed indeed.

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated. Barnes, Albert. “Revelation.” *Barnes On The New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993.

- Cox, William. *Biblical Studies In Final Things*. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1967.
- Hailey, Homer. *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979.
- Jackson, Wayne. "Revelation 20: Victory In Jesus." *Great Chapters Of The Bible*. Ed. Thomas F. Eaves. Delight, AR: Karns Church of Christ, 1979.
- Kik, J. Marcellus. *An Eschatology Of Victory*. n.p.: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974.
- Lanier, Sr., Roy H. "Revelation 20—An Analysis And Exegesis." *Premillennialism, True Or False?* Ed. Wendell Winkler. Fort Worth, TX: Winkler Publications, 1978.
- Lenski, R. C. H. *Interpretation Of St. John's Revelation*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963.
- McGuiggan, Jim. *Revelation*. Lubbock, TX: International Biblical Resources, Inc., 1976.
- Morris, Leon. *The Revelation of John*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973.
- Murray, George. *Millennial Studies*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972.
- Plummer, A. "Revelation." *The Pulpit Commentary*. Ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962.
- Tolle, James M. *The Beatitudes*. San Fernando, CA: Tolle Publications, 1966.
- Vine, W. E. *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1966.
- Wallace, Jr., Foy E. *The Book of Revelation*. Fort Worth, TX: Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Publications, 1966.
- West, Jr., W. B. *Revelation: Through First—Century Glasses*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1997.
- Winters, Howard. *Commentary on Revelation*. Greenville, SC: Carolina Christian, 1989.
- Workman, Gary. "The Millennium." *Studies In The Revelation*. Ed. Dub McClish. Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1984.

BLESSED ARE THOSE KEEPING THE SAYINGS, DO HIS COMMANDS REVELATION 22:7, 14

James E. Rogers



James Rogers is a native of Blakely, Georgia. He is married to the former Nancy Brazzell and has two children, Daniel and Donna. He began preaching full-time in September 1971, and is presently working with the congregation in Bremen, Georgia and on the faculty of Georgia School of Preaching and Biblical Studies.

He attended Alabama Christian College, Alabama Christian School of Religion, North Central Georgia Law Enforcement Academy, and Theological University of America (Doctorate of Ministry). James has done local work in Alabama and Georgia, has conducted gospel meetings in numerous other states, and mission work in Trinidad and the Dominican Republic. He writes

for various brotherhood publications and has appeared on radio and television programs. He speaks at gospel meetings and lectureships. He is the co-editor of *What Does The Bible Teach?* and editor of *Studies in Genesis*. He has served as the director of lectureships in Talladega and Millport, Alabama, Duluth, Georgia, East Tennessee School of Preaching, and is the director of the annual Bremen Lectures. He is currently the chaplain and a Reserve Officer for Haralson County Sheriff's Office.

INTRODUCTION

Webster illustrates the limited view many have of biblical beatitudes when he defines *beatitude* as “any of the declarations made in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5:3-12) beginning ‘Blessed are’” (75). As this lectureship shows, there are many statements of blessedness from Deity to different ones in the Bible. A thorough study of these statements will help the student better himself in his service to God. The beatitudes help one “see the present in the light of the future” (Hauck 4:369).

The blessings pronounced in Revelation 22:7, 14 stand in view of the context of the book of Revelation. God's people were about to endure severe persecution. The churches to whom John wrote needed to be encouraged to stand firm and remain faithful to God. “The whole book stands in the framework of the blessing of those who attain to and keep the blessed revelation of the mysteries of God (1:3 confirmed in 22:7)” (Hauck 4:369).

The particular emphasis of our study will be upon the blessedness of obedience to the revelation of God. This emphasis of the Bible began in Genesis and is seen in God's dealings with mankind throughout Bible history. Let us glean some important truths from this study.

BLESSED ARE THOSE KEEPING THE SAYINGS

This beatitude is found in a section that might be entitled: Faithful and True Words. Revelation 22:6-7 form the paragraph for this study. In this section one finds the following considerations.

The Commission of the Angel (Rev. 22:6)

The speaker in this verse is probably "one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues" (Rev. 21:9). He now declares to John the **authenticity** of the Revelation. Earlier, John had been told "these are true words of God" (Rev. 19:9), and "these words are faithful and true" (Rev. 21:5). As these things were true of the Christ (Rev. 3:14; 19:11), one would expect them to be true of His words. "He wanted the apostle to know assuredly that the glorious triumph achieved by persecuted Christians, described in previous chapters (as, 2:10; 14:13; 17:14), was no fantasy" (McCord 230).

These words came **from** "the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets" (Rev. 22:6). The same one who was behind the message of the prophets was behind the message described by the angel. This is true whether Old Testament or New Testament prophets are under consideration. This points up the **inspiration** of the Revelation. The prophets were recognized as those who spoke the truth of God, so this attestation would give weight to the words of the Revelation. *These words* came **by** "his angel." The Revelation had been *sent and signified* by "his angel" (Rev. 1:1).

These words came **to** "his servants." These are the ones to whom it could be said: "Ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17-18). The concept of obedience, then, would not be foreign to them. When the beatitude was pronounced, they would understand it. God had shown His concern for His servants in previous chapters (Rev. 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 19:2, 5; 22:3).

These words were "to show...the things which must shortly come to pass" (Rev. 1:1). This shows that the "Epilogue looks back to the Prologue" (Earle 10:623). "Show" is from *deiknumi*, "to show by

making known” (Vine 4:20). “Must” is from *dei*, which signifies “of necessity.” “That phrase reminds us that a primary purpose of Revelation was to encourage persecuted Christians in that day, not to give a timetable of events thousands of years in the future” (Roper 47).

The Coming of the Lord (Rev. 22:7)

Verse seven begins with *behold*. This is “an imperative, bidding the reader or hearer to give serious attention to what is said” (Hailey 426). After the speaker gets our attention, a bold statement is made. “I come quickly.” Either Jesus speaks here or the angel quotes Jesus. A great amount has been written about this statement. Many believe that Jesus is speaking of His final coming. In light of the purpose of the book being written to encourage the readers during persecution, it would seem to be more fitting to apply it to His coming in the judgments revealed in the book on the enemies of His servants. Johnson observed that it “may be that the reference is to his coming to work out ‘the things that must shortly be done,’ or he may refer to his final coming” (2:503).

J. W. Roberts observed that the Lord

was constantly “coming” in the events of history in fulfillment of his promise to be with his disciples always, to the end of the world. Part of the message of this book has been to warn the church (as in 2:5) that they must not fail to see the coming of the Lord in the events facing the church (cf. 16:15) (Elkins 355).

Wayne Jackson suggests that this may mean the things revealed would begin to unfold in the near future or this could suggest the certainty of the unfolding of these things (118-122). In this regard, “We must recall that *tachu* and *en tachei* are according to God’s time, not ours (II Pet. 3:8)” (Robertson 6:482).

The Commendation of Obedience (Rev. 22:7)

John shows the state of blessedness. “In the beatitudes the Lord indicates not only the characters that are blessed, but the nature of that which is the highest good” (Vine 1:133). The idea of *blessed* is that of the greatest joy one could have being focused on the things of God. John also observes the one who is blessed. “**He that keepeth** the words of the prophecy of this book.” This is consistent with the way the book began (Rev. 1:3).

The major emphasis of our study in this section is on the **reason** for the blessing. He **is keeping** “the words of the prophecy of this book.” “Keep” is from *Teron*, from *tereo*, “to observe, to give heed to” (Vine 2:287). This has reference to the lifestyle of the individual Christian. Those in Sardis were admonished to “remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep *it*, and repent” (Rev. 3:3). Those in Philadelphia were commended because they kept “my word” (Rev. 3:8). Because they kept “the word of my patience,” Jesus promised to “keep thee from the hour of trial” (Rev. 3:10). The angel stressed his relationship with the saints by identifying with John and “with thy brethren the prophets, and with them that keep the words of this book” (Rev. 22:9). These are the people who will be “faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10).

This gives evidence to the fact that the Revelation may be understood.

The very propounding of these blessings and rewards is God’s own seal to the possibility of understanding this Book equally with any other part of Scripture... Therefore these very benedictions pronounce against the common notion that this Book is too difficult for ordinary Christians, and rebuke all who despise and avoid it... we have here the unmistakable authority of heaven for it, that this Apocalypse is capable of being understood; that its presentations are among the most momentous in all the Word of God; and that the highest blessedness of believers is wrapped up with the learning and keeping of what is pictured to us in it (Seiss 514-515).

We are impressed with the importance of keeping the words of this book in particular and the Bible in general. The servant of God “receives them as a Divine communication...makes use of them to comfort himself in the days of darkness, persecution, and trial; and...is obedient to the precepts here enjoined” (Barnes 1726). Let us also remember that it “is not in reading, or wondering, or talking, but in keeping, that the blessing comes” (Ellicott 3:634). There is a reason for God’s encouragement to keep the words. “In this verse God reminds us that our study has not been an intellectual exercise [only]; Revelation is intended to change our attitudes and lives” (Roper 47). The stress is that one “must be both a diligent student and a devout observer of what God says” (Hailey 426).

Solomon reminds us that, if we want to be whole, we must “fear God, and keep his commandments” (Ecc. 12:13). Jesus told the people

of His day that His “mother and...brethren” were “these that hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:21). In response to one who pronounced a blessing on Mary because of the works of Jesus, Jesus responded, “Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it” (Luke 11:28).

This author believes there are at least three things involved in this matter of keeping the words. (1) One’s relationship with the Christ is the stimulus to keep the words. Jesus said, “If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments” (John 14:15), and “Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you” (John 15:14). One is motivated by his love **for** the Lord and that motivation causes him to keep the words **of** the Lord. When one belongs to Jesus, he will keep the words of Jesus. To belong to Jesus is to be a Christian. This stimulus will cause one to stand on the Word of God even when under attack. The dragon “went away to make war with” those “that keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17).

(2) One’s standing in the judgment is settled. It is the one who hears the words of Jesus and does them that will have a house so “well builded” (Luke 6:48) that it will stand in the face of descending rain, coming floods, and blowing winds (Mat. 7:24-25). Stedfastness on earth allows one to stand fast in judgment. “Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). (3) One’s destiny in eternity is secured. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my word, he shall never see death” (John 8:51).

While the blessing is bestowed on those who keep “the words of the prophecy of this book,” there is also an emphasis on the standard upon which the blessing is based: “The words of the prophecy of this book.” “Book” is from *biblion*, which is a diminutive of *biblos*. It “denotes a scroll or a small book” (Vine 1:140). “Prophecy” is from *propheteia* which “signifies the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God” (Vine 3:221).

It is Christ’s revelation from God, a direct message from God. Part of it is prediction of doom on Christ’s enemies, but most of it is a comforting picture of final triumph and bliss for the faithful in a time of great distress and persecution (Robertson 482).

One must never underestimate the importance of God’s revelation. From Genesis 2 onward it is God’s revelation that is given for man’s

good and ultimate salvation. God's Word is sufficient for a man to learn what to do to be saved and how to stay saved.

One may keep the words of the prophecy of this book and be blessed because:

Every scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

While the admonition of this section of Scripture was immediately to those to whom John wrote in the first century, the principle is applicable to us. If we will faithfully follow the revelation of God for us, we will be saved eternally. What a man does and how a man lives has eternal implications.

DO HIS COMMANDS

This beatitude is found in a section which might be entitled: Unsealed Words. Revelation 22:10-15 form the section in which this beatitude rests. In this section one finds some interesting and helpful truths.

The Statement of the Angel (Rev. 22:10)

The angel gives John a prohibition. "Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book." "Seal" is from *sphragizo* and is used to indicate "secrecy and security and the postponement of disclosure" (Vine 3:331). This prohibition means that John is not to postpone disclosure of this information which has been revealed to him.

A "sealed" book is one beyond the comprehension of uninitiated persons... The book was to be sent to the churches at that time, (1:11), and its content made applicable to all churches (22:16). Its message was to be made known, its warnings were to be heeded, and its hearers encouraged by the divine assurance of victory (Hailey 427-428).

Barnes observes:

The events which John had predicted, though in their ultimate development they were to extend to the end of the world, and even into eternity, were about to *begin* to be fulfilled, and were to be of immediate use in consoling a persecuted church... so that a persecuted church might have access to them, and might in times of persecution and trial have the assurance that the principles of their religion would finally triumph (1727).

This prohibition is the antithesis to Revelation 10:4 where John “was about to write” but “heard a voice from heaven saying, Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.”

The reason for the prohibition is “the time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3). “Some interval, however, is presupposed between the vision and its fulfilment, otherwise it would be futile to write the visions down, and to arrange for their circulation throughout the churches” (Moffatt 5:490). “How near *eggus* (at hand) is we do not know any more than we do about *en tachei* (shortly) in 1:1” (Robertson 285). We must, however, keep in mind that

matters that concerned the immediate needs of these struggling Christians in the Asiatic congregations and the severe judgments soon to be visited upon troubling Rome were of immediate importance (Taylor 211).

The States of Mankind (Rev. 2:11)

There are two states of mankind revealed in this verse.

Some are lost.

Some believe:

It is the hopelessness of the final state of the wicked which is here pictured... It is the time when Christ has shut the door to those outside who are now without hope... There is no word here about a “second chance” hereafter (Robertson 483).

It may, however, be the case that John is showing that if the revelation of God will not cause one to change his behavior, there is nothing that will. Abraham told “a certain rich man” that if his brothers “hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead” (Luke 16:19, 31). The same power that would have caused Lazarus to go back from the dead was behind the message of Moses and the prophets. To reject the message is to reject the power behind the message. John had already been shown that “the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets” (Rev. 22:6) was behind the Revelation. If this message would not cause the wicked to repent, there was nothing that would.

Some are lost because they are unrighteous and will do unrighteousness. This is the “first aorist (constative) active imperative of *adikeo*, viewed here as a whole” (Robertson 483). Some are lost because they are filthy and will continue filthy. This the “first aorist (constative) passive imperative of *rupaino*” (Robertson 483). Here *rhuparos* is used

“metaphorically of moral defilement” (Vine 2:99). Paul observed that “evil men and impostors shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). The Hebrews writer wrote of

those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and *then* fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame (Heb. 6:4-6).

When viewing this matter with the long view, Barnes is certainly right when he observes

there is nothing more awful than the idea that a polluted soul will be always polluted; that a heart corrupt will be always corrupt; that the defiled will be put for ever beyond the possibility of being cleansed from sin (1727).

Some are saved.

This points up the power of the revelation of God to save. The saved ones learned what to do to be saved and stay saved from God’s Word. Some are saved because they are righteous and will practice righteousness. This is the “first constative aorist active imperative of *poieo*” (Robertson 483). Some are saved because they are holy and will remain holy. This is the “first constative aorist passive imperative of *hagiazō*” (Robertson 483). *Hagiazō* means “to hallow, sanctify, in the Passive Voice, to be made holy, be sanctified, is translated ‘let him be made holy’ in Rev. 22:11, the aorist or point tense expressing the definiteness and completeness of the Divine act” (Vine 2:227).

“Revelation 22:11, therefore, is a solemn warning that decision determines character, and character determines destiny” (Wiersbe 2:625). It is intended to encourage the faithful to endure and persevere. “This verse is a complete refutation, from the biblical view point, of universalism—the doctrine that everyone will ultimately be saved” (Strauss 340).

The Sentences to Be Given (Rev. 22:12)

Again, Jesus affirms the quickness of the coming. This may refer to His coming in the judgments revealed in this book, which is more likely, or it may look forward to His final coming.

It is thus probable that the promise here is intended to encourage and give hope in the persecutions facing the new Israel. Such temporal

events can be described in terms of the final coming because they anticipate that event (Elkins 355).

Hailey is more specific when he states, "Since the book was not sealed, for the time was at hand, the passages do not refer to the Lord's second or final coming, for that was not at hand (II Thess. 2:1f.)" (429). Barnes is right on target when he asks, "What thought could there be more adapted to impress on the mind the importance of giving immediate attention to the concerns of the soul?" (1727).

Reference is made to the reward that is with Him. "Reward" is from *misthos*, "primarily wages, hire" (Vine 3:294). "The present passage may refer to the reward rendered to good and bad men at any coming of the Lord and also to the reward rendered to each at His final coming" (Hailey 429). The matter of a reward points to the rendering which will take place. "Render" is from *apodidomi* which "signifies to give up or back, to restore, return, render what is due, to pay, give an account" (Vine 2:148). Notice that this rendering is inclusive: "to each man."

The basis of the sentence is stated: "According as his work is." John had revealed to those of Thyatira that the Lord would "give unto each one of you according to your works" (Rev. 2:23). In the "great white throne" judgment scene "the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12). *His work* would refer to his lifestyle. "He will dispense rewards and punishments to men according as their works agree or disagree with the word of God" (Henry 6:1187).

This method of reckoning has been used by Jehovah in all His dealings with man. He told Judah, "I, Jehovah, search the mind, I try the heart, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 17:10). This is also the method that will be used in the final judgment. "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds" (Mat. 16:27). Paul stressed this point to the Romans (Rom. 2:1-16). Paul told those of Corinth that "we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). All of this underscores the universal principle introduced in the creation that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh

shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:7-8).

The Savior Who Is Coming (Rev. 22:13)

Jesus describes Himself in three ways. Each of these descriptions underscores something about the character of the Lord. (1) He is “the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev. 1:8; 21:6). These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This description stresses His authority. (2) He is “the first and the last” (Rev. 1:17; 2:8). This description stresses His eternity. (3) He is “the beginning and the end” (Rev. 21:6). This description stresses His Deity. “The third phrase...is better understood that Jesus is the beginner and ender of everything, not that Jesus had a beginning and will have an end” (McCord 234). This certainly reminds us that “whatever God starts, He will finish” (Wiersbe 625). Barnes accurately observes:

He originated the whole plan of salvation, and he will determine its close; he formed the world, and he will wind up its affairs. In the beginning, the continuance, and the end, he will be recognized as the same being presiding over and controlling all (1727).

The Support for Purity (Rev. 22:14)

John identifies those who are blessed: “They that wash their robes.” Those who “came out of the great tribulation...washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14).

The King James Version in v. 14 says, “Blessed are they that do his commandments,” while the American Standard Version has, “that wash their robes.” Why this big difference? Really, no one has enough information to decide for sure which clause Jesus used. Strong evidence exists (both in Greek manuscripts and in the early Christians’ use of this verse and in translations) for either rendition. Fortunately, however, it does not make any difference, for both statements are true and both are specified in other scriptures. People are not blessed who refuse to do his commandments (Luke 6:46; 1 John 2:4) and people with unwashed robes cannot enter heaven (John 8:21; Rev. 7:14). And the only way to wash one’s spiritual robes is to keep his commandments: “arise, and be baptized, wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16) (McCord 235).

This shows that at one time these people were unclean. They, then, discovered how to become clean from God’s revelation. They obeyed the plan of salvation and were washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. By the blood of Jesus we are loosed from our sins (Rev. 1:5), purchased

unto God (Rev. 5:9), and have our robes or lives made white (Rev. 7:14). These who are now clean (Christians) continue to be clean by their faithfulness to the words of the Christ. One is blessed who watches and keeps his garments (Rev. 16:15). One remains clean who continues to enjoy fellowship with God by walking in the light because “the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). It is the responsibility of the individual to “keep oneself unspotted from the world” (Jam. 1:27).

The idea of washing one’s robes is an interesting way of describing faithfulness. “The free-will of man is implied in the active form of the participle” (Spence and Exell 22:547).

One’s clothes are reckoned with himself. They are an outside part of him, but that which marks the form, order, or habit in which he bears himself. There is something moral and spiritual in clothes. They express much of the inward taste and character. They come between us and society, to a large extent represent us to society, and react again on our inner consciousness, moral sense, and state of mind and heart. We cannot always judge one from the clothes he wears, but we cannot help the effect which clothes have upon our judgment of people. They tell a story of the wearers of them. And if any one is habitually filthy, slovenly, unclean, and untidy in his garments, it is a blur upon him, a repugnance, a thing to make his presence unwelcome and undesirable in respectable company. When it comes to agreeable social recognition and intercourse, clean clothes are associated with a right heart, a right mind, and a right feeling. Anything short of this is an offence and a disqualification (Seiss 519).

The blessing to be enjoyed is then stated. This is seen in two expressions. (1) “They may have the right to come to the tree of life.” “Lit., *in order that theirs shall be authority over the tree of life*” (Vincent 2:573). The tree of life is in the holy city (Rev. 21:2; 22:2). The right to eat of the tree of life was promised to those who “overcometh” (Rev. 2:7). Those who overcome do so because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and because they loved not their life even unto death (Rev. 12:11). Those who overcome will be arrayed in white (undefiled) garments (Rev. 3:4-5). They are authorized by the Christ to enjoy the blessing as a result of their obedience.

(2) “They... may enter in by the gates into the city.” “Gates” is from *pulon* which “primarily signifies a porch or vestibule... then, the gateway or gate tower of a walled town” (Vine 2:141-142). Nothing “un-

clean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27) are allowed into the holy city. They are authorized by the Christ to enter the city as a result of their obedience. Since the theme of Revelation is "Victory Through The Christ," perhaps this is their victory march! "The final macarism is a judicial sentence. In contrast to the wicked who are excluded, it blesses those who in full holiness (forgiveness) and sanctification are counted worthy to enter into the eternal city" (Hauck 4:369).

The whole of the verse would seem to say that those who have washed their robes continue to remain clean by living a faithful life and looking forward to the coming of the Lord and are thus to be blessed as a result. When we contemplate our eternal destiny, we realize that "heaven is more than a destination; it is a motivation. Knowing that we shall dwell in the heavenly city ought to make a difference in our lives here and now" (Wiersbe 624).

The Scourge of Impurity (Rev. 22:15)

In contrast with the pure who are in *the city* (Rev. 22:14; 21:27), the impure are *without*. This may refer to the "lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8). Paul told those in Corinth "that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God," for "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In listing some of the works of the flesh, Paul concluded "that they who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21). To be *without* is to "suffer punishment, *even* eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 The. 1:9).

A description of those *without* is given. They are *the dogs*. *Kunes*, from *kuon*, is used in a metaphorical sense "of those whose moral impurity will exclude them from the New Jerusalem. The Jews used the term of Gentiles, under the idea of ceremonial impurity. Among the Greeks it was an epithet of impudence" (Vine 1:332). "Here *kunes* are not merely impure pagans, but the impudently impure, possibly in the special and darker sense of 'sodomites' (*cf.* 1 Tim. i. 10...)" (Moffatt 490). Moses described sodomites as *dogs* (Deu. 23:17-18). The Psalmist described "evil-doers" as *dogs* (Psa. 22:16, 20). Paul described "evil workers" as *dogs* (Phi. 3:2).

They are *the sorcerers*. “Sorcerer” is from *pharmakos*, “an adjective signifying ‘devoted to magical arts,’ is used as a noun, a sorcerer, especially one who uses drugs, potions, spells, enchantments” (Vine 4:51). They are *the fornicators*. “Fornicators” is from *pornos* which “denotes a man who indulges in fornication” (Vine 2:125). It is interesting that *porneia* is used “metaphorically, of the association of pagan idolatry with doctrines of, and professed adherence to, the Christian faith, Rev. 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3; 19:2; some suggest this as the sense of 2:21” (Vine 2:125). They are *the murderers*. They are *the idolaters*. “Idolaters” is from *eidololatres* “(from *eidolon*, and *latris*, a hireling)” (Vine 2:244).

They are *the liars*. Two aspects of lying are mentioned here. There are those who love a lie. “Love” is from *phileo* which represents tender affection.

“PHILEO” is a love which consists of the glow of the heart kindled by the perception of that in the object which affords us pleasure. It is the response of the human spirit to what appeals to it as pleasureable (Wuest 3:63).

In keeping with the idea that in verse 11 John is speaking of the response to the revelation of God, it is interesting that Paul, in discussing “them that perish,” said they did so because “they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” but believed “a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 The. 2:10-12). Anytime one loves a lie, he will not love the truth.

There are those who make a lie. Making a lie is tied with “an abomination” in Revelation 21:27. “Abomination” is from *bdelugma* which “denotes an object of disgust” (Vine 1:14). This is the word used to describe “the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel” which would stand “in the holy place” (Mat. 24:15). It also described the exalting of money by the Pharisees above the Word of God (Luke 16:14-17). It described the contents of the golden cup of the woman with a name written upon her forehead (Rev. 17:4-5). This may refer to the lifestyle of one who replaced God in his heart with some earthly idol.

David stated the sentiments of God when he wrote, “He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes” (Psa. 101:7). “Satan is the

father of lying (John 8:44) and Satan's home is a congenial place for those who love and practise lying (II Thess. 2:12)" (Robertson 485).

CONCLUSION

These two beatitudes will set us on the straight way if we will take heed to their precepts. May we impress upon the minds of men the need to listen to the revelation of God and allow that revelation to make a difference in the way they live. Let us invite the sinner to hear the Word of the Christ (Rom. 10:17), believe in the Deity of the Christ (John 8:24), repent of sins (Acts 17:30), confess faith in the Deity of the Christ (Acts 8:37), and be baptized unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Let us remind the saint to keep his robes clean so he might "have the right *to come* to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14).

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.
- Barnes, Albert. *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*. Grand Rapid, MI: Kregel Publications, 1974.
- Earle, Ralph. *Beacon Bible Commentary*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1967.
- Elkins, Garland. "Answering False Doctrines Relating To Revelation No. III." *Studies In The Revelation* Ed. Dub McClish. Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1984. 351-371.
- Ellicott, Charles John. *A New Testament Commentary For English Readers*. London, England: Cassell And Company, Limited, 1897.
- Hailey, Homer. *Revelation, An Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979.
- Hauck, F. *Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament* Ed. Gerhard Kittel. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1967.
- Henry, Matthew. *Commentary On The Whole Bible*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.
- Jackson, Wayne. *Select Studies From The Book Of Revelation*. Stockton, CA: Courier Publications, 1995.
- Johnson, B. W. *The People's New Testament*. Delight, AR: Gospel Light Pub. Co., n.d.
- McCord, Hugo. "The Last Words Of Revelation." *Studies In The Revelation* Ed. Dub McClish. Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1984. 230-237.
- Moffatt, James. "The Revelation Of St. John The Divine." *The Expositor's Greek Testament* Ed. W. Robertson Nicoll. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974.
- Robertson, Archibald Thomas. *Word Pictures In The New Testament*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931.
- Roper, David. *Truth for Today* Ed. Eddie Cloer. Vol. 20. No. 6., November 1999.
- Seiss, J. A. *The Apocalypse*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973.

- Spence, H. D. M. and Exell, Joseph S. *The Pulpit Commentary, Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1961.
- Strauss, James D. *The Seer; The Saviour; And The Saved*. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1972.
- Taylor, Robert R., Jr. *Companion*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1990.
- Vincent, Marvin R. *Word Studies In The New Testament*. McClean, VA: MacDonald Pub. Co., n.d.
- Vine, W. E. *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1966.
- Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1971.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989.
- Wuest, Kenneth S. *Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*. Golden Nuggets. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979.

DEVIL'S BEATITUDES

Gary Summers



Gary W. Summers and his wife Barbara have two children and three grandchildren. He is a graduate of Illinois State University (B.A., M.A.). He taught college for four years and was a teacher/principal of Central Illinois Christian Academy in Peoria, Illinois.

Gary has done local work in Pennsylvania, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Texas and is currently with the Pearl Street Church of Christ in Denton, Texas. He is author of many newspaper editorials and letters to editors. He writes for several brotherhood journals and speaks on several lectureships each year. He has recorded two series for World Video Bible School: one on the New

Age Movement and one on Angels.

INTRODUCTION

This book will prove to be of great value by virtue of its wonderful collection of beatitudes from every section of the Scriptures. People constantly seek joy, but most search in the same places where Solomon failed to find it—in earthly and carnal pursuits that appeal to the physical senses. True pleasure results from seeking God, helping others, and developing one's character. Many are too preoccupied with themselves to care much about the Lord, let alone diligently seek Him. Many regard others as mere nuisances who get in the way; they never think about actually doing something which might profit others or improve their characters. For these reasons we generally do not find people we would term *joyous*. Some may seem content simply because they possess such low goals; a lack of ambition does not demonstrate joy.

The Bible alone can accurately present what brings about joy in life, for there is but One Who created us and knows us thoroughly. Even while He was upon this earth, Jesus “knew all *men*, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” (John 2:24b-25). Our Creator knows us mentally, psychologically, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. He has not left us void of knowledge about the important issues pertaining to this life or the next. If we really desire to know how to achieve blessedness both now and in eternity, the information is available.

While we are rejoicing in this rich study of the beatitudes, however, there exists one who prefers that we be miserable; furthermore, he always does everything in his power to discourage us from finding or believing the Truth. Failing that, he summons all his strength in an effort to prevent us from putting into practice what we have learned. The devil helped introduce sin into this world, which has resulted in genuine sorrow ever since. He has his own way of approaching this life. Briefly stated, Satan's general philosophy of life is that true joy is found in rejecting God and His commandments.

The devil does not need his own book, since he knows how to make sin so enticing to most people. But surely he has his own list of beatitudes, and one way of discerning these is to simply negate all of the positive statements that Jesus and others have made. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," for example, becomes: "Blessed are the proud and arrogant." So we could easily formulate, from our own imaginations, the devil's beatitudes, but we do not have to bother; a brief search of the Internet tells us that some have already done the work for us.

MIGHT IS RIGHT

Speaking of the proud and arrogant, one could scarcely find (besides Ted Turner) one possessing greater egotism than Ragnar Redbeard (which may be a pseudonym). Listed under the Web site, www.realsatanism.com/ragnar.htm, is an article titled "Might Is Right." It contains five sections, the last of which consists of Mr. Redbeard's version of the beatitudes. He has not compiled these for the sake of frivolity; he appears to be intensely serious about them. Before we analyze those, however, we will consider the preliminary material he provides in the first four sections. The author of the words that follow seems to fancy himself as an epic poet, although of considerably diminished dimensions, since the volume of his work cannot match Homer or Vergil. He begins thus: "In this arid wilderness of steel and stone, I raise my voice that you may hear. To the East and to the West I beckon. To the North and to the South I show a sign proclaiming: Death to the weaklings, wealth to the strong!"

Precisely who is going to listen to such a message? It might be of interest to a few tinhorn dictators and power-hungry megalomaniacs, but the average person is probably going to chuckle. In actuality, physically infirm individuals have been known to wield great power, and wealth usually winds up in the hands of the clever rather than the

strong. A few centuries ago, those who could fight and win a battle got the spoils, but civilization no longer operates in such a manner—in most countries.

Ragnar rants on that he is going to challenge the laws of men and of God, which seems rather futile. The laws of God will not change regardless of how much vituperative rhetoric spews forth from his computer keyboard. Probably, few of the laws of man will change, either, despite his dislike of them.

He writes: "I request reason for your golden rule, and ask the why and the wherefore of your Ten Commands." This is an amazing request in light of the fact that he provides no rationale whatever for anything he believes. He does not cite any scholars, any case studies, or any experiments which show conclusively that his way is best. In fact, proof is entirely against him, which probably explains his silence. Do we have reasons for the Ten Commandments? Certainly! They work. The first three prohibit the worshipping of false gods and making idols. Why should people waste their time honoring and serving what does not even exist? If an appeal to intelligence is to be made, certainly the first three commandments make sense.

The last six are very practical. Does Mr. Redbeard want a *stronger* man than he is to steal his property or his wife? Does he want one *stronger* than he is to commit adultery with her at will? Perhaps he will not mind if someone bears false witness against him in a court of law, and he stands convicted of a crime he did not commit. Surely, he could not object to a *strong* man killing him just because he is in that individual's way. Can he not see the chaos that would result from his philosophy? The commandments are for everyone's protection. By Redbeard's philosophy we could dispense with murder trials. The 300-pound former football player who raped and killed a teenage girl need not be tried; he was stronger than she was.

No one is forced to treat others the way they would like to be treated, but it is a very good system—one which promotes the general welfare of all. Families are more harmonious; businesses operate more smoothly. Better relationships result from following the "golden rule" (Mat. 7:12) than when people selfishly walk around with chips on their shoulders, snapping at everyone and everything. Jesus provided teaching that improves society, as experience shows.

One wonders if the writer of all this haughty drivel has been ingesting certain drugs (or reading Edgar Allan Poe) when he boasts: "I

gaze into the glassy eye of your fearsome Jehovah and pluck him by the beard; I uplift a broadaxe and split open his worm-eaten skull.” These descriptions comprise vivid verbiage, but the bragging seems a bit hollow, since Jehovah has remained unscathed and continues to rule on His throne. Voltaire thought he would destroy the Bible; some have announced (apparently, with a straight face): “God is dead” (Nietzsche, for example). Someone is always coming along, thinking himself to be strong enough to take on and topple God. Of a truth, however, God has not been, nor will be, moved by *weak* men, made of dust.

Section 2

“Behold the crucifix; what does it symbolize? Pallid incompetence hanging on a tree.” To the contrary, the sacrifice of Jesus was the most competent, most powerful, and most effective act in the history of the world. We have no desire to defend the use of crucifixes. However we are always ready to defend Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). The only thing that Mr. Redbeard has proven is that he is a Greek (non-Jewish)—and that what Paul wrote several centuries ago still applies to him: to Greeks the cross is foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23).

That the Bible teaches the Deity of Christ cannot be denied. Jesus on the cross is not indicative of weakness. He had the power to elude His captors, as well as avoiding the crucifixion (John 10:17-18). When evil and envious men came to arrest Jesus, His disciples were prepared to fight. Jesus, however, insisted: “Put up again thy sword into his place... Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Mat. 26:52-53).

Perhaps Mr. Redbeard has been so vainly entrenched in seeking Jehovah’s whiskers that he has overlooked John 12:27: “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.” Jesus had the resources to escape the cross altogether or to depart from it any time He desired. What we see in Jesus’ sacrifice on the tree is not weakness, but unfathomable strength. To have more than sufficient power and **not** use it can scarcely be described as “pallid incompetence.” Jesus possessed more strength in His smallest fingernail than Mr. Redbeard could muster with his entire body (and the bodies of all those who erroneously agree with him).

The cross was thoroughly sufficient in that Jesus atoned for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). It would be difficult to imagine greater competency. His innocent blood is sufficient to wash away the sins of the world: "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*" (Heb. 9:12). Yes, Jesus "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever" (Heb. 10:12). Since Mr. Redbeard styles himself an authority on competence, perhaps he could some day provide an example of it for us. Railing against the Bible proves neither intelligence nor innovation. Donkeys likewise bray their complaints; they offer, however, no positive solutions to their perceived problems.

"The chief duty of every new age is to upraise new men to determine its liberties...." Might we ask who assigned this duty? How would recondite Ragnar set about to prove this point? A duty is an obligation, which implies an objective source. If man originated this requirement, then it might be dispensed with, in which it would no longer be the chief duty of every new age. Just because a moral precept is old does not make it worthless. Does Mr. Redbeard desire thieves to make of his home a target? Does he agree with the commandment prohibiting stealing, or should we throw that one out in this generation's attempt to determine its liberties? He enjoys speaking in the abstract; some specific applications of his theories might be helpful.

"In nature the wages of sin are always **death**. Nature does not love the wrong doer, but endeavors in every way to destroy him." Really? Was it nature that brought Ted Bundy to justice—or law enforcement agencies using their intellect? And what of all of the unsolved murders that every major city has? How did nature punish the former Symbionese Liberation Army member that had been a respectable housewife for the past twenty years?

Nature is presented here as some sort of impersonal god, which somehow (though how is never clear) keeps track of real wrongdoing and metes out punishment. Why would a non-rational, non-feeling thing care about justice? If a woman is kidnapped, raped, and murdered, does the sidewalk from which she was abducted shed tears? Did the trees hear her screams and begin plotting their revenge? Did the field which received her lifeless body decree **death** to the perverted soul who violated and destroyed her freedom, her body, and her life? The guilty often go unpunished here on earth, but God (who possesses both

intellect and feeling) will bring all of these things into judgment (2 Cor. 5:10).

“Only Jews and Christs and other degenerates think that rejuvenation can ever come through law and prayer. ‘All the tears of the martyrs might just as well have never been shed.’” Does he mean *Christians* instead of *Christs*? Here Mr. Redeard has engaged in name-calling. It is not sufficient to take intellectual issue with the doctrines and tenets of the Bible; he must resort to calling believers *degenerates*, which is a strange designation for those who keep society from being totally chaotic. Law is not the answer to every social ill, but it is necessary. While all societies do not have the same laws, can this critic point out to us a society with **no** laws that has somehow managed to thrive regardless?

Prayer has accomplished great things through the ages. People have been delivered from harm (David, according to Psalms), lives have been restored, battles have been won. No one has ever said that rejuvenation can be accomplished solely through prayer, but it plays a part. Ragnar rails against the martyrs, but their steadfastness impressed the world. Their positive lives and their refusal to deny their convictions changed the world for the better. Any empire-craving megalomaniac (Adolph Hitler), nihilist, or two-bit terrorist can change the world for the worse.

Section 3

“Love one another”, [*sic*] you say, is this the supreme law. But what power has made it so? Upon what rational authority does the gospel of love rest? Is it even possible of practice, and what would result from its universal application to active affairs? Why should I not hate mine enemies and hunt them down like the wild beasts they are? If I “love” them, does not that place me at their mercy? Is it natural for enemies to “do good” unto each other?

If it were natural for one to do good to one’s enemies, it would be unnecessary to teach this doctrine; the *natural* thing is to respond in kind to the way one is treated, as David was about to do to Nabal. When their request for food was denied and Nabal hurled insults at David and his men, David was determined to get even (perhaps, even more than even). However Nabal’s wise wife prevented, through kindness, the slaughter that had been appointed them. David blessed Abigail “because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand” (1 Sam. 25:33—NKJV).

By morning David would have killed Nabal and every male belonging to him (1 Sam. 25:34). Abigail's kindness prevented the destruction of this people. Nabal was harsh and insulting, Abigail was kind and generous. Which approach works better with people?

If David had killed all of the males, what good would such an action have produced? Some innocent men would have been put to death, and their wives would have been bereaved. Hatred begets hatred, as continual conflicts in Ireland and the Middle East have demonstrated. When does revenge ever end? Which response of David's was *good*: the one in which many would have been slaughtered, or the one in which he spared Nabal?

What power has made "love one another" the supreme law? God (the One who is all-powerful) has decreed this law, and Jesus (the One who died for the sins of mankind) taught it (John 13:34-35). Acting out of love for others makes for a better world. It is difficult to hate someone who is kind to you (Abigail, for instance), although some people can manage it anyway. Love, however, does not negate God's system of justice. Criminals are still to be punished for their crimes—even if they afterward repent.

Mr. Redbeard prefers, if someone smites him on the cheek, to "smash him down!" He continues: "Give him blow for blow... with compound interest liberally added thereunto! Eye for eye, tooth for tooth—aye, four-fold, a hundred-fold! Make yourself the Terror to your adversary.... Thus shall you make yourself respected in all the walks of life." Can one imagine how this poor man's wife fares? "I said no meat loaf on Monday nights. What are you trying to do to me anyway?" One wonders how she would look after receiving four-fold vengeance. What would happen to the poor thing if she were paid back a hundred-fold for forgetting to tape his favorite television show while he was out spending the night with his drinking buddies? People such as Mr. Redbeard described are neither respected nor loved; they are feared.

He contends that men need conflict and "powerful enemies" to keep their skills sharp. "If all men had treated each other with brotherly love since the beginning, what would have been the result now?" We must admit that we do not know, but we do know what the result is in the world *without* brotherly love, beginning with Cain's murder of the righteous Abel. Paul describes how love behaves towards others in Romans 13:9; therefore, we know that a lack of brotherly love causes

adultery, theft, bearing false witness, covetousness, and murder—not only the murder of individuals, but in many cases genocide.

Philip was not loved by his brother Herod, who stole his wife (Mark 6:17-18). Jacob stole his brother's birthright (Gen. 27). How, exactly, did these acts bring out their best qualities? Ragnar merely asserts that his way is best. He does not provide any concrete examples that bring his theory out of the realm of the hypothetical. Most people have observed that his philosophy does not work. Do today's women have better qualities because rapists exist as a source of conflict? Was Tamar forever a sharper individual because Amnon humbled her (2 Sam. 13)? Most people have decried man's inhumanity to man (and woman), but Mr. Redbeard seems to glory in it.

Section 4

“Why not go forward daring all things, to conquer or to die? Is it not better to perish than to serve? ‘Liberty or Death’ is not a meaningless phrase.” Is this what life is about—conquering others? What a grim outlook! And what happens when, like Alexander, we find no more worlds to conquer? There goes all of the mental acumen we laboriously obtained, and we are doomed to terminal boredom. Is it better to perish than to serve? The Gibeonites weighed their options and decided that, where there is life, there is hope (Jos. 9). They chose servanthood over certain death. How many people would choose death for their children? What value inheres in being proud and dead? Who will remember or care in thirty years? Life means opportunity.

When Patrick Henry said, “Give me liberty or give me death,” it was a call to arms to fight an oppressive regime. Would he have said these words under all circumstances? The Gibeonites had no chance of success if they chose to fight against God. The colonists had a reasonable expectation that they might win. Joshua and the Israelites were in the land; the British lived across the ocean. The two situations are not parallel. Those who thought as Mr. Redbeard does (the other cities in the land) did attack Israel, and they and their posterity all perished. We are unable to take a survey to see how satisfied with their course of action they were.

“All men lead dishonorable lives that serve a master with hand or brain.” Well, then, Mr. Redbeard is living a dishonorable life, since he serves Satan. All of us serve one or the other, according to Romans 6:17-23. Even the free-wheeling Bob Dylan recognized that we “Gotta

Serve Somebody” (1979). How often have we heard it said that someone is a slave to his passions? Alexander the Great killed his childhood friend in a fit of anger, as other kings have been known to do. He could conquer the world, but he remained a slave to his own anger (Pro. 16:32). Come to think of it, Ragnar’s rhetoric sounds as though he might have the same problem. By his own logic, he who serves the master known as *anger* leads a dishonorable life.

Inverted Beatitudes

The last section of this document contains the beatitudes that, by now, will not be too surprising to the reader. Most of them center around physical strength.

1. “Blessed are the strong, for they shall possess the earth. Cursed are the weak, for they shall inherit the yoke.” This cutesy statement sounds right—if the reader does not stop to think about it. Were Pharaoh and the Egyptians stronger than Israel? Yet God’s people walked away a free people (Exo. 13). The cities of Canaan were well fortified, and giants dwelt there (Num. 13:32-33), but Israel conquered the land. The youth David, armed with only a sling, defeated the giant Goliath, who was dressed in full battle gear (1 Sam. 17). Christians, without fighting the Romans in a single battle, prevailed against them nevertheless. Truly, “the race *is* not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong” (Ecc. 9:11).

2. “Blessed are the powerful, for they shall be revered among men. Cursed are the feeble, for they shall be blotted out.” Some reverence the powerful, but eventually someone more powerful (or clever) comes along. Who was mightier than Samson? Delilah was no match for his physical strength, but she brought about his downfall. Has Mr. Redbeard ever heard of people cheering for the underdog? The feeble (Mephibosheth) are often pitied and provided for by those who have generosity of heart. Were the terrorists the most powerful on September 11th? Do we reverence them? Or did the nation not, rather, rally around the feeble survivors?

3. “Blessed are the bold, for they shall be masters of the world. Cursed are the humble, for they shall be trodden under hoofs.” For several months the bold (Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda cronies) have been hiding out in caves and living in fear. Some people have much more wealth and power than they do common sense. The humble are aware of their limitations; they are the ones who are often truly ad-

mired. (There is a time for spiritual boldness, as the apostles demonstrate in Acts 4).

4. “Blessed are the victorious, for victory is the basis of right. Cursed are the vanquished, for they shall be vassals forever.” So Hitler was right when he conquered most of Europe? The Japanese were right when they won their victory at Pearl Harbor? These beatitudes do not even provide for good nonsense. This is the philosophy that “Whatever is, is right” (Fatalism). This philosophy would lead to lawlessness at its worse. No civilization could survive it.

5. “Blessed are the battle-blooded. Beauty shall smile upon them. Cursed are the poor in spirit, for they shall be spat upon.” These two do not contradict one another. Few have ever lived their lives more under siege than the Lord. He was questioned, spied upon, and challenged at every opportunity. More than once, His death was sought. His blood is truly a thing of beauty, because through it He obtained redemption for us all (Heb. 9:12). Christians remember and honor that death each week by partaking of the symbols of His body and blood. No one has ever possessed more courage than to face His death as Jesus did. Yet He was also poor in spirit and spat upon. He did not allow His anger to control Him or use His power to strike back. His strength is unfathomable, but He endured to redeem us from sin.

6. “Blessed are the audacious, for they have imbibed true wisdom. Cursed are the obedient, for they shall breed creepings.” Many of the *audacious* have not imbibed any wisdom whatsoever; they are merely obnoxious creeps. “The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning is the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Pro. 1:7). Genuine wisdom is linked to the fear of the Lord. Mr. Redbeard does not have the inclination to fear one of superior power. At one and the same time, he appears to argue that those who are powerful should be revered, yet he lacks proper respect for God. Furthermore, how can we count the Master of the world as blessed and then refuse to submit?

7. “Blessed are the iron-handed; the unfit shall flee before them. Cursed are the haters of battle; subjugation is their portion.” This is equivalent to saying, “We should all fight one another until we are dead.” If we should all fight and never be subjugated (“liberty or death”), then the destruction of the world is inevitable. Only the victors remain standing.

8. "Blessed are the destroyers of false hope; they are the true messiahs. Cursed are the God-adorers; they shall be shorn sheep." Well, at long last this diatribe moves in a little bit different direction. Apparently, Ragnar fancies himself as a true Messiah because he can spew invective like a person choking on something too large to swallow. He has not come close to destroying *genuine* hope. The hope of the Christian is built upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The evidence is solid and has withstood the quibbles of atheists, whose alternate theories have always quickly crumbled. How odd that those who laud fighting and destruction consider themselves to be Messiahs when all they leave in their wake are dead bodies. This *beatitude* sounds like one of George Orwell's slogans from *1984*: Death is liberty.

9. "Blessed are the valiant, for they shall obtain great treasure. Cursed are the believers in good and evil, for they are frightened by shadows." The first statement is correct. Those who are valiant for the Lord shall be rewarded (1 Sam. 18:17). The battles are spiritual, and the rewards eternal. The second part of this *beatitude* is puzzling. Are we not to believe in good and evil? Is there no such thing? If not, then all actions are the same. Saving the life of a drowning child is the same as shooting to death a crippled man. The works of Florence Nightingale and Jeffrey Dahmer are equal. Jonas Salk's vaccine and the medieval torture device, known as the rack, become identical. Saddam Hussein's Elite Guard and the Mayo Clinic are really no different from one another. Hippocrates' and Jack the Ripper's deeds were, in essence, the same. With this philosophy, why should we even care if the bank robbers shoot the Lone Ranger and Tonto? This philosophy of Ragnar's reeks with madness.

10. "Blessed are those who believe in nothing; never shall it terrorize their minds. Cursed are the 'lambs of god' they shall be bleed [*sic*] 'whiter than snow.'" We would hate for Redbeard's animosity level to kick into high gear. He wants all men to believe in nothing—and to fight for nothing, to boot. We would not be surprised to learn that this man has overfed on Nietzsche or Hemingway. He is identifying himself here as a nihilist. And this is supposed to be a *beatitude*? Does this man sound blessed to anybody? His entire document is permeated with bitterness and wrath. The reader can discern that there is not so much as a flicker of joy in his life or teachings.

11. “Blessed is the man who has powerful enemies they shall make him a hero. Cursed is he who ‘doeth good’ unto others; he shall be despised.” His enemies shall only make him a hero if they oblige him by losing out. How can one hunt down one’s enemies like the wild beasts that they are and expect them to make him a hero? Jesus went about doing good (Acts 10:38), and He was despised—but only by a few *powerful* men, who sought His death. Most people admire and respect those who do good, as the women admired Dorcas (Acts 9:36-39). This one is easily resolved. Which do people prefer: the obnoxious neighbor who blows all of his grass and leaves into someone else’s yard and hosts raucous parties or the one who is cheerful and occasionally brings over a dessert?

12. “Blessed is the man whose foot is swift to serve a friend; he is a friend in deed. Cursed are the organizers of charities; they are propagators of plagues.” The amazing thing is that this man would have a friend. Not content with having inverted several Scriptures, now Mr. Redbeard begins to take issue with Benjamin Franklin, who wrote: “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” Naturally, no one enjoys an abused friendship, but when someone has an unusual (and perhaps emergency) need, it is comforting to know that there are some we may rely on. Ragnar recoils at such a notion. Refuse to help others—what a motto. Only a self-sufficient, narcissistic egotist could be so callous. He is surely a distant relative of the rich young fool who was totally self-absorbed (Luke 12:15-20).

13. “Blessed are the wise and brave, for in the struggle they shall win. Cursed are the unfit, for they shall be righteously exterminated.” Thanks, Adolph, for the insight. Yes! Let us first exterminate the mentally retarded; they are just a drain on society. Next, we should bomb the prosthetics factories. If people cannot make it on their own, they deserve to die. That goes for anyone who wears glasses or contact lenses, too. Kill all of those in hospitals and do away with them. These people are weak and sick; the cost is too great to keep them around. The elderly have too much money and are often infirm; why not dispatch them and impound their assets? The elderly might be defined as anyone over 30, as per *Logan’s Run*. What about babies and infants? They cannot take care of themselves, either. People smile and coo at them—how sickening! All of these are unfit and should be righteously exterminated! After the work is done, we should have a society of healthy individuals in their twenties. Is this a wise course, which leads to joy?

14. "Blessed are the sires of noble maidens; they are the salt of the Earth. Cursed the mothers of strumous [my dictionary lacks this word, also, gws] tenderlings, for they shall be ashamed." What this *beatitude* means is anybody's guess.

15. "Blessed are the mighty-minded, for they shall ride the whirlwinds. Cursed are those who teach lies for truth and truth for lies, for they are—abomination." Behold, Ragnar inadvertently stumbled into a biblical truth here (Isa. 5:20)! Now he just needs to realize he is the one on the side of error. As for the *mighty-minded*, he seems to be a combination of Robert Schuller (anything is possible), Ted Turner (I want to own the world), and Charles Darwin (might makes right).

16. "Blessed are the unmerciful; their posterity shall own the world. Cursed are the famous wiselings; their seed shall perish off the Earth." Those who grant no mercy shall receive none on the Day of Judgment. Who does he mean by "famous wiselings": Solomon, Jesus, Paul? Their names have already lasted thousands of years? What glory will Redbeard have? The best he can hope for is to achieve notoriety for being infamous; he will never accomplish anything good, noble, or wise with his current philosophy.

CONCLUSION

The beatitudes examined above are certainly excessive, and it is unlikely that very many people would take them seriously, although some probably do. They might not state them as harshly, but they still believe in nothing and find little distinction between good and evil. The theory of evolution, taught by many as factual in our public schools is a contributing factor to this philosophy. If we are here as the result of a cosmic accident, objectivity cannot exist. No ground or basis for morality and ethics is available except for what each individual *feels* about it. Under evolution, good and evil cannot exist. "Might makes right," "Whatever is, is right," and "The survival of the fittest" become the obvious conclusion. Moral and ethical chaos reign, and spirituality is merely a pretentious way of viewing ourselves as better than we really are. Mr. Redbeard is to be congratulated for voicing the stark applications of evolution.

The devil has unleashed some beatitudes that are less brutal in appearance and much more accepted by the general populace, as well as some members of the body of Christ. Those who would reject the Redbeard philosophy will sometimes subscribe to these.

1. Blessed are those who trust their feelings about religious matters (Jer. 17:9; Pro. 28:26).
2. Blessed are those who do judge neither the doctrine nor morality of others (John 7:24).
3. Blessed are those who are pleased with their prosperity and creature comforts (1 Tim. 6).
4. Blessed are those who keep to themselves and refuse to interfere with other people's business (1 Cor. 10:24).
5. Blessed are those who refuse to pester their neighbors and co-workers with the gospel (Rom. 1:14).
6. Blessed are those who are not so fanatical that they have memorized portions of the Scriptures so they can self-righteously repeat them to others (Heb. 5:12).
7. Blessed are those who are not so legalistic as to discern between truth and error (Eph. 4:14).
8. Blessed are those who know that God is, and the Bible is His Word, and that they need to obey—but are willing to do it tomorrow (2 Cor. 6:2).

Let us draw near to God by studying carefully His Word and implementing it in our lives. If we truly hunger and thirst after righteousness, we can avoid those erroneous notions that Satan tries to foist upon us. Let us take to heart the fact that we face a powerful enemy every day, whose primary objective is to destroy our souls. Let us, therefore, be sober and vigilant, because he is an adversary who seeks to devour us (1 Pet. 5:8). Our worst failing would be to be ignorant of His devices (2 Cor. 2:11). "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph. 6:10). Only by putting on the whole armor of God can we prepare ourselves properly for eternity (Eph. 6:10-18).

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise specified. Redbeard, Ragnar. "Might Is Right." Home page. 14 March 2002 <http://www.realsatanism.com/ragnar.htm>.