

The Beatitudes

And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him: and He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying,

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

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.

Matthew 5:1-12.

A. W. Pink

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It is indeed blessed to observe how the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ opens. Christ began not by pronouncing maledictions on the wicked, but benedictions on His people. How like Him was this, to whom “judgment” is a “strange work!” Nevertheless, later, we also hear Him pronouncing “woe” after woe upon the enemies of God: Matthew 23. It was not to the multitude at large that the Redeemer first spoke, but to the elect, who had a special claim upon Him, as given by the Father’s love to Him (John 17:9, 10). Nor was it to the favoured apostles He addressed His opening remarks, but rather to the poor of the flock, the afflicted in soul, those who were conscious of their deep need. Therein He has left an example for all His under shepherds: “Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees;” “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God” (Isa. 25:3; 40:1).

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” Matthew 5:3.

In these words Christ began to draw a picture of those characters upon whom the Divine benediction rests. It is a composite picture, each line in it accentuating some distinct spiritual feature; and with the whole we should honestly and carefully *compare ourselves*. At what complete variance is this declaration of Christ’s from the popular view among men! The idea which commonly obtains, the world over, is, Blessed are the rich, for theirs is the kingdom of the world. But Christ says the flat contrary: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” which is infinitely better than all the kingdoms of the earth; and herein we may see that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 1). Who before Christ ever regarded the poor in spirit as the blessed or happy ones of the earth? And who, except genuine Christians, do so today? How this opening word struck the keynote of all the subsequent teaching of Him who was Himself born in a stable: not what a man does, but what he *is* in the sight of God.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” There is a vast difference between this and being hard up in our circumstances. There is no virtue (and often no disgrace) in financial poverty as such, nor does it, of itself, produce humility of heart, for anyone who has any real acquaintance with both classes soon discovers there is just as much pride in the indigent as there is in the opulent. This poverty of spirit is a fruit that grows on no merely natural tree. It is a spiritual grace wrought by the Holy Spirit in those whom He renews. By nature we are well pleased with ourselves, and mad enough to think that we deserve something good at the hands of God. Let men but conduct themselves decently in a civil way, keeping themselves from grosser sins, and they are rich in spirit, pride filling their hearts, and they are self-righteous. And nothing short of a miracle of grace can change the course of this stream.

Nor is real poverty of spirit to be found among the great majority of the religionists of the day: very much the reverse. How often we see advertised a conference for “promoting the higher life,” but who ever heard of one for furthering the *lowly* life? Many books are telling us how to be “filled with the Spirit,” but where can we find one setting forth what it means to be spiritually emptied—emptied of self-confidence, self-importance, and self-righteousness? Alas, if it be true that, “That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15), it is equally true that what is of great price in His sight is despised by men—by none more so than by modern Pharisees, who now hold nearly all the positions of prominence in Christendom. Almost all of the so-called “ministry” of this generation feeds pride, instead of starving the flesh; puffs up, rather than abases; and anything which is calculated to search and strip is frowned upon by the pulpit and is unpopular with the pew.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” And *what is* poverty of spirit? It is the opposite of that haughty, self-assertive and self-sufficient disposition which the world so much admires and praises. It is the very reverse of that independent and defiant attitude which refuses to bow to God, which determines to brave things out, which says with Pharaoh, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His

voice?” To be “poor in spirit” is to realize that I have nothing, am nothing, and can do nothing, and have need of all things. Poverty of spirit is a consciousness of my emptiness, the result of the Spirit’s work within. It issues from the painful discovery that all my righteousnesses are as filthy rags. It follows the awakening that my best performances are unacceptable, yea, an abomination to the thrice Holy One. Poverty of spirit evidences itself by its bringing the individual into the dust before God, acknowledging his utter helplessness and deservingness of hell. It corresponds to the initial awakening of the prodigal in the far country, when he “began to be *in want*.”

God’s great salvation is free, “without money and without price.” This is a most merciful provision of Divine grace, for were God to offer salvation for sale no sinner could secure it, seeing that he has nothing with which he could possibly purchase it. But the vast majority are insensible of this, yea, all of us are until the Holy Spirit opens our sin-blinded eyes. It is only those who have passed from death unto life who become conscious of their poverty, take the place of beggars, are glad to receive Divine charity, and begin to seek the true riches. Thus “the *poor* have the Gospel preached to them” (Matthew 11:5): preached not only to their ears, but to their hearts!

Poverty of spirit may be termed the negative side of faith. It is that realization of my utter worthlessness which precedes the laying hold of Christ, the eating of His flesh and drinking His blood. It is the Spirit emptying the heart of self that Christ may fill it: it is a sense of need and destitution. This first Beatitude, then, is foundational, describing a fundamental trait which is found in every regenerated soul. The one who is poor in spirit is nothing in his own eyes, and feels that his proper place is in the dust before God. He may, through false teaching or worldliness, leave this place, but God knows how to bring him back; and in His faithfulness and love He will do so, for it is the place of blessing for His children. How to cultivate this God-honouring spirit is revealed in Matthew 11:29.

He who is in possession of this poverty of spirit is pronounced

“blessed.” He is so because he now has a disposition the very opposite of what was his by nature, because he has in himself the first sure evidence that a Divine work of grace has been wrought in his heart, because he is an heir of the “kingdom of heaven”—the kingdom of grace here, the kingdom of glory hereafter. Many are the gracious promises addressed to the poor in spirit. “I am poor and needy: yet the Lord thinketh upon me: Thou art my help and my deliverer” (Psa. 40:17), “The Lord heareth the poor” (Psa. 69:33), “He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy” (Psa. 72:13), “Yet setteth He the poor on high from affliction” (Psa. 107:41), “I will satisfy her poor with bread” (Psa. 132:15), “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word” (Isa. 66:2). Let such favours as these stir us up to pray earnestly for more of this poverty of spirit.

“Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted”
Matthew 5:4.

Mourning is hateful and irksome to poor human nature: from suffering and sadness our spirits instinctively shrink. It is natural for us to seek the society of the cheerful and joyous. The verse now before us presents an anomaly to the unregenerate, yet is it sweet music to the ears of God’s elect: if “blessed” why do they “mourn?” If they mourn, how can they be blessed? Only the child of God has the key to this paradox, for “happy are they who sorrow” is at complete variance with the world’s logic. Men have, in all places and in all ages, deemed the prosperous and the gay to be the happy ones, but Christ pronounces blessed those who are poor in spirit and who mourn.

Now it is obvious that it is not every species of mourning which is here referred to. There are thousands of mourners in the world today who do not come within the scope of our text: those mourning over blighted hopes, over financial reverses, over the loss of loved ones. But alas, so far from many of *them* coming beneath this Divine benediction, they are under God’s condemnation; nor is there any promise that such shall ever be

Divinely “comforted.” There are three kinds of “mourning” referred to in the Scriptures: a *natural*, such as we have just referred to above; a *sinful*, which is a disconsolate and inordinate grief, refusing to be comforted, or a hopeless remorse like that of Judas; and a *gracious*, a “godly sorrow,” of which the Holy Spirit is the Author.

The “mourning” of our text is a *spiritual* one. The previous verse indicates clearly the line of thought here: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Yes, “Blessed are the poor,” not the poor in purse, but the poor in heart: those who realize themselves to be spiritual bankrupts in themselves, paupers before God. That felt poverty of spirit is the very opposite of the Laodiceanism which is so rife today, that self-complacency which says, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” In like manner it is *spiritual mourning* which is in view here. Further proof of this is found in the fact that Christ pronounces these mourners “blessed.” They are so because the Spirit of God has wrought a work of grace within them, and hence they have been awakened to see and feel their lost condition. They are “blessed” because God does not leave them at that point: “they shall be comforted.”

“Blessed are they that mourn.” The first reference is to that initial mourning which ever precedes a genuine conversion, for there must be a real sense of sin before the remedy for it will even be desired. Thousands acknowledge that they are sinners, who have never *mourned over* the fact. Take the woman of Luke vii, who washed the Saviour’s feet with her tears: have you ever shed any over your sins? Take the prodigal in Luke 15: before he left the far country he said, “I will arise and go unto my Father and say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee, And am no more worthy to be called Thy son”—where shall we find those today with this sense of their sinnership? Take the publican of Luke 18: why did he “smite upon his breast” and say “God be merciful to me a sinner?” Because he felt the plague of his own heart. So of the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost: they were “pricked in their heart, and *cried out.*”

This “mourning” springs from a sense of sin, from a tender conscience, from a broken heart. It is a godly sorrow over rebellion against God and hostility to His will. In some cases it is grief over the very morality in which the heart has trusted, over the self-righteousness which has caused such complacency. This “mourning” is the agonizing realization that it was *my* sins which nailed to the Cross the Lord of glory. When Israel shall, by faith, see Christ, “they shall mourn for Him” (Zech. 12:10). It is such tears and groans which prepare the heart to truly welcome and receive the “balm of Gilead,” the comfort of the Gospel. It is, then, a mourning over the felt destitution of our spiritual state, and over the iniquities that have separated between us and God. Such mourning always goes side by side with conscious poverty of spirit.

But this “mourning” is by no means to be confined unto the initial experience of conviction and contrition, for observe the tense of the verb: it is not “have mourned,” but “mourn”—a present and continuous experience. The Christian himself has much to mourn over. The sins which he now commits—both of omission and commission—are a sense of daily grief to him, or should be, and *will* be, if his conscience is kept tender. An ever-deepening discovery of the depravity of his nature, the plague of his heart, the sea of corruption within—ever polluting all that he does—deeply exercises him. Consciousness of the surgings of unbelief, the swellings of pride, the coldness of his love, and his paucity of fruit, make him cry, “O wretched man that I am.” A humbling recollection of past offences: “Wherefore remember that ye being *in time past*” (Eph. 2:11).

Yes, “Ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves *groan* within ourselves” (Rom. 8:23). Does not the Christian groan under the disciplining rod of the Father: “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous” (Heb. 12:11). And is he not deeply grieved by the awful dishonour which is now done to the Lord Jesus on every hand? The fact is that the closer the Christian lives to God, the more will he mourn over all that dishonours Him: with the Psalmist he will

say, “Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake Thy law” (Psa. 119:53), and with Jeremiah, “My soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eyes shall weep sore and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock is carried away captive” (13:17). But blessed be God, it is written, “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof” (Ezek. 9:4). So too there is a sympathetic mourning over the sufferings of others: “Weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15).

But let us return to the primary thought of our verse: “Blessed are they that mourn” has immediate reference to the convicted soul sorrowing over his sins. And here it is most important to note that Christ does not pronounce them “blessed” simply because they are mourners, but because they are *such* mourners as “shall be *comforted*.” There are not a few in Christendom today who glory in their grief and attempt to find comfort in their own inward wretchedness—as well seek health from our sicknesses. True comfort is not to be found in anything in self—no, not in perceiving our own vileness—but in *Christ* alone. Distress of soul is by no means always the same thing as evangelical repentance, as is clear from the case of Cain (Gen. 4:13). But where the Spirit produces in the heart a godly sorrow for sin, He does not leave him there, but brings him to look away from sin to the Lamb of God, and then he *is* “comforted.” The Gospel promises no mercy except to those who forsake sin and close with Christ.

“They shall be comforted.” This gracious promise receives its fulfilment, first, in that Divine consolation which immediately follows a sound conversion (i.e. one that is preceded by conviction and contrition), namely the removal of that conscious load of guilt which lies as an intolerable burden on the conscience. It finds its accomplishment in the Spirit’s application of the Gospel of God’s grace to the one whom He has convicted of his dire need of a Saviour. Then it is that Christ speaks the word of power, “Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy

laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28)—observe that His language clearly presupposes the feeling of sin to be a “burden” as that which impels to Him for relief; it is to the *sin-sick* heart that Christ gives rest. This “comfort” issues in a sense of a free and full forgiveness through the merits of the atoning blood of Christ. This Divine comfort is the peace of God which passeth all understanding, filling the heart of one who is now assured that he is “accepted in the Beloved.” First God wounds and then heals.

Second, there is a *continual* “comforting” of the mourning saint by the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter. The one who sorrows over his departures from Christ is comforted by the assurance that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The one who mourns under the chastening rod of God is comforted by the promise, “afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:11). The one who grieves over the awful dishonour done to his Lord in the religious world is comforted by the fact that Satan’s time is short, and soon Christ will bruise him beneath His feet. Third, the *final* “comfort” is when we leave this world and are done with sin for ever. Then shall “sorrow and sighing flee away.” To the rich man in hell, Abraham said of the one who had begged at his gate, “now he is *comforted*” (Luke 16:25). The best wine is reserved for the last. The “comfort” of heaven will more than compensate for all the “mourning” of earth.

From all that has been before us learn, first, the folly of looking to the wounds which sin has made in order to find consolation; view rather the purging and healing blood of Christ. Second, see the error of attempting to measure the helpfulness of the books we read or the preaching we hear by the degree of peace and joy they bring to our hearts. Yet how many there are who say, We have quite enough in the world, or in the home, to make us miserable, and we go to church for comfort. But it is to be feared that few of them are in any condition of soul to receive comfort from the Gospel: rather do they need the Law to search and convict them.

Ah, the truth is, dear friend, that very often the sermon or the article which is of most benefit is the one which causes us to get alone with God and *weep* before Him. When we have flirted with the world or indulged the lusts of the flesh the Holy Spirit gives us a rebuke or admonition. Third, mark then the inseparable connection between godly sorrow and godly joy: compare Psalms 30:5; 126:5; Proverbs 14:10; Isaiah 61:3; 2 Corinthians 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; James 2:13.

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth”
Matthew 5:5.

There has been considerable difference of opinion as to exactly what meekness consists of. When we wrote upon this verse some twelve years ago, we defined it as *humility*, but it now appears to us that that is inadequate, for there is no single term which is capable of fully expressing all that is included in this virtue. A study of its usage in Scripture reveals, first, that it is linked with and cannot be separated from *lowliness*: “Learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29); “Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called; with all lowliness and meekness” (Eph. 4:1, 2). Second, it is associated with and cannot be divorced from *gentleness*: “I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:1); “To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men” (Titus 3:2). Third, “receive with meekness the engrafted word” is opposed to “the *wrath* of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (Jam. 1:20, 21). Fourth, the Divine promise is “the meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way” (Psa. 25:9), intimating that this grace consists of a *pliant* heart and will.

Additional help in determining for us the meaning and scope of the word “meek” is to be obtained from duly noting our present verse in the light of the two preceding ones. It is to be kept steadily in mind that in these Beatitudes our Lord is describing the orderly development of God’s work of grace as it is experientially realized in the soul. First, there is a poverty of spirit: a sense of

our insufficiency and nothingness, a realization of our unworthiness and unprofitableness. Next, there is a mourning over our lost condition, sorrowing for the awfulness of our sins against God. And now we have meekness as a by-product of self-emptying and self-humiliation; or, in other words, there is a broken will and a receptive heart before God. Meekness is not only the antithesis of pride, but of stubbornness, fierceness, vengefulness. It is the taming of the lion, the making of the wolf to lie down as a kid.

Thomas Scott rightly points out that “There is a *natural* meekness of spirit, springing from love of ease, defect in sensibility and firmness, and the predominancy of other passions, which should be carefully distinguished from evangelical meekness. It is timid and pliant, easily deterred from good, and persuaded to evil; it leads to criminality in one extreme, as impetuosity of spirit does in another; it is often found in ungodly men; and it sometimes forms the grand defect in the character of pious persons, as in the case of Eli, and of Jehoshaphat. Divine grace operates in rendering such men of an opposite temper more yielding and quiet. The meekness to which the blessing is annexed is not constitutional, but *gracious*: and men of the most vehement, impetuous, irascible, and implacable dispositions, by looking to Jesus through the grace of God, learn to curb their tempers, to cease from resentment, to avoid giving offence by injurious words and actions, to make concessions and forgive injuries.”

Meekness is the opposite of *self-will* toward God, and of *ill-will* toward men. “The meek are those who quietly submit themselves before God, to His Word, to His rod, who follow His directions and comply with His designs, and are gentle toward men” (Matthew Henry). As pointed out above, this is not constitutional, but *gracious*—a precious fruit of the Spirit’s working. Godly sorrow softens the heart, so that it is made receptive to the entrance of the Word. Meekness consists in the spirit being made pliant, tractable, submissive, teachable. Speaking prophetically through Isaiah the Saviour said, “The

Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto *the meek*" (Isa. 16:1), for *they* have bowed to the authority of the Law. And again it is written, "For the Lord taketh pleasure in His people: He will beautify the meek with salvation" (Psa. 149:4).

A word or two on the fruits of meekness. First, *Godwards*. Where this grace is in the ascendant, the enmity of the carnal mind is subdued, and its possessor bears God's chastenings with quietness and patience. Illustrations thereof are seen in the cases of Aaron (Lev. 10:3), Eli (1 Sam.3:18), and David (Psa. 39:9). Supremely it was exemplified by Christ, who declared, "I am a worm, and no man" (Psa. 22:6), which had reference not only to His being humbled into the dust, but also to the fact that there was nothing in Him which resisted the judgments of God: "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). He was "led [not dragged] as a lamb to the slaughter:" when He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He was buffeted, He threatened not. He was the very King of meekness.

Second, *manwards*. Inasmuch as meekness is that spirit which has been schooled to mildness by discipline and suffering, and brought into sweet resignation to the will of God, it causes the believer to bear patiently those insults and injuries which he receives at the hands of his fellows, and makes him ready to accept instruction or admonition from the least of the saints, moving him to think more highly of others than of himself. Meekness enables the Christian to endure provocations without being inflamed by them: he remains cool when others get heated. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness: considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). This means, not with a lordly and domineering attitude, not with a harsh and censorious temper, not with a love of finding fault and desire for inflicting the discipline of the church, but with gentleness, humility and patience.

But meekness must not be confounded with weakness. True meekness is ever manifested by yieldedness to God's will, yet it will not yield a principle of righteousness or compromise with

evil. God-given meekness can also stand up for God-given rights: when God's glory is impeached, we must have a zeal which is as hot as fire. Moses was "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3), yet when he saw the Israelites dancing before the golden calf, in zeal for Jehovah's honour, he broke the two tables of stone, and put to the sword those who had transgressed. Note how firmly and boldly the apostles stood their ground in Acts 16:35-37. Above all, remember how Christ Himself, in concern for His Father's glory, made a whip of cords and drove the desecrators out of the temple. Meekness restrains from private revenge, but it in nowise conflicts with the requirements of fidelity to God, His cause, and His people.

"For they shall inherit the earth" or "land," for both the Hebrew and Greek words possess this double meaning. This promise is taken from Psalm 37:11, and may be understood in a threefold way. First, *spiritually*, as the second half of that verse intimates: "The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of *peace*." The spirit of meekness is what enables its possessor to get so much enjoyment out of his earthly portion, be it small or large. Delivered from a greedy and grasping disposition he is satisfied with such things as he has: "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked" (Psa. 37:16). Contentment of mind is one of the fruits of meekness. The haughty and covetous do not "inherit the earth," though they may own many acres of it. The humble Christian is far happier in a cottage than the wicked in a palace: "Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith" (Prov. 15:16).

Second, *literally*. The meek inherit the earth in regard of *right*, being the members of Christ, who is Lord of all. Hence, writing to the saints, Paul said, "For all things are yours; whether. . . *the world*, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours" (1 Cor. 3:21, 22). Right or title to the earth is twofold: civil and spiritual. The former is that which holds good—according to their laws and customs—before *men*, and in regard

thereof they are called lords of such lands they have a right unto in the courts. The latter is that which is approved before *God*. Adam had this spiritual right to the earth before he fell, but by his sin he forfeited it both for himself and his posterity. But Christ has regained it for all the elect, hence the apostle said, “As having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor. 6:10).

Third, *mystically*. Psalm 37:11, is an Old Testament promise with a New Testament meaning: the land of Canaan was a figure of heaven, of which meekness proves the possessor to be an heir, and for which it is an essential qualification. From what has been before us let us learn, first, the value of this spiritual grace and the need of praying for an increase of the same: “Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought His judgment: seek righteousness, *seek meekness*” (Zeph. 2:3). As a further inducement to this end, mark these precious promises: “The meek shall eat and be satisfied” (Psa. 21:26), “The Lord lifteth up the meek” (Psa. 147:6), “The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord” (Isa. 29:19). Second, see the folly of those who are so diligent in seeking earthly possessions without any regard to Christ. Since all right to the earth was lost by Adam and is only recovered by the Redeemer, until they have part in Him none can, with the comfort of a good conscience, either purchase or possess any mundane inheritance. Third, let the fact that the meek, through Christ, inherit the earth serve for a bridle against all inordinate care for the world: since we are members of Christ the supply of every need is certain, and an infinitely better portion is ours than the perishing things of time and sense.

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” Matthew 5:6.

In the first three Beatitudes we are called upon to witness the heart exercises of those who have been awakened by the Spirit of God. First, there is a sense of need, a realization of their nothingness and emptiness. Second, there is a judging of self, a consciousness of their guilt and sorrowing over their lost condition. Third, there is an end of seeking to justify themselves

before God, an abandonment of all pretences to personal merit, a taking of their place in the dust before God. And here, in the fourth, the eye of the soul is turned away from self to Another: there is a longing after that which they know they have not got and which they are conscious they urgently need. There has been much needless quibbling as to the precise import of the word “righteousness” in this verse, and it seems to us that most of the commentators have failed to grasp its fullness.

In many Old Testament passages “righteousness” is synonymous with “salvation,” as will appear from the following. “Drop down ye heavens from above, and let the skies pour down *righteousness*: let the earth open, and let them bring forth *salvation*, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it” (Isa. 45:8); “Hearken unto Me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near My *righteousness*; it shall not be far off, and My *salvation* shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion” (Isa. 46:12, 13); “My *righteousness* is near. My *salvation* is set forth, and Mine arms shall judge the people: the isles shall wait upon Me, and on Mine arms shall they trust” (Isa. 51:5): “Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment and do justice: for My *salvation* is near to come, and My *righteousness* to be revealed” (Isa. 56:1); “He hath clothed me with the garments of *salvation*, He hath covered me with the robe of *righteousness*” (Isa. 61:10). Yet after all, this does not bring us much nearer in that “salvation” is one of the most comprehensive terms to be found in the Scriptures. Let us, then, seek to define its meaning a little more closely.

Taking it in its widest latitude, to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” means to yearn after God’s favour, image, and felicity. “Righteousness” is a term denoting all spiritual blessings: “seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). More specifically, “righteousness” in our text has reference, first, to the righteousness of faith whereby a sinner is justified freely by Divine grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. As the result of his Surety’s obedience being imputed to him, the

believer stands *legally righteous* before God. As sinners who have constantly broken the Law in thought, word, and deed, we are utterly destitute of righteousness. “There is none righteous, no not one” (Rom. 3:10). But God has provided a perfect righteousness in Christ for all who believe: it is the best “robe” put upon each returning prodigal. The merits of Christ’s perfect keeping of the Law is reckoned to the account of every sinner who shelters in Him.

Second, this “righteousness,” for which the awakened sinner longs, is to be understood of *inward and sanctifying* righteousness, for as we so often point out, justification and sanctification are never to be severed. The one in whom the Spirit graciously works desires not only an *imputed* righteousness, but an *imparted* one too; he not only longs for a restoration to God’s favour, but to have God’s image renewed in him. For this twofold “righteousness” the convicted “hunger and thirst,” expressive of vehement desire, of which the soul is acutely conscious, for as in bodily hunger and thirst there are sharp pangs and an intense longing for their appeasement, so it is with the soul. First, the Spirit brings before the conscience the holy and inexorable requirements of God. Next, He convicts the soul of its destitution and guilt, so that he realizes his abject poverty and lost condition, seeing there is no hope in and from himself. And then He creates a deep hunger and thirst which causes him to lock unto and seek relief from Christ, “The Lord our righteousness.”

Like the previous ones, this fourth Beatitude describes a *dual* experience: an initial and a continuous, that which begins in the unconverted, but is perpetuated in the saved sinner. There is a repeated exercise of this grace, felt at varying intervals. The one who longed to be saved by Christ now yearns to be made like Him. Looked at in its widest aspect, this hungering and thirsting refers to that panting of the renewed heart after God (Psa. 42:1), that yearning for a closer walk with Him, that longing for more perfect conformity to the image of His Son. It tells of those aspirations of the new nature for Divine blessings which alone can strengthen, sustain and satisfy it. Our text presents such a

paradox that it is evident that no carnal mind ever invented it. Can one who has been brought into vital union with Him who is the Bread of Life and in whom all fullness dwells be found *still* hungering and thirsting? Yes, such is the experience of the renewed heart. Mark carefully the tense of the verb: it is not “Blessed are they which have,” but “Blessed are they *which do* hunger and thirst.” This has ever been the experience of God’s saints (Psa. 82:4; Phil. 3:8, 14).

“They shall be filled.” Like the first part of our text, this also has a double fulfilment: an initial, and a continuous. When God creates a hunger and thirst in the soul, it is that He may satisfy it. When the poor sinner is made to feel his need of Christ, it is that he may be drawn to and led to embrace Him. Like the prodigal who came to the Father as a penitent, the believing sinner now feeds on the One figured by the “fatted calf.” He is made to exclaim, “Surely in the Lord have I righteousness.” “They shall be filled” with the peace of God which passeth all understanding. “Filled” with that Divine blessing to which no sorrow is added. “Filled” with praise and thanksgiving unto Him who has wrought all our works in us. “Filled” with that which this poor world can neither give nor take away. “Filled” by the goodness and mercy of God, till their cup runneth over. And yet, all that is enjoyed now is but a little foretaste of what God has prepared for them that love Him: in the day to come we shall be “filled” with Divine holiness, for we shall be made “like Him” (1 John 3:2). Then shall we be done with sin for ever: then shall we “hunger *no more*, neither thirst *any more*” (Rev. 7:16).

As this fourth Beatitude has been such a storehouse of comfort to many a tried and troubled believer, let us point out the use which may be made of it by Satan-harassed believers. First, by those whose faith is little and weak. There are not a few in God’s family who sincerely long to please Him in all things and to live in no sin against their conscience, and yet they find in themselves so much distrust and despair of God’s mercy that they are conscious of much more doubting than faith, so that they are brought seriously to question their election and state before God.

Here, then, is Divine consolation for them: if they genuinely hunger and thirst after righteousness, Christ Himself pronounces them *blessed*. Those who are displeased with their unbelief, who truly desire to be purged from distrust, who long and pray for increased faith and assurance—evidencing their sincerity by diligently using all proper means—are the subjects of God’s approbation.

Second, by those whose sanctification is so imperfect. Many there be who are most anxious to please God and make conscience of all known sins, yet find in themselves so much darkness of mind, activity of rebellious corruption, forwardness in their affections. perverseness in their wills, yea, a constant proneness to all manner of sins; and, on the contrary, they can perceive so little of the fruits of sanctification, so little evidence of spiritual life, so few signs of Divine grace at work within, that they often seriously doubt if they have received any grace at all. This is a fearfully heavy burden, and greatly casts down the soul. But here is Divine consolation. Christ pronounces “blessed” not those who *are full* of righteousness, but those who “hunger and thirst” *after it*. Those who mourn over their depravity, who grieve over the plague of their hearts, who yearn for conformity to Christ—using the means constantly—are accepted of God in Christ.

Third, by the more extreme case of one who has grievously departed from God and long been a backslider, and now, conscious of his wickedness, is in despair. Satan will tell him that his case is hopeless, that he is an apostate, that hell is prepared for him and he must surely be damned; and the poor soul is ready to believe that such must really be the case. He is destitute of peace, all his evidences are eclipsed, he cannot perceive a ray of hope. Nevertheless, here is Divine comfort. If he truly mourns over his departure from God, hates himself for his backsliding, sorrows over his sins, truly desires to repent of them and longs to be reconciled to God and restored to communion with Him, then he too is among the blessed: “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”

In these Beatitudes the Lord Jesus delineates the distinguishing characteristics and privileges of those who are “His disciples indeed,” or the birthmarks by which the true subjects of His kingdom may be identified. This is only another way of saying that His design was to make known the character of those upon whom the Divine benediction rests, or that He here revealed who are the truly happy. Looking at these Beatitudes from another angle, we may regard them as furnishing a description of the nature of true happiness, and as propounding sundry rules by which it is attained. Very different indeed is Christ’s teaching here from the thoughts and the theories which obtain in the carnal mind. Instead of attributing genuine felicity unto the possession of outward things, He affirmed that it consists in the possession and cultivation of spiritual graces. It was God incarnate pouring contempt on the wisdom of this world and showing how radically opposed are its concepts to the Truth.

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”
Matthew 5:7.

Grossly have these words been perverted by merit-mongers. Those who insist that the Bible teaches salvation by works appeal to this verse, among others, in support of their pernicious error. But nothing could be less to their purpose, for there is not a word in it which affords the slightest support to their fatal delusion. Our Lord was not here describing the foundation on which rests the sinner’s hope of receiving mercy from God, but is tracing the spiritual features of His own people, among which mercifulness is a prominent one. His evident meaning was: mercy is an indispensable trait in that holy character which God has inseparably connected with the enjoyment of that happiness—both here and hereafter—which is the product of His own sovereign kindness.

The place occupied by this particular Beatitude in the series furnishes a sure key to its interpretation. The first four may be regarded as describing the *initial* exercises of heart in one who has been awakened by the Spirit, whereas the next four treat of

the *subsequent* fruits. In the preceding verse the soul is seen hungering and thirsting after Christ, and then filled by Him, whereas here we are shown the first effect and evidence of this. Having received mercy from the Lord, the saved sinner now exercises mercy unto others. It is not that God requires us to be merciful in order to obtain His mercy—that would be to overthrow the whole scheme of grace—but having been made the recipient of His wondrous grace. I cannot now but act graciously toward others. That which is signified by “they shall obtain mercy” will come before us in the sequel.

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” First, let us endeavour to define the nature of this mercy. This mercifulness upon which the Divine approbation rests is a holy compassion of soul, whereby one is moved to pity and go to the relief of another in misery. In saying that it is a compassion of soul, we mean that it causes its possessor to make the case of another his own, so that he is grieved by it, for when our heart is really touched by the state of another, we are stirred within. “It is an aversion to everything harsh, cruel, oppressive or injurious; a propensity to pity, alleviate or remove the miseries of mankind; an unwillingness to increase personal emolument or indulgence by rendering others uneasy; a willingness to forgo personal ease, interest or gratification to make others easy and happy” (Thomas Scott).

Mercifulness, then, is a gracious disposition toward our fellow creatures and fellow Christians. It is a spirit of kindness and benevolence which sympathizes with the sufferings of the afflicted, so that we weep with those that weep. It ennobles its possessor so that he tempers justice with mercy, and scorns the taking of revenge. But it is a *holy* disposition in contrast with that foolish sentimentality which flouts the requirements of justice, and which inclines many to sympathize with those in deserved misery. That is a false and unholy mercy which petitions the powers that be to cancel or modify a just and fully merited sentence which has been passed upon some flagrant offender. Therefore are we told, “And *of some* have compassion, making a

difference” (Jude 22)—king Saul defied this principle when he spared Agag. It is also a holy compassion as opposed to that partiality which is generous to some and harsh to others.

This mercifulness has not its roots in anything in the natural man. True, there are some who make no profession of being Christians in whom we often find not a little kindness of disposition, sympathy for the suffering, and a readiness to forgive those who have wronged them, yet is it merely instinctive, and though amiable there is nothing spiritual in it—instead of being subject to Divine authority it is often opposed to God’s law. That which Christ here inculcated and commended is very different from and vastly superior to natural amiability: it is such compassion as *God* approves of, which is a fruit of His Holy Spirit and is commanded in His Word. It is the result of Christ living in us. Was He moved with compassion? Did He weep with the mourner? Was He patient with the dull-witted? Then if He indwells me, that same disposition, however imperfectly manifested, must be reproduced.

This mercy is something more than a feeling: it is *an operative principle*. It not only stirs the heart, but it moves the hand to render help unto those in need, for the one cannot be severed from the other. So far from it being a well shut up or a fountain sealed, this mercy is a copious source of acts of beneficence, from which issue streams of blessing. It does not exhaust itself in profitless words, but is accompanied by helpful deeds. “But whoso hath this world’s goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17): this verse makes it clear that no work of mercy is shown to those in misery except that it proceeds from inward compassion. Thus we see what is the “mercy” which is here mentioned: it is that which exerts itself in doing good, being a fruit of the love of God shed abroad in the heart.

This mercy may, through walking after the flesh, for a time be checked and choked, but taking the general tenor of a Christian’s character and the main trend in his life, it is seen to be an unmistakable trait of the new man. “The wicked borroweth, and

payeth not again; but the righteous showeth mercy, and giveth” (Psa. 37:21). It was “mercy” in Abraham, after he had been wronged by his nephew, which caused him to go after and secure the deliverance of Lot. It was “mercy” on the part of Joseph, after his brethren had so grievously mistreated him, which moved him to freely forgive them. It was “mercy” in Moses, after Miriam had rebelled against him and the Lord had smitten her with leprosy, which moved him to cry, “Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee” (Num. 12:13). It was “mercy” in David which caused him to spare the life of his arch-enemy when the wicked Saul was in his hands. In solemn contrast, of Judas we read “he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man” (Psa. 109:16).

Were we sermonizing Matthew 5:7, our next division would be *the duties* of mercy, which are answerable to the miseries of those we should relieve, as the form and degree of its manifestation is regulated by our own station and circumstances. This mercy regards not merely the bodies of men but also their *souls*, and here again it is sharply distinguished from that natural and instinctive kind which pities and ministers to the temporal needs of sufferers, but has no concern for their eternal prospects. The preacher needs to carefully heed this fifth Beatitude: so, too, the employer and the tradesman. But we must dismiss this branch of our subject by calling attention to “he that sheweth mercy *with cheerfulness*” (Rom. 12:8), which is what gives chief value to the service rendered. If God loves a cheerful giver, it is equally true that He takes notice of the spirit in which we respond to His precepts.

A word now on *the reward*: “for they shall obtain mercy,” which, as the older theologians pointed out, is not the reward of condignity (wholly deserved), but of congruity. This gives not the least countenance to the horrible error of Rome, that by alms deeds we can make satisfaction to God for our sins. Our acts of mercy are not meritorious in the sight of God: had that been the case, Christ had said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain *justice*,” for what is meritorious is due reward by right. Our

text has nothing to do with salvation matters, but enunciates a principle pertaining to the governmental ways of God, by which we reap what we sow and have measured again to us according as we have meted out to others (Matthew 7:2). “He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour” (Prov. 21:21).

“For they shall obtain mercy.” First, there is an *inward benefit*. The one who shows mercy to others gains thereby: “the merciful man doeth good to his own soul” (Prov. 11:17). There is a personal satisfaction in the exercise of pity and benevolence, which the fullest gratification of the selfish man is not to be compared with: “he that hath mercy on the poor, *happy* is he” (Prov. 14:21). Second, he reaps mercy at the hands of his *fellows*: the overruling providence of God causes him to be dealt with mercifully by others. Third, he receives mercy from *God*: “with the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful” (Psa. 18:25) —contrast “he shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy” (Jam. 2:13). Mercy will be shown to the merciful in the Day to come (see 2 Tim. 1:16, 18; Jude 21). Then let us prayerfully heed the exhortations of Romans 12:10; Galatians 6:2; Colossians 3:12.

**“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God”
Matthew 5:8.**

This is another of the Beatitudes which has been grossly perverted by the enemies of the Lord: those who have, like their predecessors the Pharisees, posed as the champions of the Truth and boasted of a superior sanctity to that confessed by the true people of God. All through this Christian era there have been poor deluded souls who have claimed an entire purification of the old man, or have insisted that God has so completely renewed them that the carnal nature has been eradicated, and in consequence they not only commit no sins, but have no sinful desires or thoughts. But God tells us, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Of course, such people appeal to the Scriptures in support of their

vain delusion, applying to experience verses which describe the legal benefits of the Atonement, or by wresting such a one as that which is now before us.

That purity of heart does *not* mean sinlessness of life is clear from the inspired record of the history of all God's saints. Noah got drunk, Abraham equivocated, Moses disobeyed God, Job cursed the day of his birth, Elijah fled in terror from Jezebel, Peter denied Christ. Yes, perhaps someone will exclaim, but all these were before Christianity was established. True, but it has also been the same since then. Where shall we go to find a Christian of superior attainments to those of the apostle Paul? And what was *his* experience? Read Romans 7 and see. When he would do good, evil was present with him (verse 21); there was a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin (verse 23). He did, with the mind, serve the Law of God, nevertheless with the flesh he served the law of sin (verse 25). Ah, Christian reader, the truth is, one of the most conclusive evidences that we *do* possess a pure heart is to be conscious of and burdened with the impurity which still indwells us.

“Blessed are the pure in heart.” Here again we see the Lord exposing the thoughts of the natural man, who errs greatly in his ideas of what constitutes real blessedness. Therein He refutes the Pharisees, who contented themselves with a species of external ceremonialism or mere outward holiness, failing to realize that God requires “truth in the *inward* parts” (Psa. 51:6). Very solemn and searching is this sixth Beatitude, for it equally condemns most of that which now passes current for genuine religion in Christendom. How many today rest satisfied with a *head* religion, supposing that all is well if their creed be sound; and how many more have nothing better than a *hand* religion—busily engaged in what they term “Christian service.” “But the Lord looketh on the *heart*” (1 Sam. 16:7), which includes the mind, conscience, affections and will.

How is purity of heart effected? for by nature the heart of fallen man is totally depraved and corrupt, deceitful above all things and

desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). How can it be otherwise when each of us must make the humiliating confession, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa. 51:5)? This purity of heart is by no means to be restricted to inward chastity or simplicity—being without guile and deceit—but has a far more comprehensive meaning and scope. The heart of the Christian is made pure by a fourfold operation of the Holy Spirit. First, by imparting a holy nature at the new birth. Second, by bestowing a saving faith which unites its possessor to a holy Christ. Third, by sprinkling him with the precious blood of Christ, which purges his conscience. Fourth, by a protracted process of sanctification so that we, through His aid, mortify the flesh and live unto God. In consequence thereof, the believer has a sincere desire and resolution not to sin against God in thought or word or deed, but to please Him in all things.

In what measure is the heart of the Christian now made pure? Only in part during this life, relatively and not absolutely. “The believer’s understanding is *in part* purified from darkness, his judgment from error, his will from rebellion, his affections from enmity, avarice, pride, sensuality” (T. Scott). The work of Divine grace in the soul is begun here, but it is only completed hereafter (Phil. 1:6). We are not wholly perfected, having received only “the *first fruits* of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:23). Observe carefully the tense of the verb in Acts 15:9: it is not “purified their hearts by faith,” but “purifying their hearts by faith”—a continuous experience. So again “He saved us by the washing of regeneration and (not “renewal” but) *renewing* of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5). Consequently it is written “in many things we *all* stumble” (Jam. 3:2, Revised Version). Yet it is our bounden duty to use every legitimate means of purification: the daily denying of self, sincere confession of our sins, walking in the paths of righteousness.

What is this purity of heart? a question which requires a somewhat more definite answer than has been given above, where we have intimated that this sixth Beatitude contemplates both the new heart or nature received at regeneration and the transformation of character which is the effect of a Divine work

of grace in the soul. Spiritual purity may be defined as undivided affections, sincerity and genuineness, godly simplicity. It is the opposite of subtlety and duplicity, for genuine piety lays aside not only hatred and malice, but guile and hypocrisy. It is not sufficient to be pure in words and outward deportment: purity of desires, motives, intents, is what should, and in the main does, characterize the child of God. Here, then, is a most important test for each professing Christian to apply to himself: Have I been freed from the dominion of hypocrisy? Are my motives pure and intentions genuine? Are my affections set upon things above? Do I meet with the Lord's people to commune with Him or to be seen of men?

A "pure heart" is one which has a pure Object before it, being attracted by "the beauty of holiness." It is one in which the fear of the Lord has been implanted and the love of God shed abroad, and therefore it hates what He hates and loves what He loves. The purer the heart be, the more conscious it becomes of, and the more it grieves over, indwelling filth. A pure heart is one which makes conscience of foul thoughts, vile imaginations, and evil desires. It is one that mourns over pride and discontent, unbelief and coldness of affection, and weeps in secret over unholiness. Alas, how little is this *inward* purity esteemed today: the great majority of professors content themselves with a mere form of godliness, a shadow of the reality. The heaviest burden of a pure heart is the discovery that such an ocean of unclean waters still indwells him, constantly casting up mire and dirt, fouling all that he does.

Consider now the attendant blessing: the pure in heart "shall *see God*." Once again we would remind our readers that the promises attached to these Beatitudes have both a present and a future fulfilment; notably is this the case with the one now before us. Corresponding to the fact that the Christian's purity of heart is only in part in this life, but perfected in the life to come, is the experience that "Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). To "see God" is to be brought

nigh to Him (for we cannot see an object which is a vast distance from us), to be introduced into intimate intercourse with Him, which is the consequence of having the thick cloud of our transgressions blotted out, for it was our iniquities which separated us from Him (Isa. 59:2). We need scarcely say that it is a spiritual sight and not a corporeal one, a heart knowledge of and communion with God.

The pure in heart possess spiritual discernment and with the eyes of their understanding they obtain clear views of the Divine character and perceive the excellency of His attributes. When the eye is single, the whole body is full of light. It is by faith God is beheld. To “see God” also has the force of *enjoy* Him, as in John 3:36, and for that a pure heart is indispensable. That which pollutes the heart and beclouds the vision of a Christian is unjudged evil, for when any sin is “allowed” communion with God is broken, and can only be restored by genuine repentance and unsparing confession. Since, then, the privilege of seeing God is dependent upon the maintenance of the heart purity, how essential it is that we give earnest heed to the exhortations of Isaiah 1:16; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 3:15. Oh to be able to say “I have set the Lord always before me” (Psa. 16:8).

“In the Truth, the faith of which purifies the heart, they ‘see God.’ for what is that Truth but a manifestation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ—an illustrious display of the combined radiance of Divine holiness and Divine benignity! . . . They who are pure in heart ‘see God’ in this way, even in the present world; and in the future state their knowledge of God will become far more extensive and their fellowship with Him far more intimate. To borrow the words of the Psalmist, we shall ‘Behold His face in righteousness, and shall be satisfied when we awake in His likeness’ (Psa. 17:15). Then, and not till then, will the full meaning of these words be understood, ‘the pure in heart shall see God’” (J. Brown).

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” Matthew 5:9.

“The Jews, in general, regarded the Gentile nations with bitter

contempt and hatred, and they expected that, under the Messiah, there should be an uninterrupted series of warlike attacks made on these nations, till they were completely destroyed or subjugated to the chosen people of God (an idea based, no doubt, on what they read in the book of Joshua concerning the experiences of their forefathers—A. W. P.). In their estimation, those emphatically deserved the appellation of ‘happy’ who should be employed under Messiah the Prince to avenge on the heathen nations all the wrongs these had done to Israel. How different is the spirit of the new economy! How beautifully does it accord with the angelic anthem which celebrated the nativity of its Founder: ‘glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!’ (J. Brown).

This seventh Beatitude has to do more with conduct than with character, though, of necessity, there must first be a peaceable spirit before there will be active efforts put forth to make peace. Let it be remembered that in this first section of the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus is *defining the character* of those who should be subjects and citizens in His kingdom. First, He described them according to the initial experiences of those in whom a Divine work is wrought. The first four may be grouped together as setting forth the negative graces of their hearts. They are not self-sufficient, but consciously poor in spirit; they are not self-satisfied, but mourning because of their spiritual state; they are not self-willed, but meek; they are not self-righteous, but hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of Another. In the next three, the Lord names their *positive* graces: having tasted of the mercy of God, they are merciful in their dealings with others; having received a spiritual nature, they now hate impurity and love holiness; having entered into the peace which Christ made by the blood of His Cross, they now wish to live in amity with all.

“Blessed are the peacemakers.” This takes note of the horrible contention and enmity which sin has brought into the world, for where there is no strife there is no need for peacemakers. The world is “living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Titus 3:3): though attempts are often made to conceal

this by the cloak of hypocrisy yet it soon peeps forth again in its hideous nakedness, as the history of the nations attests. And let not writer and reader forget the solemn fact that such was once our own sad case, as the opening words of Titus 3:3, declare—“for we *ourselves* also were.” But on the other hand, our text also brings into view the triumph of God over the Devil: grace has brought in that which even now in measure, and in the future completely, displaces the vile works of the flesh.

To be a lover of and worker after peace is one of the distinguishing marks of those who are followers of the Prince of peace. That miracle of grace which has made them at peace with God causes them to regard their fellows with sincere benevolence, desiring to promote their best interests, both here and hereafter. It is their care, so much as in them lies, to live peaceably with all men, and therefore do they abstain from deliberate injury of others. In each relationship they occupy—domestic, social, ecclesiastical—it is their desire and endeavour to prevent and allay strife. They are lovers of concord, promoters of unity, healers of breaches. They delight to pour oil on troubled waters, to reconcile those who are estranged, to right wrongs, to strengthen the kindly ties of friendship. As the sons of peace they bring into the fetid atmosphere of this world a breath from the pure and placid air of heaven. How much the world is indebted to their presence, only the Day to come will show.

Let it be pointed out that this lovely Christlike disposition is a vastly different thing from that easy-going indolence which is so often naught but cowardice or selfishness. It is not a peace at any price which the Christian loves and aims to promote. No, indeed, that is a false peace, unworthy to be called peace at all. “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (Jam. 3:17): note well the words “first pure”—peace is not to be sought at the expense of righteousness. Hence it is important that we lose not the thread of connection between our present Beatitude and the one which precedes it: as the “pure in heart” modifies the “mercy” of verse

7, so also it qualifies the “peace” of verse 9—it is *such* mercy and peace as God Himself approves of. The same qualification is seen again in “follow peace with all men *and* holiness” (Heb. 12:14). We are to avoid all needless occasions of contention, yet not to the point of sacrificing the Truth, compromising principle, or forsaking duty—Christ Himself did not so: Matthew 10:34.

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). The very terms of this exhortation denote that so far from compliance therewith being a simple task, it is one which calls for constant vigilance, self-discipline, and earnest prayer. Such is the state of human nature, that offences must needs come, nevertheless it is part of Christian duty to see to it that we so conduct ourselves as to give no just cause of complaint against us. It is for our own peace we do so, for it is impossible to be happy in broils and enmities. Some believers are of a naturally contentious disposition, and doubly do *they* need to beg God to hold His restraining and calming hand upon them. When disturbance and turmoil is aroused, we should diligently examine ourselves before the Lord as to whether the cause for it lie *in us*, and if so, confess the sin to Him and seek to reconcile those offended. If we be innocent, we must meekly submit to it as an affliction.

If it be true that “Blessed are the peacemakers,” it necessarily follows that cursed are the peacebreakers. Then let us be diligently on our guard against bigotry, intemperate zeal, and a quarrelsome spirit: the things of God are too sacred for wrangling. Highly important is it that we give earnest heed to the exhortation of “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). Let it be carefully noted that the preceding verse specifies the chief *aids* to this. In order to the development of a peaceful disposition we must first cultivate the grace of “lowliness,” which is the opposite of pride, for “only by pride cometh contention” (Prov. 13:10). Second, there must be the cultivation of “meekness,” which is the opposite of self-assertiveness, the determination to press my will at all costs: remember “a soft answer turneth away wrath.” Third, the grace of

“long sufferance,” which is the opposite of impatience. Finally, “forbearing one another in love,” for the queen of the graces “endureth all things.”

See here the blessedness of that work to which the ministers of God are called: not merely to effect peace between man and man, but to reconcile men to God. What a contrast is this from the task allotted to Joshua and his officers under the Mosaic economy, of taking up the sword to slay the enemies of the Lord! In this dispensation the servants of Christ are commissioned to seek the reconciliation of those who are at enmity with God. The heralds of the Cross are the ambassadors of peace, bidding sinners throw down the weapons of their warfare and enter into amnesty with God. They know there is no peace for the wicked, and therefore do they exhort them to acquaint themselves with God and be at peace (Job 22:21). Of them it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15).

There is still another way in which it is the holy privilege of believers to be peacemakers, and that is by their *prayers* averting the wrath of God from a guilty nation. In the day when the Lord’s anger is kindled against a sin-laden people and the dark clouds of providence threaten an impending storm of judgment, it is both the duty and the privilege of God’s remembrancers to stand in the breach and by their earnest supplication stay His hand, so making peace. Moses did so (Ex. 32:10); so too Aaron (Num. 16:47, 48), and David (2 Sam. 24:14). When a fearful plague visits our country, or another nation threatens it with war, we are to behold God raising His rod, and entreat Him to be merciful: see Jeremiah 12:11; Ezekiel 22:30, 31. This is indeed a blessed work of peace: to stay the Lord from the work of destruction, as Abraham’s intercession had done for Sodom if there were but ten righteous persons in it. Once more we say, only the Day to come will show how the wicked gained by the presence of the righteous remnant in their midst.

A word now upon the reward: “*for they shall be called the children of God,*” which is a decisive proof that these Beatitudes

contemplate not the moral virtues of the natural man, but rather the spiritual graces of the regenerate, To be *made* a child of God is to be renewed in His image and likeness; to be *called* so is to be esteemed and regarded as such. The Lord Himself is “the God of peace” (Heb. 13:20), and where this holy disposition is manifested by His people He *owns* them as His children—compare Hebrews 2:11, and 11:16, for this force of the word “called.” Furthermore, holy peacemakers are recognized as children of God by their spiritual brethren. Have you received this grace of the Spirit, so that you sincerely desire and endeavour to live at peace with all men? Then that is an evidence you are a child of God, a pledge of your adoption. Labour to maintain it. Ultimately, God will make it manifest to all the universe that we are His children (Rom. 8:19).

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” Matthew 5:10.

The Christian life is one that is full of strange paradoxes which are quite insoluble to human reason, but which are easily understood by the spiritual mind. God’s saints rejoice with joy unspeakable, yet do they mourn with a lamentation to which the worldling is an utter stranger. The believer in Christ has been brought into contact with a source of vital satisfaction which is capable of meeting every longing, yet does he pant with a yearning like unto that of the thirsty hart. He sings and makes melody in his heart to the Lord, yet does he groan deeply and daily. His experience is often painful and perplexing, yet would he not part with it for all the gold in the world. These puzzling paradoxes are among the evidences which he possesses that he is indeed blessed of God. But who by mere reasoning would ever conclude that the persecuted and reviled are “blessed!” Genuine felicity, then, is not only compatible with but is actually accompanied by manifold miseries in this life.

“It is a strong proof of human depravity that men’s curses and Christ’s blessings should meet on the same persons. Who would have thought that a man could be persecuted and reviled, and

have all manner of evil said of him for righteousness' sake? And do wicked men really hate justice and love those who defraud and wrong their neighbours? No; they do not dislike righteousness as it respects *themselves*: it is only that species of it which respects God and religion that excites their hatred. If Christians were content with doing justly and loving mercy, and would cease walking humbly with God, they might go through the world, not only in peace, but with applause; but he that will *live godly* in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Such a life reproves the ungodliness of men and provokes their resentment" (Andrew Fuller). It is the enmity of the Serpent—active ever since the days of Abel (1 John 3:12)—against the holy seed.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake." The connection between this and all that has been before us must not be overlooked. It is not every sufferer, nor even every sufferer for religion, who is entitled to appropriate such consolation. This antagonism is not in return for wrong-doing or in response to what has given just cause for offence. They who are morose, haughty, selfish, or evil-speaking, have no right to seek comfort from this Beatitude when people retaliate against them. No, it is where Christliness of character and conduct is assailed, where practical godliness condemns the worldly ways of empty professors and fires their enmity, where humble yet vital piety cannot be tolerated by those who are devoid of the same. The wicked hate God's holy image and those who bear it, His holy Truth and those who walk in it. This pronouncement of Christ's signifies, Blessed are the spiritual which the carnal detest; blessed are the gentle sheep, whom the dogs snap at.

How many a Christian employee who has refused to violate his conscience has suffered at the hands of an ungodly master or mistress! Yet such persecution, painful though it may be, is really a blessing in disguise. First, by means of the opposition which they encounter, the Lord's people become the better acquainted with their own infirmities and needs, for thereby they are made conscious that they cannot stand for a single hour unless Divine

grace upholds them. Second, by persecution they are often kept from certain sins into which they would most likely fall were they wicked at peace with them: the rough usage they receive at the hands of worldlings makes impossible that friendship with them which the flesh craves. Third, such persecution affords the believer opportunity to glorify God by his constancy, courage, and fidelity to the Truth.

This searching word “for righteousness’ sake” calls upon us to honestly examine ourselves before God when we are being opposed: “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). The same qualification is made in the verse which immediately follows the last quoted: “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf:” this is a most necessary caution, that the believer see to it that he is buffeted for *right doing* and not on account of his own misconduct or foolish behaviour. It is to be observed that persecution is often so speciously disguised that those guilty thereof are not conscious of the same, yea, so deceitful is the human heart, they imagine they are doing God a service (John 16:2). But “Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs *is* [not “shall be”] the kingdom of heaven;” its privileges and blessings (Rom. 14:17) are theirs even now: though hated by men, they are “kings and priests unto God” (Rev. 1:6).

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake” Matthew 5:11.

In verse 10 the Lord enunciates the general principle; here He makes special application of it to His servants. Note carefully the change from “them” throughout verses 5-10 to “ye” and “your” in verses 11 and 12: opposition is the general lot of God’s people, but it is the special portion of His ministers. If faithful to their calling, they must expect to be fiercely assailed. Such has ever been the experience of the Lord’s servants. Moses was reviled again and again (Ex. 5:11; 14:11; 16:2; 17:2; etc.). Samuel was

rejected (1 Sam. 8:5). Elijah was despised (1 Kings 18:17) and persecuted (1 Kings 19:2). Micaiah was hated (2 Chron. 18:17). Nehemiah was oppressed and defamed (Neh. 4). The Saviour Himself, the faithful witness of God, was put to death by the people to whom He ministered. Stephen was stoned, Peter and John cast into prison, James beheaded, while the entire course of Paul was one long series of bitter and relentless persecutions.

“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” Matthew 5:11, 12. In these words the Lord Jesus faithfully warns His servants what they may fully expect to encounter, and then defines how they are to respond thereto, how they are to conduct themselves under the fire of their enemies. That blessedness which worldly leaders value and crave is to be flattered and feted, humoured and honoured; but the felicity and glory of the officers of Christ are to be made conformable to the Captain of their salvation, who was “despised and rejected of men.” Yet instead of being downcast over and murmuring at the hostility they meet with, ministers of the Gospel are to be thankful to God for the high honour He confers upon them in making them partakers of the sufferings of His Son. Because that is so difficult for flesh and blood to do, the Lord here advances two reasons as encouragements.

It is true that persecution of both ministers and saints is today in a much milder form than it assumed in other ages; nevertheless, it is just as real. Through the goodness of God we have long been protected from legal persecution, but the enmity of the Serpent finds other ways and means for expressing itself. The words of Christ in John 15 have never been repealed: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they

will keep yours also” (verses 19 and 20). Let it be carefully noted that it was the professing and not the profane “world” that Christ was alluding to: it was from religious leaders, those making the greatest spiritual pretensions, that the Redeemer Himself received the worst treatment. And so it is now: members and officers of the “churches” stoop to methods and use means of opposition which those outside would scorn to employ.


Let us carefully note the qualification made by Christ in the verses we are now considering. This benediction of His is pronounced only on them who have all manner of evil spoken against them *falsely*: they have themselves given no just occasion for the same. No, far from it, it is not for any lawful ground of accusation in themselves, but for “My sake”—for their loyalty and fidelity to Christ, for their obedience to His commission, for their refusal to compromise His holy Truth. To be “reviled” is to suffer personal abuse: said Paul, “We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things” (1 Cor. 4:13). “Persecution” may involve acts of ill-treatment or ostracism. To have “all manner of evil said against” us is to suffer defamation of character: 1 Thessalonians 2:2, clearly implies that even the moral reputation of the apostle was attacked. All these are efforts of the Devil to destroy the usefulness of God’s ministers.

The Lord Jesus here pronounced blessed or happy those who, through devotion to Him, would be called upon to suffer. They are “blessed” because such are given the unspeakable privilege of having fellowship with the sufferings of the Saviour. They are “blessed” because such tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and such a hope that will not make ashamed. They are “blessed” because they shall be fully recompensed in the Day to come. Here is rich comfort indeed. Let not the soldier of the Cross be dismayed because the fiery darts of the wicked one are hurled against him. Remember that “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

“Rejoice and be exceeding glad:” this too is spoken specially to ministers. Those afflictions which faithfulness to Christ brings

upon them are to be endured not only with patience and resignation, but thanksgiving and gladness, and that for a threefold reason. First, that they come upon them for Christ's sake: if He suffered so much for them, should they not rejoice to suffer a little for Him? Second, they shall be richly recompensed hereafter: ***“great is your reward in heaven”***—not as of merit, but purely of grace, for there is no proportion between them. Third, they bring them into fellowship with a noble company of martyrs: ***“for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”***—they too were ill-treated by members of the outward Church: what an honour to share, in our measure, the lot of those holy men! Verily there is cause to rejoice, no matter how fierce the conflict may be. Oh, to emulate the apostles in Acts 5:41, and 16:25. May Divine grace enable all the oppressed servants and saints of God to draw from these precious words of Christ the comfort and strength they need.

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*Blessed are the
undefiled in the way,
who walk in the law of
the LORD.*

*Blessed are they that
keep His testimonies,
and that seek Him with
the whole heart.*

Psalm 119:1, 2