

THE BEATITUDES

CHARACTER	DEFINITION	FAILURE	REWARD
<u>POOR IN SPIRIT</u>	WILLING TO RECEIVE <i>-subordinates ambition</i>	*PROUD; *SELF-RIGHTEOUS *DEFENSIVE; *SENSITIVE, *EASILY OFFENDED, *GREEDY	KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: salvation, rewards
<u>MOURN</u>	HAS GOD'S VIEW OF EVIL <i>-subordinates pleasure</i>	*LACK OF PURPOSE; *LACK OF SERIOUSNESS; *INEFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE; *CALLOUSNESS TO SIN; *ENTERTAINMENT ORIENTED	COMFORT, Joy, Peace
<u>MEEK</u>	UNDER AUTHORITY- + all rights yielded + carries out the role of servant <i>-subordinates rights</i>	*ANGER *INDEPENDENCE *IMPATIENCE	KINGDOM AUTHORITY
<u>HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNES</u>	APPETITE FOR GODLINESS <i>-subordinates character</i>	*SPIRITUAL INDIFFERENCE *IRREGULAR DEVOTIONS	FILLED led by God Fed by God
<u>MERCIFUL</u>	FORGIVENESS; PITY FOR MISERY <i>-subordinates retaliation</i>	*BITTER; *UNFORGIVING SPIRIT; *LEGALISM *CRITICAL SPIRIT	OBTAIN MERCY
<u>PURE IN HEART</u>	MOTIVES AND DESIRES CLEANSED & CONTROLLED BY CHRIST <i>-sub. self in thought+life</i>	*MORAL IMPURITY *UNCONTROLLED THOUGHT LIFE *LOVE OF THE WORLD	SEE GOD and HIS PERSPECTIVE
<u>PEACEMAKER</u>	RECONCILING GOD AND MEN, AND MEN AND MEN <i>-sub. self in relationships</i>	*COVETOUS JAS 4:1-5. *DEFENSIVE *UNCONTROLLED TONGUE	CALLED SONS OF GOD * Recognized * Rewarded
<u>PERSECUTED</u>	ENDURING LOSS FOR JESUS <i>-subordinates reputation</i>	*COMPROMISE + QUITTING	ASSURANCE, JOY

Overview by Henry Clay

Henry Clay
Nov. 30, 1982

Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit For Their's Is The Kingdom Of Heaven

The word "poor" is a translation of the Greek word "ptokos" and is similar to "ptosse" which means to crouch or to cower. Poverty had arisen and continued in Israel in Old Testament times because the nation had failed to observe God's laws, which made specific provision for the poor, those without land of their own. "The poor man is one who suffers injustice; he is poor because others have despised God's law." (Dict. of N.T. Theology p. 822) Having no resources of his own, and no significant help offered by the community, the poor man had no recourse left but to call out to God to somehow provide for his survival. The term "poor" came to include "all those who turn to God in great need and seek His help." (Dict. of N.T. Theology p. 823) (e.g. Ps. 40:17, Ps. 86:1) It is apparent from the context in Matthew that Jesus is referring to the hardship that disciples would face in following Him and that they needed to look to God alone, as the defender of the rights of the afflicted, to meet all their needs. This required a humbling of themselves, recognizing that they were not like the rich, owning their own land and able to do as they pleased; but rather they were servants of the One who owned all things and must look to Him both for orders as well as provision. This person is blessed (or happy), not because he experiences a superficial emotional joy, having "pushed a right button," but because he realizes that, as this quality is developed, his own highest good from God's perspective is achieved and God is glorified.

Today Christ calls us to be "poor in spirit," humbled before God, confessing our great need for Him to guide, protect and supply, and not to blindly deny our spiritual poverty as did the church of Laodicea: "I...have need of nothing." (Rev. 3:17) Humility comes automatically as God's Spirit opens our eyes to the depth of our need, our own inability to meet it, and God's undeserved generosity on our behalf.

But the poor in spirit, Jesus tells us, do have at least one possession. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In Matt. 19:14 Christ in referring to the children surrounding Him said, "for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." The kingdom of heaven is the gracious and supreme rule of God in the heart of an individual and it belongs only to those who humble themselves before God, admitting their inabilities and sins, and also their need of salvation and daily help and guidance. For "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (Jas. 4:6)

Henry Clay
Nov. 30, 1982

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn For They Shall Be Comforted

At first hearing the paradox of this beatitude is profound: "Happy are those who are sad." The word "mourn" comes from the greek word "pentheo" meaning "to mourn for" or "to lament." "It does not have to be open lamentation, neither is it quiet sorrow of heart. What is meant is passionate grief which leads to corresponding action." (Kittell's 6:40) A foreshadowing of this beatitude is perhaps seen in Eccl. 7:2-4 which points out that more is learned through sorrow than through joy. "The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure." It is inadequate for the disciples to be poor in spirit, to humbly realize their need and their wickedness of heart, and the world's lostness. There must also be the response of godly sorrow, of mourning over the tragic situation. "It is one thing to be spiritually poor and acknowledge it; it is another to grieve and mourn over it." (Stott p. 41) "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death." (2Cor. 7:10) From this verse it is clear that the right kind of sorrow leads to a change of heart and lifestyle; and it is also plain that in this beatitude Jesus is not declaring all sorrow to be blessed by God. This blessedness is limited to those whose hearts are broken by the sins that broke God's heart and nailed Jesus to the cross. Jesus was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is. 53:3) not because of personal sin or need, but because of the lostness of the world and the extreme suffering He had to undergo to bring salvation. Disciples are not above their teacher (Matt. 10:24) and they must expect to follow in the bloody footprints of their Lord, burdened with the immense need of people condemned and dying, and experiencing personal suffering to bring them the message of redemption. (Col. 1:24) But disciples are also to mourn their own falling short of God's laws and in repentance seek God's deliverance.

As far as present day application of this beatitude, we must not give in to the contemporary "Christian" philosophy that believers should be bubbling with smiles and happiness all the time. As followers of Christ we are called to not merely recognize sin for what it is, but to grieve over it, so that in our own lives we will flee to God for His cleansing and deliverance, and so that in regard to the world's sin we stop dodging our responsibility to "preach the gospel to every creature." (Mk. 16:15)

The most appropriate blessing for those who mourn is promised by Jesus: they shall be comforted. There is no inherent blessing in being sorrowful, but the blessing is found rather in the comfort that comes as a consequence of the sorrow. Only God can comfort the sorrow over sin, for only He can forgive and cleanse. He comforts us in the present with the assurance of His forgiveness (I Jn. 1:9) and with His help in temptation (I Cor. 10:13) and He will comfort us in the future by delivering us from the presence of sin (Rom. 8:17-23, I Jn. 3:2) and by wiping away every tear. (Rev. 21:4)

Henry Clay
Dec. 1, 1982

Blessed Are The Gentle, For They Shall Inherit The Earth

How this beatitude must have taken aback the nationalistic Jewish audience! They had pictured Messiah as a military commander-in-chief who through God's might would set up God's kingdom of Israel on earth. It was common knowledge that people who wanted to be "nice guys" would always just get stepped on, and would be overcome in any dispute because they would not assert themselves. But right here Jesus says: Blessed are the meek, the gentle. The word for gentle in greek is "praus" and is etymologically related to the word "friend." When used of persons it means mild, friendly, gentle, pleasant, as opposed to rough, hard, and violent. (Kittel 6:645) In the first beatitude one is to realize his own sinfulness and helplessness; in the second one mourns over this tragic situation, seeking God's solution to his problem; and here in the third beatitude we have the resulting view of self that is characterized by humility. There is no longer room for the proud look and the haughty eyes. As D. Martin Lloyd-Jones puts it, "the man who is truly meek is the one who is amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do." (p.69) A meek man is not a weak man but a gentleman in the truest sense. Freed from trying to assert himself and seeking his own selfish gain, he is able to joyfully give himself to serving God and others, not as a chore, but as a privilege. Because of God's undeserved acceptance of him, even though a former enemy of God, he is free from ever needing to defend himself, pity himself, or spend time thinking about himself. "He that is down need fear no fall." (John Bunyan)

Today in our high-powered, "me" oriented society we are still called by our Master to be meek and gentle. In our character it expresses itself in a humble estimation of who we are and a full acknowledgement of our tremendous capacity for personal failure and wickedness. In conduct this results in a disciple always having a teachable spirit, responding humbly to reproof and criticism, without striking back at the one who has given it. There is no lust for revenge and no bitterness over actual or supposed mistreatment. There is instead the patience and trust in a faithful God who will set things aright in the end.

And the blessing promised to these gentle disciples? Ironically, the very earth that the proud and arrogant had spent their lives striving to gain and control. Indeed the "last shall be first" in this area of meekness. There is a present fulfillment of this blessing seen in I Cor. 3:21-23 in that, since we belong to Christ, all things belong to us already. As Paul says it "regarded...as having nothing yet possessing all things." (II Cor. 6:10) But there will also be a future fulfillment which is perhaps referred to in Ps. 37:10,11 where God is seen to weed out the wicked on the day of judgement, leaving the earth to be inherited and inhabited by the meek. "But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity."

Henry Clay
Dec. 1, 1982

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger And Thirst For Righteousness For They
Shall Be Satisfied

This fourth beatitude struck right at the heart of the pharisaical thinking and practice that righteousness was already theirs. This comes out so well in the parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple in Luke 18:10-14. The Pharisee congratulates himself on his own righteousness, relieved that he is "not like other men." But this self-centered self-righteousness has no place in God's kingdom for it is only a mirage, a figment of the imagination. If the Pharisees had properly interpreted God's laws they would have realized their helplessness to obey them.

Instead of commending those who desire or strive for righteousness, Jesus phrases the beatitude: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. The word "hunger" comes from "pinao" meaning to hunger, to be hungry and is used in this verse metaphorically to mean to crave ardently, to seek with eager desire. (Thayers) In the O.T. God used physical hunger to teach the Israelites the importance of having a spiritual hunger for God's Word. (Deut. 8:3) In Is. 55:17 the needy are commanded to come to the Lord to have their spiritual hunger satisfied without charge. According to Kittel's work the hunger "means 'to lack' rather than 'to strive.'...The hungry are men who both outwardly and inwardly are painfully deficient in the things essential to life as God meant it to be, and who, since they cannot help themselves, turn to God on the basis of His promise." (Kittel 6:12f) Therefore disciples of Jesus are to have an insatiable appetite to be righteous, to be pleasing to God, to be like God. The stilling of this hunger is found not in the efforts of the disciples but in the feeding on the Bread of Life, Jesus. Abiding in the True Vine and drawing nourishment from Him.

In character the disciple will be ever eager to grow and to see God bring his life into conformity to Christ, whatever the price. Just as physical hunger and thirst tend to dominate a person's thoughts, the disciple's thoughts are to be caught up in "trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (Eph. 5:10) and living accordingly "not by might, nor by power" but by God's Spirit (Zech. 4:6). As far as the disciple's conduct, he will give himself to prayerful study and application of God's Word. He will never be satisfied with a superficial knowledge of the Bible. His desire will not be to find how much he can get away with and still be "in the club," but rather it will be to know and to do God's will in every area of his life. "I delight to do Thy will, O my God." (Ps. 40:8)

The promised blessing is one of satisfaction. Our need is met in the Bread of Life, the Fountain of Living Water. But it is not once and for all. We are to abide in Him and He in us, continually enabling us to feast at His table. It is the tremendous satisfaction of living a meaningful life in the sight of God.

Blessed Are The Merciful For They Shall Receive Mercy

Turning from His focus in the first 4 Beatitudes on the disciple's relationship to God, Jesus begins giving the character qualities that we should have in our relating to our fellow man. The first of these is mercy. The original word "eleos" means to be gracious, to have mercy, to bring help to the wretched; and finally it refers specifically to God granting even to the unworthy favor, benefits, opportunities, and particularly salvation by Christ. (Thayers) In classical greek literature "eleos" meant primarily "the emotion roused by contact with an affliction which comes undeservedly on someone else." (Kittel 2:477f) But its use in the Bible involves more than just feelings of sympathy. As D. Martin Lloyd-Jones put it, "Mercy is pity plus action." The mercy God wants His followers to have is an active mercy, not an empty sentimentality. This is illustrated so well in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. The Samaritan when confronted with this stranger in distress "felt compassion" (vs. 33). But he didn't leave it at that and go away pleased with himself that he was such a tender-hearted person. He went immediately to work to help alleviate the victim's suffering to the degree he was able. At the end of the parable Jesus asks who was the victim's true neighbor, and the reply from the lawyer comes: The one who showed mercy toward him. (vs. 37) God's mercy is demonstrative and ours must be too.

All this sounds so nice and sweet, but the realist is quick to remind us that the world is not like this at all. It is often brutal and unmerciful. The only way to survive, we are told, and to keep from getting unmercifully "cut down" is to be even more skillfully critical of others. Capitalize on the sins and weaknesses of those around you if you want to get ahead! That's how most politics seems to go. And if you can't find a juicy enough vice or weakness to criticize your opponent for, make one up! And of course if someone "let's you have it," you determine to get revenge, to "get even." That's why verbally much of society usually resembles a mafia shoot-out. And what Jesus is saying is that the disciple is going to walk into the midst of this "shoot-out" and not even take a gun! What could possibly motivate him to do this? He realizes that God could have "shot" him, but instead turned and blasted His own Son with the wrath of God. If God refrained from "shooting" me, through no merit of my own, how can I dare "shoot" someone else?

Interestingly enough we always want mercy for ourselves. And therefore it is a great indicator of whether we love our neighbor as ourself, if we are completely merciful to him. And the reward promised if we are merciful? We will receive mercy. This is the only Beatitude where the quality to exemplify and the reward to be received are the same. The poor in spirit don't receive poverty of spirit, nor do the peacemakers peace. But with mercy God blesses in like kind, not in the sense that He withholds mercy until we are totally merciful with others, but that we are incapable of really receiving and being convinced of His unmerited mercy until we have come to the point where we can unconditionally forgive those who have wronged us, and show compassion on those who are suffering the consequences of their sins.

Blessed Are The Pure In Heart For They Shall See God

Few beatitudes go as deep as this one into the inner man, "discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Heb. 4:12) "Pure" comes from the greek "katharos" meaning clean and pure (free from the admixture or adhesion of anything that soils, adulterates, or corrupts), genuine, blameless. (Thayers) "The purity in the N.T. community is personal and moral (rather than national and ceremonial) by nature. It consists of full and unreserved self offering to God which renews the heart and rules out any acceptance of what is against God. The inward life of believers is cleansed from past sin and whole heartedly directed toward God." (Kittel 3:413f) The heart, "kardia," is the soul or the mind, and it is the fountain and seat of thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, and purposes. (Thayers) Since the other 3 of the last 4 beatitudes deal with the disciple's relation to others, it is not unreasonable then to postulate that Jesus' challenge on being pure in heart has to do also with earthly relationships. When Jesus first meets Nathaniel, He says "Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47) Guile means deceit and its opposite is sincerity. Nathaniel was a man who was straight forward about himself with others, and Jesus admired this quality. It's the quality of a man whose total devotion is Godward, free from contamination by any other passion or love. He cares so much about God's opinion of him that the opinion of those around him concerning himself becomes unimportant. He is free to serve one master with an undivided heart and to represent himself and his thoughts to others in an honest and straightforward way.

The Pharisees, for all their interest in purity, never quite seemed to get the picture. They labored over "cleaning the outside of the cup," trying to look good in the eyes of others, never realizing that God had given the outward physical cleansings in the Law as visual aids to help the people learn that God is even more concerned with the purity of your heart. "Beware the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy," (Lk. 12:1) Jesus told His disciples. Hypocrisy, like leaven, is a decay of inner substance resulting in the production of unvented pressures that lead to an enlargement of apparent size with no addition of substance. Rotting on the inside, the Pharisees were putting on a big show on the outside, and even though some of them believed Jesus was the Messiah, their hypocrisy kept them from an open commitment to Christ, "for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God." (John 12:42,43) Jesus' solution to the disciples was: 1. to realize that anything they hid now from people would be put up on billboards in heaven (Lk. 12:3) 2. to see that if you are going to fear someone, God is definitely more to be feared than man, because He can wipe you out for all eternity (Lk. 12:4,5) 3. to understand that even though He is so awesome, God loves you tenderly and there need be no cringing terror in your relationship with Him. (Lk. 12:6,7) If the devotion of my heart is totally fixed on God, it will result in moral purity, since I'm no longer listening to the suggestions and orders given by my flesh and those around me.

"They shall see God" reminds us of Psalm 24: "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?...He who has...a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood..." (vs. 3,4). Transparency is a must if we are to ever experience intimate fellowship with the Lord. "If we walk in the light (honestly, without deceit)...we have fellowship with (God)" (I Jn. 1:7) Those who are caught up both in trying to deceitfully hide their true nature and in attempting to win the admiration and praise of those around them, are too busy to see God. Even though "in Him we live, and move, and breath, and have our being" we will never see Him until we are purely devoted to Him alone in our hearts.

Henry Clay
Dec. 3, 1982

Blessed Are The Peacemakers For They Shall
Be Called Sons Of God

The seventh beatitude is the last beatitude dealing with an area of character in the disciple's life, the eighth having to do with the world's response to the disciple. This is the only verse in the N.T. where the word "peacemaker" appears and it comes from eirene meaning "peace" and poieo meaning "to make", literally then, to make peace. The word eirene on the other hand appears in every book of the N.T. except I John. In ancient greek the word eirene was not referring to "a relationship between two people, or an attitude of mind, but rather a state, i.e., 'time of peace' or 'state of peace,' originally conceived of purely as an interlude in the everlasting state of war. In the Septuagint the word came to be used to mean the thought of well being or salvation." (Kittel) The writer goes on to say that the term peacemaker refers to "those who disinterestedly come between contending parties and try to make peace."

When God originally created the world, everything He had made was characterized by peace and concord. There was the open communication of love, perfect orderliness and harmony, and complete satisfaction. But then man sinned against His Creator, resulting in the destruction or damaging of every relationship in the universe. Alienation, strife, and wars have since characterized all of man's recorded history. He can't get along with anyone, not even himself. But "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself..." taking the initiative to reach out to His enemies to restore them to a peaceful fellowship with Him. "For He Himself (Jesus) is our peace..." (Eph. 2:14) As His followers then we are called to be agents of God's plan to reconcile all relationships through Christ's work on the cross. We are not to seek peace "at any price," simply because when you compromise the truth, you always end up with a counterfeit peace and not the real thing. All reconciliation between God and man, man and other men, and between man and himself is possible only with the foundation laid by the blood of the Lamb of God.

The disciples who have the first 6 characteristics in the beatitudes are called to be peacemakers because only they are qualified, since they have personally experienced the depth of God's mercy reconciling them to Himself, and since they have the mercy and sincerity toward those that they wish to help be reconciled. Reconciling two offended parties is very difficult and costly: difficult because you must not choose sides and thus escalate the conflict rather than resolve it; and costly because your role as mediator often results in you being attacked by both parties. Perhaps that's why Proverbs 26:17 says "like one who takes a dog by the ears is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him." Now we are not to meddle, but God has called us to mediate in love and to long for and work for reconciliation. That is exactly what God did for us in Christ, and when we do that for others, we demonstrate a "family resemblance" of being God's sons. But before God can use us in others' lives, we must have reconciled all of our relationships. The church of Corinth could not be an agent of reconciliation for others because they were so divided themselves (I Cor. 1:11). But even though they blamed it on differences in doctrine, Paul uncovered what the real sources of strife were: pride and lack of love. Until we have victory in our own personal relationships, walking in humility and loving sacrificially, we are not in a position to be used as "peacemakers."

Henry Clay
Dec. 3, 1982

Blessed Are Those Who Have Been Persecuted For The Sake Of
Righteousness For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven

After seven (the number of completeness) wonderful qualities that are found in the character of a true follower of Christ, comes the response of the world to this remarkable person, redeemed and transformed by his personal encounter with the Master. Does the world rush to embrace him with open arms, longing to become like him? No! They persecute him and take delight in humiliating him and embarrassing him. The word "persecution" comes from dioko which means in this context "to persecute, to expel, in the sense of religious persecution implying guilt on the part of the persecutors." (Kittel) In other contexts the word means to run after, to seek after eagerly. The image comes to mind of the Christian being one who is pursued as in a hunt by those who wish to do him harm simply for the fun of it.

"I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves," Jesus said to the disciples (Matt. 10:16). So what's the problem? Well, wolves like to eat sheep. ...Oh. Why would they want to do that to us innocent little lambs? ...Because "everyone who does evil hates the light." The disciples' character condemns those who are living in rebellion against God's rule. ...Oh. Well, what are we supposed to do? ...Well we are not to just avoid wolves and go hole up in a monastery somewhere. Our Lord has sent us into the midst of the wolves and we dare not go elsewhere. Jesus told the disciples to be as wise and prudent as serpents and as innocent and sincere as doves in their dealings with the "wolves" of the world, but when persecution came, and it would (Jesus says "when," not "if," Matt. 5:11), they were to react in a certain way. Not only were they not to retaliate (because they were meek) and not to resent their tormentors (since they (disciples) were merciful), but they were also not to even get depressed! Instead they were to rejoice and be excitedly happy! Are they at this point just cracking under the pressure and going crazy? No; because their rejoicing is not baseless and illogical. They are to look beyond the present suffering, "momentary light affliction" according to the battered and bruised Apostle Paul (II Cor. 4:17), and see God's greater purpose behind it and the tremendous reward of joining the ranks of the persecuted prophets of God.

This is definitely the beatitude of the cross. The disciple, because of his life and message, is marked for death row by the world. The persecution can come in many forms, but come it will. But after all, is it really worth all this trouble? What could possibly motivate a person to voluntarily put up with all this abuse and not give in to the temptation to respond in like kind? Here in this beatitude without a doubt we have the dividing line of how much God means to you, whether He is unimportant, important, or all important to you. He must be all important to you, "not I, but Christ," if you are to be able to actually rejoice in persecution. And even though we often feel that "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," yet "He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." (II Cor. 12:9)