

# THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Collegiate Quarterly



October-December 1980



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# UNION COLLEGE

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To what shall we liken the kingdom of heaven?

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a crane, pure and clean, having come down from heaven, and its destiny being heaven, but abiding for a time upon this earth." So says Tony Wong, the featured artist in this quarter's COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY.

Having come to Union College from mainland China, Tony, an architectural major, has become interested in the "kingdom of heaven" and the characteristic beatitudes Christ spoke about on the mountainside. Thus, we asked Tony to portray the beatitudes in picture for this COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY audience.

Tony calls the crane, pictured on the cover and in two inside drawings, "heaven's bird." "In oriental legend," he explained, "it is said that these birds never die, but come to earth from heaven and, after a respite here, return. Thus, the crane is a symbol of eternal life and of man's heavenly origin and destiny."

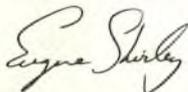
And who are they that inherit such a destiny? The poor, or, the poor in spirit, illustrated by Tony with a single clump of grass and upon that grass, a grasshopper. "Rich land is cultivated and farmed," explained Tony, "while poor land grows but single clumps of grass, here and there. Grass grows in the floors and roofs of ill-kept, poverty-stricken homes. It grows in the cracks of the pathways of the poor. And so, it is a fitting symbol of the poor, or poor in spirit." And the grasshopper? Tony explained that no man is poorer than he who can grow but a clump of grass, and then upon that grass sits a grasshopper, ready to devour.

Carefully studying his paintings further, I came across a stylized picture of bamboo. "Why bamboo?" I asked the artist. Tony explained that this was painted to illustrate the beatitude, "Blessed are the merciful." "For what is more merciful," he said, "than bamboo? Every year it is chopped down to be used for furniture or canes. And yet, it is so 'forgiving,' growing back again—even multiplying—in the spring, as if no harm had ever been done to it."

From there we discussed the other illustrations painted for this quarterly: the Chinese salt dish ("Ye are the salt of the earth"), the lantern ("Ye are the light of the world"), the rabbit ("Blessed are the meek"), etc. And I was impressed. Impressed with the imagination and thought that was put into each of these paintings, illustrating the abstract message of the beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount.

"The Kingdom Of Heaven." What a topic for study this quarter! So deep, so rich, and yet so hidden. Its content demands the investigation of an artist's eye. And it challenges men everywhere to use a good deal of imagination and thought to creatively illustrate its abstract message in life.

Yours as a fellow citizen of the kingdom,



Eugene B. Shirley, Jr.  
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY Editor

## GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

### *Trans-Africa Division*

To Sabbath School Members Around the World

Dear Fellow Believers:

The Trans-Africa Division Family wishes to thank all Sabbath School members for the liberal support given in the 1978 Special Project Offering to our Division which was for the erection of an evangelistic center in the large city of Kinshasa, Zaire. Now we have an experienced and capable worker located in this metropolis and further plans are in the development stage.

For our project this quarter, we would like to share with you a dream we have had for several years: that of building 500 rural chapels throughout the Division! This is an ambitious project! Here is the way we believe it can be done: our unions and fields will select congregations which are most in need of chapels. Through a co-operative plan of shared expenses the local congregations will prepare and burn kilns of bricks and provide the labor for construction. Your funds will be combined with our available resources to add corrugated iron roofs, cement floors, doors and windows for these chapels.

You see in some areas, 90 percent of our congregations meet in mud and thatch buildings. Other congregations meet under trees or out in the open. We have found, as many of you have, that permanent church homes do wonders to help stabilize and strengthen our congregations.

In your mind's eye, visualize these happy groups of people throughout the countries of our Division, rolling up their sleeves and launching their brick-making work, seeing the walls of the chapels go up, the metal roofs added, then the doors and window glasses fitted in. Then visualize the day of the first meeting in their new church homes! Multiplied thousands of voices will be raised in praise to God and in appreciation to their brethren in all the world for helping them build clean, modest little chapels.

We have shared our dream with you. On behalf of this Division we wish to say a hearty "THANK YOU" for helping your brothers and sisters in Africa realize its fulfillment.

Very cordially yours,

*Merle L. Mills*

Merle L Mills, President

## Collegiate Quarterly

A KALEIDOSCOPE  
OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

October-December 1980

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The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is written by faculty, students and friends of the Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities throughout North America. This is an experimental publication, organized under the Union College board of trustees and published with the approval of the General Conference Sabbath School Department.

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*Correction:* In the second quarter, 1980 COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY, page 89, it was stated that Peter Zafar Jilani, "being a lawyer and secretary to the former Attorney General of Pakistan, served as a legal counselor for the former Prime Minister." This should read: Peter Zafar Jilani "served as a secretary to the lawyer and former Attorney General of Pakistan, who was representing the former Prime Minister." Reference was also made on page 89 to "notes [of Ali Bhutto's] hidden in legal references and collected [by Peter Jilani] . . . during counseling periods," inferring illegal action. But this is not true. Peter Jilani has since stated, "Mr. Bhutto's lawyer and I myself never involved ourselves in anything illegal but instead kept to our business within the bounds of the law."

*Note On Capitalization:* It is the practice of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY to capitalize nouns and pronouns referring to the Diety. However, in copyrighted material, nouns and pronouns referring to God may or may not be capitalized, and thus we must reprint exactly as it has been previously published. Such capitalization may also not occur for reasons of special effect.

Scripture quotations used in this quarterly, other than the King James Version, are as follows:

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**T**his is Lucy Henderson's lemonade stand. Lucy sells lemonade here four days a week, after school, for 5¢ a glass. Her mother donates the lemonade. Lucy usually sells fifteen glasses of lemonade a day. So her weekly income is \$3.00.

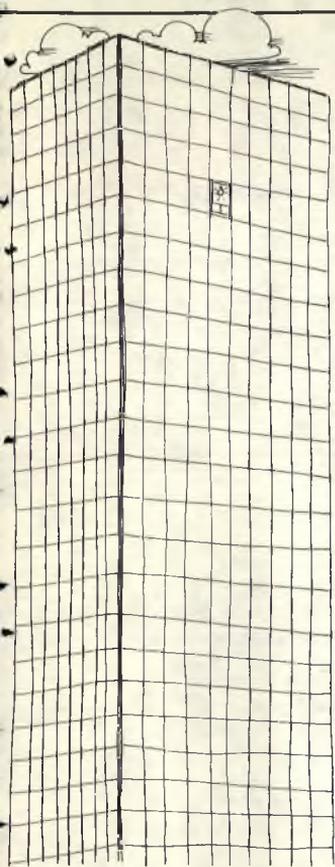
On Sabbath, Lucy puts a quarter and a nickel into an envelope, marks it "Tithe" and drops it in the offering plate. That 10% of Lucy's income helps support the world ministry of the church. Lucy is happy to return her tithe to the Lord.

## We all know how but how much should

Lucy and her daddy both pay tithe on an equal basis: 10% of income. But how much should Lucy and her daddy give in offerings?

Sometimes members are encouraged to give \$2.00. Now to Lucy, \$2.00 is more than half her weekly income. To Lucy's daddy, \$2.00 is mere pocket change. Lucy worries because \$2.00 seems so much. Her daddy feels \$2.00 for him is really not enough!

Wouldn't it be better if we planned our offerings on a percentage basis, just like tithe? Many are doing just



**T**his is Lucy Henderson's daddy's building. Lucy's daddy works in an office on the 32nd floor from eight to five each weekday. Mr. Henderson's weekly income is substantially higher than Lucy's.

On Sabbath, Mr. Henderson puts a check into an envelope, marks it "Tithe" and puts it in the offering plate. That 10% of his income helps support the world ministry of the church. Mr. Henderson is happy to return his tithe to the Lord.

# much tithe to pay, we give in offerings?

that. The fact is, if every church member gave as an offering 2-3% of income, all world budget financial needs, from the support of missions to educational institutions, would be adequately met. Giving as God has blessed is always ideal.

**Proportionate financial support. It's an idea as old as tithing.**

## Facts About The Collegiate Quarterly

- Published with the approval of the General Conference Sabbath School Department.
- Discussion is centered around the same themes as the adult quarterly.
- Special attention is directed toward the expressions and needs of the college and university person.
- An intercollegiate project of the colleges and universities across North America.
- Approximately 200 professors, college students, pastors, church administrators and laymen have contributed articles for the quarterly.
- The international circulation of the quarterly reached 13,000 for the second quarter of 1980.

## How To Use The Collegiate Quarterly

1. The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is not designed to be just a supplementary quarterly. It is *the* Sabbath School quarterly for the college and university person—though many in other environments and age-brackets are also attracted to its use. So use it just like you would any other daily study guide or Sabbath School quarterly.
2. The Logos articles of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY have been condensed and rewritten from the corresponding weeks of the adult Sabbath School lessons. As the articles with the greatest Bible base, they most clearly reveal the central theme for each week and around them the other articles center their discussion.
3. Along with each daily discussion, a reference is given of a biblical passage for further Bible study. We encourage you to read these passages—even though some may be lengthy—as this will greatly enhance your study.
4. Do not accept every concept and emphasis made in the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY just because it is in the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY. For it can be dangerous to accept anything as truth, without personal investigation, simply because it has an organizational stamp of approval.

One goal of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is “to aid in developing thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men’s thoughts.” To meet this goal, it is necessary to include within the pages of this quarterly challenging and stimulating material—which inherently may contain something which you disagree with. But that’s OK. Challenge the authors. Think. Prayerfully and critically question the material in each day’s lesson to determine the truth in the material for you.

# The Sermon On The Mount

## An Introduction To The Lesson

"I sure am anxious to hear Jesus speak. You see, I knew his father—in fact I even used to do a little business with him from time to time. And so I've known Jesus for nearly thirty years. Well, in fact ever since Joseph and Mary and the family moved back here to Nazareth I've known him. Nice family. Good boys—every one of them.

"But now Jesus, he was different—different, that is, in a good way. It seems like he never did anything very wrong. Oh, every now and then he would get into trouble for ignoring some of our traditions—and no boy ought to do that—but by and large he was a good kid. A real good kid. I've always liked him. Do anything you'd ever ask of him. And work like you wouldn't believe.

"But I'll tell you something else about him—that guy is close to God. I mean, it's almost like he's a prophet. You know, one night my missus was real sick—she got the fever or something—and I was scared to death; thought she was going to die. Well, I went out looking for a doctor and just happened to pass Jesus on the road—he must have been out on a late-night walk. So, wishing that someone could be back at the house, I asked him to go stay with Anna—that's my wife's name, Anna—while I went to get the doctor.

"Well, it was about half an hour till I could get that doctor, but when we finally got back to my place, lo and behold my wife met me at the door—all cleaned up and everything! She said Jesus had healed her! And I guess he really had.

"But do you know what? That Jesus, do you know what that dear man was doing? He was fixing my wife and me a little snack. Said he thought we might need a little bit of late-night nourishment.

"Yes sir. I've always admired him. Even been proud of him—like he was my own. I'm anxious to hear what he has to say."

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a moun-

tainside and sat down, and the people gathered around. And he began to teach them saying:

"Blessed are those who find themselves, not in obeying traditions and standards and restrictions, but in being sons and daughters of God. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus paused to give the silent multitude some time for reflection and then he continued.

"As a whole, the Jewish people have experienced what could be called an identity crisis. As the Spirit of the Father has been forced to withdraw from our midst, we, as a people, have been left wondering who we are and for what we stand.

"Our religious leaders have tried to give us back our identity in prescribing rules and restrictions and raising higher and higher the standard for us to reach. But as it is written, 'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of goats.'

"My friends, my neighbors and kin, come unto me if you are laboring and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Don't seek for an identity in rules and in standards. Find yourselves in being sons and daughters of the living sovereign God.

" 'Rules, rules, rules' is a symptom of a community which is experiencing an identity crisis. Indeed, rules are non-issues. The issue is whether or not you live a life committed to God. For when you have found your identity as a child of God, then everything else will fall into place. And you will possess the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus was finished. And only the wind dared to speak.

"Jesus," I said to myself, "you've got guts. But I think you're right. Yes sir, I think you're probably right."

**Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, was responsible for compiling the information for this issue of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY.**

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# The Kingdom Of Heaven



庚申年夏



"And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

— Luke 17:20, 21

by Albert Schweitzer

The belief in the Kingdom of God is the most difficult demand Christian faith makes of us. We are asked to believe in what seems impossible, namely in the victory of the spirit of God over the spirit of the world. Our trust and hope are invested in the miracle which the spirit can produce.

But the miracle must occur in us before it occurs in the world. We dare not hope that by our efforts we can create the conditions of the kingdom in the world. We must certainly work for it. But there can be no divine kingdom in the world, if there is not one first of all in our hearts. The beginning of the kingdom is to be found in our determination to bring our every thought and deed under the dominion of the kingdom. Nothing will come to pass without inwardness. The spirit of God will only contend against the spirit of the world when it has triumphed over the spirit in our hearts.

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"Religion And Ethics" by Albert Schweitzer from *A Treasury of Albert Schweitzer*. Ed. Thomas Kiernan. Copyright © 1965, Philosophical Library, Inc.

by editors

Notes

**"Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" (James 2:5).**

In the Bible, the phrases "kingdom of heaven" or "kingdom of God" refer more to a kind or quality or condition of people rather than they do to any one geographical area, political entity, class, or race. The kingdom of heaven occurs wherever there are individuals who freely and imaginatively live out the value system of God.

**"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20, 21).**

The phrases "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are virtually interchangeable: they refer to the presence of God's values and His offer of salvation. There were moments in Old Testament history when God's values and His offer of salvation shone brightly, and there were others when these were hardly visible. However, it was the life of Jesus that gave a full illumination of what it means to be a member of the kingdom of God.

Nevertheless, as Jesus' offer of membership in the kingdom of God was rejected by most of His countrymen, so it has been rejected by many of His professed people. **"He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11).** They have challenged His right to offer membership in the kingdom of God because His description of the kingdom has differed so widely from theirs. They had completely inverted the value system of God, which placed service as the most prestigious of virtues.

But Jesus said, Whosoever shall do and keep the gospel of the kingdom, **"the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19).** (See also verses 17, 18, 20.)

God had given His people two gifts: (a) a knowledge of Himself, and (b) a knowledge of the ideals He had in mind for created beings. The chosen people had memorized the ideals but had lost sight of the God who stood behind them. Religious individuals were inclined to draw attention to themselves rather than to God. While God's friends are supposed to be living evidence for the quality of heaven's values, they are above all responsible for keeping a true knowledge of God alive in society. As we read in Hosea 4 and Romans 1, the greatest need of this world is a knowledge of what kind of person God is.

**"Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matthew 13:33).**

"As the leaven, when mingled with the meal, works from within outward, so it is by the renewing of the heart that the grace of God works to transform the life. . . . There are many who try to reform by correcting this or that bad habit, and they hope in this way to become Christians, but they are beginning in the wrong place. Our first work is with the heart" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p.97).

This passage indicates that members of God's kingdom on earth are difficult to identify by mere external means. They may be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; they may be in other religious communities. Like the centurion that came to Jesus, they may show no outward allegiance to any religion. But because the Spirit of God is working within their hearts, they are indeed members of the kingdom of heaven and will be gathered into the body in the last day.

selected by editors

In the multitude that listened to Christ's teaching there were many Pharisees. These noted contemptuously how few of His hearers acknowledged Him as the Messiah. And they questioned with themselves how this unpretending teacher could exalt Israel to universal dominion. Without riches, power, or honor, how was He to establish the new kingdom? Christ read their thoughts and answered them:

"Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?" In earthly governments there was nothing that could serve for a similitude. No civil society could afford Him a symbol. "It is like a grain of mustard seed," He said, "which, when it is sown upon the earth, though it be less than all the seeds that are upon the earth, yet when it is sown, groweth up, and becometh greater than all the herbs, and putteth out great branches; so that the birds of the heaven can lodge under the shadow thereof." (R.V.)

The germ in the seed grows by the unfolding of the life-principle which God has implanted. Its development depends upon no human power. So it is with the kingdom of Christ. It is a new creation. Its principles of development are the opposite of those that rule the kingdoms of this world. Earthly governments prevail by physical force; they maintain their dominion by war; but the founder of the new kingdom is the Prince of Peace. The Holy Spirit represents worldly kingdoms under the symbol of fierce beasts of prey; but Christ is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. In His plan of government there is no employment of brute force to compel the conscience. The Jews looked for the kingdom of God to be established in the same way as the kingdoms of the world. To promote righteousness they resorted to external measures. They devised methods and plans. But Christ implants a principle. By implanting truth and righteousness, He counterworks error and sin.

As Jesus spoke this parable, the mustard plant could be seen far and near, lifting itself above the grass and grain, and waving its branches lightly in the air. Birds flitted from twig to twig, and sang amid the leafy foliage. Yet the seed from which sprang this giant plant was among the least of all seeds. At first it sent up a tender shoot, but it was of strong vitality, and grew and flourished until it reached its present great size. So the kingdom of Christ in its beginning seemed humble and insignificant. Compared with earthly kingdoms it appeared to be the least of all. By the rulers of this world Christ's claim to be a king was ridiculed. Yet in the mighty truths committed to His followers the kingdom of the gospel possessed a divine life. And how rapid was its growth, how widespread its influence! When Christ spoke this parable, there were only a few Galilean peasants to represent the new kingdom. Their poverty, the fewness of their numbers, were urged over and over again as a reason why men should not connect themselves with these simple-minded fishermen who followed Jesus. But the mustard seed was to grow and spread forth its branches throughout the world. When the earthly kingdoms whose glory then filled the hearts of men should perish, the kingdom of Christ would remain, a mighty and far-reaching power.

(Taken from *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 76-78).

Key passage:  
Matthew 13:31-32

Notes

**"The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed"**

**The Jews devised methods and plans; Christ implants a principle**

**"The kingdom of Christ remains"**

by William Barclay

It is evident that the Kingdom of God was central to the message of Jesus. The first emergence of Jesus on the scene of history was when he came into Galilee preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). Jesus himself described the preaching of the kingdom as an obligation laid upon him . . . (Luke 4:43; Mark 1:38). Luke's description of Jesus' activity is that he went through every city and village preaching and showing the good news of the Kingdom of God (Luke 8:1). Clearly the meaning of the Kingdom of God is something which we are bound to try to understand.

When we do try to understand the meaning of this phrase we meet with certain puzzling facts. We find that Jesus spoke of the Kingdom in three different ways. He spoke of the Kingdom as existing in the *past*. He said that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets were in the Kingdom (Luke 13:28; Matthew 8:11). Clearly therefore the Kingdom goes far back into history. He spoke of the Kingdom as *present*. "The Kingdom of God," he said, "is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:21). The Kingdom of God is therefore a present reality here and now. He spoke of the Kingdom of God as *future*, for he taught men to pray for the coming of the Kingdom in this his own prayer. How then can the Kingdom be past, present and future all at the one time? How can the Kingdom be at one and the same time something which existed, which exists, and for whose coming it is our duty to pray?

We find the key in this double petition of the Lord's Prayer. One of the commonest characteristics of Hebrew style is what is technically known as *parallelism*. The Hebrew tended to say everything twice. He said it in one way, and then he said it in another way which repeated or amplified or explained the first way. . . .

Let us apply this principle to these two petitions of the Lord's Prayer [Matthew 6:10]. Let us set them down side by side:

"Thy Kingdom come—Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

Let us assume that the second petition explains, and amplifies, and defines the first. We then have the perfect definition of the Kingdom of God—*The Kingdom of God is a society upon earth where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven*. Here we have the explanation of how the Kingdom can be past, present and future all at the one time. Any man who at any time in history perfectly did God's will was within the Kingdom; any man who perfectly does God's will is within the Kingdom; but since the world is very far from being a place where God's will is perfectly and universally done, the consummation of the Kingdom is still in the future and is still something for which we must pray.

To be in the Kingdom is to obey the will of God. Immediately we see that the Kingdom is not something which primarily has to do with nations and peoples and countries. It is something which has to do with each one of us. The Kingdom is in fact the most personal thing in the world. The Kingdom demands the submission of *my will, my heart, my life*. It is only when each one of us makes his personal decision and submission that the Kingdom comes.

**"To be in the kingdom is to obey the will of God"**

**Key passage:**  
Matthew 6:9-13

**Notes**

**The kingdom of God is a past, present and future reality**

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by Beatrice S. Neall

Key passage:  
John 8:12-20

Notes

The beatitudes describe the citizen of the kingdom—the kingdom person. I see there the qualities I must have to belong. If someone had all those qualities, what would he be like? How I wish I had a role model I could relate to and identify with. Who would it be: my father, my friend, my teacher? Not exactly. I don't know of any such model—unless it is Jesus. Are the beatitudes a description of Jesus, the Kingdom Person *par excellence*?

Was He "poor in spirit"? He "emptied Himself" of glory, majesty, wealth, position and power to become a man (Phil. 2:7; cf. II Cor. 8:9). Did He mourn? He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). Was He meek? He had a calm, controlled disposition, "never elated by applause, nor dejected by censure or disappointment" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 330; Matthew 11:29). Did He hunger and thirst after righteousness? Doing God's will was the hunger, the passion of His life (John 4:32-34). Was He merciful? There was no sin too great for Him to forgive (Mark 5:19). Was He pure in heart? Not even by a thought did He yield to sin (John 8:46). Was He a peacemaker? He reconciled the world to God by bridging the gap of sin by His own body stretched out on a cross (II Cor. 5:19). Was He persecuted for righteousness' sake? He endured more ill treatment than any human being, yet "when he was reviled, he did not revile in return" (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

Yet what does Jesus' good example mean to me? I can't identify with Him. Now my problem is worse than before—His perfection only discourages me. It only points out the gap between us. His good example is more like bad news than good.

But wait. The beatitudes themselves tell the "how-to" of becoming the kind of person they describe.

I look at Jesus in the beatitudes. I see that He has everything and I have nothing. I am destitute—in dire need. I come to Christ a beggar, totally dependent upon His bounty. And thus I fulfill the first beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Looking at Jesus again, I become aware of the selfishness that warps my life. The contrast between Him and me is so painful that I weep. And thus I fulfill the second beatitude, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

As I meditate upon the exquisite loveliness of the character of Jesus, my pride, like a guilty dog, slinks cringing out the door. A meek and humble spirit takes its place. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Gazing still at Jesus, I feel an inexpressible longing for His goodness, His righteous character. I am parched with thirst, starved for nourishment. I lift up the empty hands of faith, and He fills them with His righteousness, imputed and imparted. I am full. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

The first four beatitudes thus illustrate the means of becoming Christlike—coming to Him with a sense of poverty, emptiness, hunger, dependence, desire. He cannot turn away from such need. But this great sense of need comes only from a long look at the Pattern.

by Watchman Nee

**Editor's Note:** Opposite from "the kingdom of God" is "this world." Watchman Nee, the great Chinese writer and preacher, discusses this world system under which many professed members and institutions of the kingdom of heaven have fallen.

Having every one of us been in bondage of sin, we readily believe that sinful things are Satanic; but do we believe equally that the things of the world are Satanic? Many of us, I think, are still in two minds about this. Yet how clearly Scripture affirms that "the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Satan well knows that, generally speaking, to try to ensnare real Christians through things that are positively sinful is vain and futile. They will usually sense the danger and elude him. So he had contrived instead an enticing network, the mesh of which is so skillfully woven as to entrap the most innocent of men. We flee sinful lusts, and with good reason, but when it comes to such seemingly innocuous things as science and art and education, how readily do we lose our sense of values and fall a prey to his enticements!

Yet our Lord's sentence of judgment clearly implies that everything that constitutes "the world" is out of line with God's purpose. His words, "Now is the judgment of this world," clearly imply the condemnation of all that goes to make up the *kosmos*, and would never have been uttered if there were not something radically amiss with it. . . . Do we acknowledge that Satan is today the prince of education and science and culture and the arts, and that they, with him, are doomed? do we acknowledge that he is the effective master of all those things that together make up the world system?

When mention is made of a dance hall or a nightclub, our reaction as Christians is one of instinctive disapproval. To us that is "the world" *par excellence*. When, however, to go to the other extreme, medical science or social service are discussed, there may be no such reaction at all. These things command our tacit approval, and maybe too our enthusiastic support. And between these extremes there lie a host of other things varying widely in their influence for good or bad, between which we should probably none of us agree on where to draw an exact line. Yet let us face the fact that judgment has been pronounced by God, not upon certain selected things that belong to this world, but impartially upon them all. . . .

The recurring phrase "after its kind" in Genesis 1 represents a law of reproduction that governs the whole realm of biological nature. It does not, however, govern the realm of the Spirit. For generation after generation, human parents can beget children after their kind; but one thing is certain: Christians cannot beget Christians! Not even where both parents are Christians will the children born to them automatically be Christians, no, not even in the first generation. It will take a fresh act of God every time.

And this principle applies no less truly in the affairs of mankind more widely. All that belongs to human nature continues spontaneously; all that belongs to God continues only for as long as God's working continues. And the world is all-inclusively that which can continue apart from divine activity, that is, which can go on by itself without the need of specific acts of God to maintain it in freshness. The world, and all that belongs to the world, does this naturally—it is its nature—and in doing so *it moves in a direction contrary to the will of God*. This statement we shall now seek to illustrate both from the Scripture and from Christian experience. . . .

Key passage:  
John 15

Notes

**"The whole world lieth in the evil one"**

**"Christians cannot beget Christians! It will take a fresh act of God every time"**

I think of one such enterprise that, at the outset of its history, was the creation of a God-fearing businessman. Now godly fear is a quality that can only exist as it is sustained from heaven, but business acumen and the efficient organization which it creates can be self-perpetuating. In the first generation of this firm's history we find divine life being mediated through its founder sufficient to hold what was even then a worldly concern securely under the authority of God. But by the second generation that restraint was gone and, as one would expect, the business gravitated automatically into the world system. Godly fear had drained away, but the firm itself is still flourishing. . . .

**“Godly fear had drained away, but the firm itself is still flourishing”**

When we turn to education, both the Bible and experience have something to say to us. Speaking allegorically we might say that in rejecting Saul and choosing David God was passing over a man distinguished by his head (for he was that much taller than his peers) in favor of the man after his heart! But more seriously, the men such as Joseph and Moses and Daniel, of whose wisdom God made public use, each received in a direct way from God himself the understanding they needed. They took little account of their secular education. And the apostle Paul clearly placed scholarship among the “all things” that he counted to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord (Phil. 3:8). He draws a clear distinction between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom that comes from God (1 Cor. 1:21, 30). . . .

. . . Over a century ago the Church set out to establish in China schools and hospitals with a definite spiritual tone and an evangelistic objective. In those early days not much importance was attached to the buildings, while considerable emphasis was placed on the institutions' role in the proclamation of the Gospel. Ten or fifteen years ago you could go over the same ground and in many places find much larger and finer institutions on those original sites, but compared with the earlier years, far fewer converts. And by today many of those splendid schools and colleges have become purely educational centers, lacking in any truly evangelistic motive at all, while to an almost equal extent, many of the hospitals exist now solely as places merely of physical and no longer of spiritual healing. The men who initiated them had, by their close walk with God, held those institutions steadfastly into his purpose, but when they passed away, the institutions themselves quickly gravitated toward worldly standards and goals, and in doing so classified themselves as “things of the world.” We should not be surprised that this is so. . . .

**“Many of the hospitals exist now solely as places merely of physical and no longer of spiritual healing”**

The Church of God, let me repeat, never ceases to be dependent upon the life of God for its maintenance. Imagine a living church in a city today with its fellowship and prayer and Gospel witness, and its many homes and centers of spiritual activity. Some years hence what do we find? If God's people have followed him in faith and obedience it may be a place filled more than ever with the life and light of the Lord and the power of his Word; but if in unfaithfulness to him they have forsaken their vision of Christ, it may equally well have become a place where people preach atheism. By then as a church it will have ceased to exist. For the Church depends for its very existence upon a ceaseless impartation of fresh life from God, and cannot survive one day without it.

**“The Church depends for its very existence upon a ceaseless impartation of fresh life from God”**

But suppose alongside that church there is a school or hospital or publishing house, or other religiously founded institution, originating in the faith of the same church members. Assuming that the need for its

service continues still to exist ten years hence and has not been met by some alternative private or State enterprise, then the probability is that that work will still be operating then at a no less efficient and commendable standard of service. For given ordinary administrative know-how, a college or a hospital can continue efficiently on a purely institutional level without any fresh influx of divine life. The vision may have gone, but the establishment carries on indefinitely. It has become no less worldly than everything else that can be maintained apart from the life of God. And every such thing is embraced in the Lord's sentence: "Now is the judgment of this world."

Suppose I put to you the question, "What work are you engaged in?" You answer, "Medical work." You say that without any special consciousness other than pride in the compassionate nature of your calling, and without any sense of the possible danger of your situation. But if I tell you that medical science is one more unit of a system that is Satan-controlled, what then? Assuming that as a Christian you take me seriously, then you are at once alarmed, and your reaction may even be to wonder if you had not better quit your profession. No, do not cease being a doctor! But walk softly, for you are upon territory that is governed by God's enemy, and unless you are on the watch you are as liable as anyone else to fall a prey to his device.

Or suppose you are engineering, or farming, or publishing. Take heed, for these too are things of the world, just as much as running a place of entertainment or a haunt of vice. Unless you tread softly you will be caught up somewhere in Satan's snares and will lose the liberty that is yours as a child of God.

How then, you ask, are we to be delivered from his entanglements? Many think that to escape the world is a matter of consecration, of dedicating themselves anew and more wholeheartedly to the things of God. No, it is a matter of salvation. By nature we are all entrapped in that Satanic system, and we have no escape apart from the mercy of the Lord. All our consecration is powerless to deliver us; we are dependent upon his compassion and upon his redemptive work alone to save us out of it. He is well able to do so . . . God can set us upon a rock and keep our feet from slipping. Helped by him we may turn our trade or profession to the service of his will for as long as he desires it.

But let me repeat again that the natural trend of all the "things that are in the world" is toward Satan and away from God. Some of them may have been set going by men of the Spirit with a goal that is Godward, but as soon as the restraint of the divine life is removed from them, they automatically swerve around and take that other direction. No wonder then that Satan's eyes are ever on the world's end, and on the prospect that at that time all the things of the world will revert to him. Even now, and all the time, they are moving in his direction, and at the end time they may be expected to have reached their goal. As we touch any one of the units of his system, this thought should give us pause, lest we be found inadvertently helping to construct his kingdom.

**Escaping the world is a matter, not of consecration, but of salvation**

Watchman Nee, *Love Not the World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978), pp. 21-33. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois.

**The great Chinese writer and preacher Watchman Nee was for many in the West a symbol of Christian steadfastness under the pressure of totalitarian government.**

## REACT

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1. Is one a member of the kingdom of heaven as opposed to being a member of an earthly kingdom, or in conjunction with it?
2. On the lines below, list three ways in which those who are members of the kingdom of heaven are different from ordinary good people of the world.

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3. How does one become a member of the kingdom of heaven?

Are "becoming a member of the kingdom of heaven" and "being saved" synonymous phrases?

4. Does the Christian church compose in totality the kingdom of God, or is it just a part? What about the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

In what ways does the Seventh-day Adventist Church partake of the nature of the kingdom of heaven? In what ways does it not?

What about your life?

5. In the Introduction to this week's lesson, Albert Schweitzer says: "The belief in the kingdom of God is the most difficult demand Christian faith makes of us." Is this statement true? What does Schweitzer mean?
6. Would a person who really understood the significance of his citizenship in the kingdom of heaven become involved with a war effort? Would he be active in social reforms? Could he be wealthy? Explain.
7. What is the relationship between the establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth and the proximity of the eschatological kingdom?
8. The kingdom of heaven is characterized by those who are poor, mournful, oppressed, etc. Without regard to the future, heavenly rewards, why should one be a member of the kingdom of heaven?
9. Watchman Nee, in discussing the condition of many of the institutions of the church, has concluded that the Christian church must make a continuous effort to come out of the world. Paraphrased, however, he says, "Escaping the world is a matter, not of consecration, but of salvation." What does he mean here? Is this true?

# The Poor In Spirit



庚申年夏



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

— Matthew 5:3

by Ralph Dye

"Blessed are the poor in spirit" is a powerful statement. These six words make up the most ironic, and yet the most meaningful statement in the Sermon on the Mount. But one can easily pass by the real significance of these words until in his own experience they come alive.

It was hot, and looked as though the intensity of the heat would progress in proportion to the passing of time. But I could have cared less. My mind was drifting back to my freshman year of academy. It was there that the idea to be a student missionary had first entered my gray matter. I remember having decided to go "in service" between my junior and senior years in college.

Things were simple back then. I decided that I would become very close to God, get most of my education out of the way, and then have the student missionary experience give my life the solidarity and assurance that I had always wanted.

But things hadn't turned out as planned. I had managed to read the Bible through several times, to lead out in all kinds of religious activities in both academy and college, and pull decent grades. But the presence of God that I so longed for never came. For the assurance that God would come to me and make Himself real I had been basing on the perseverance of my own dedication and sincerity.

Thus, the more determined I became not to give in to the devil and follow his ways, the more clearly I knew that something was wrong. I felt so alone and forsaken. And I knew that becoming a student missionary was my only hope, for then God would show me all the love that He had promised. I fought tenaciously to go and give my life in service.

But six months of overseas, dedicated service had come and gone, and happiness and peace—supposedly hallmarks of the

Christian faith—were still not mine. In the months that I had served as a student missionary I had not yet experienced anything that had been worth waiting twenty-two years for. After doing all of those things that one is supposed to do in order to have contact with God and find meaning in life, I found neither.

Then I decided that I was finished. "No more Mr. Nice Guy." And I began to tell God exactly what I thought of Him. I wasn't going to try and please Him and show respect for One who promised assurance and peace but delivered neither. And after chewing God out with all the hatred that I could manage, I asked to die. I had asked Him this several times previously, but never before without some hope or alternative. This time I was totally serious.

But then it happened: He spoke to me! And every word rang with truth. Every single line of thought was so true and genuine that I knew I was in contact with the Infinite. He didn't try to shelter me. He told me the truth about myself (which wasn't very nice and still isn't!). And I, trembling, told Him to forget it. But with unfailing love He kept coming back.

And finally the inevitable happened: I allowed Him to have me. I told Him that if He loved me enough to die for *me*, to associate not with sincere people but with sincerely awful people, then He could have me. I couldn't understand it then; and the more I get into what He and His kingdom are about the more I wonder if He really can love someone like me. But then, I guess that is what God is all about.

In the phrase "Blessed are the poor in spirit," God seems to be saying that it isn't the spiritual giant, but the midget that obtains heaven. It is when we see ourselves in our worst condition that we see with the understanding of God. And upon such eyesight is placed an eternal blessing.

by editors

Notes

**"Blessed are you poor" (Luke 6:20; RSV).**

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).**

In describing His mission, Jesus—borrowing the words of Isaiah—proclaimed: **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath annointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted"** (Luke 4:18, 19). Of Jesus' mission Paul said: **"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich"** (II Cor. 8:9).

Not only did the poor occupy an important place in our Lord's teachings, but in certain of the Psalms as well are the poor in Israel mentioned (see Psalms 40:17; 69:33; 109:31). The prophets were their defenders; it was to them that they announced the Messianic kingdom. They are the ones of whom it was said that they awaited **"the consolation of Israel"** and **"redemption in Jerusalem"** (Luke 2:25, 38). Although they were mistaken about the nature of His kingdom, God announced the Messiah's advent to them first: the shepherds, Simeon, Anna. Joseph and Mary were of their number, of them who were able to offer only the sacrifices of the poor in the temple (see Luke 2:21-24). It was also to the poor in Israel that Jesus first preached the good news of salvation.

In reality God is not partial to special groups. He does not exclude anyone. It is rather their inner inclinations that render the poor more open to the gospel, not poverty itself. On the other hand, history bears witness that the poor of every age and of every country are the first to respond to God's call (see I Cor. 1:26-29).

In the parable of the marriage supper Jesus again emphasized His concern for the poor: **"Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind"** (Luke 14:21).

"The Jews commonly supposed that persons suffering either financially or physically were in ill favor with God, and thus these classes were often despised and neglected by their fellow men. . . . In this parable Jesus denies that such persons are despised by God, and declares that they should not be despised by their fellow men, even when their sufferings may be due to their own misdeeds or unwise course of action. The poverty stricken and physically defective here seem to represent primarily those who are morally and spiritually bankrupt. They have no good works of their own to offer God in exchange for the blessings of salvation" (*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 809).

Thus, we may all see ourselves as "poor in spirit"—that is, if we are dealing honestly with ourselves. But **"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"** (Jer. 17:9). "The lips may express a poverty of soul that the heart does not acknowledge." Thus, "We must behold Christ. It is ignorance of Him that makes men so uplifted in their own righteousness. When we contemplate His purity and excellence, we shall see our own weakness and poverty and defects as they really are" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 159).

And what magnificent promise is made to those who sense their spiritual poverty? **"Theirs is the kingdom of heaven"** (Matthew 5:3).

selected by editors

Key passage:  
Luke 18:9-14

Notes

As something strange and new, these words fall upon the ears of the wondering multitude. Such teaching is contrary to all they have ever heard from priest or rabbi. They see in it nothing to flatter their pride or to feed their ambitious hopes. But there is about this new Teacher a power that holds them spellbound. . . . Their hearts open to Him, and, as they listen, the Holy Spirit unfolds to them something of the meaning of that lesson which humanity in all ages so needs to learn.

In the days of Christ the religious leaders of the people felt that they were rich in spiritual treasure. The prayer of the Pharisee, "God, I thank Thee, that I am not as the rest of men" (Luke 18:11, R.V.), expressed the feeling of his class and, to a great degree, of the whole nation. But in the throng that surrounded Jesus there were some who had a sense of their spiritual poverty. When in the miraculous draft of fishes the divine power of Christ was revealed, Peter fell at the Saviour's feet, exclaiming "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8): so in the multitude gathered upon the mount there were souls who, in the presence of His purity, felt that they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17); and they longed for "the grace of God that bringeth salvation" (Titus 2:11). . . .

Whom Christ pardons, He first makes penitent, and it is the office of the Holy Spirit to convince of sin. Those whose hearts have been moved by the convicting Spirit of God see that there is nothing good in themselves. They see that all they have ever done is mingled with self and sin. Like the poor publican, they stand afar off, not daring to lift up so much as their eyes to heaven, and cry, "God, be merciful to me the sinner." Luke 18:13, R.V., margin.

All who have a sense of their deep soul poverty, who feel that they have nothing good in themselves, may find righteousness and strength by looking unto Jesus. He says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden." Matthew 11:28. He bids you exchange your poverty for the riches of His grace. We are not worthy of God's love, but Christ, our surety, is worthy, and is abundantly able to save all who shall come unto Him. Whatever may have been your past experience, however discouraging your present circumstances, if you will come to Jesus just as you are, weak, helpless, and despairing, our compassionate Saviour will meet you a great way off, and will throw about you His arms of love and His robe of righteousness. He presents us to the Father clothed in the white raiment of His own character. He pleads before God in our behalf, saying: I have taken the sinner's place. Look not upon this wayward child, but look on Me. Does Satan plead loudly against our souls, accusing of sin, and claiming us as his prey, the blood of Christ pleads with greater power.

(Taken from *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 6-9.)

**"Whom Christ pardons, He first makes penitent"**

**"Exchange your poverty for the riches of His grace"**

by John Wesley

Key passage:  
I Peter 5:5-11

Notes

Visualize those to whom Jesus was speaking. It is supposed that those gathered around Him were mostly the poor of the world, with few of the rich being there. From this circumstance, He made a transition from temporal to spiritual things. "Blessed," said He, or happy as the word can be translated, in this and the following verses. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Jesus did not say they were poor as to their outward circumstances. It is possible that some of the rich may be as far from happiness as a monarch upon his throne. Jesus said the "poor in spirit". . . .

Who then are the poor in spirit? Without question, to Jesus the poor in spirit are the humble. The poor in spirit are those who know themselves. It is they who are convinced of their own sins. The poor in spirit are those to whom God has given that first repentance. . . .

He who is poor in spirit no longer depends upon his material possessions. He can no longer say, "I am rich and increasing in goods, and need nothing." The poor in spirit knows that he is wretched, poor, miserable, blind, and naked. . . . He says, "In me dwells no good thing, but only that which is evil and abominable." He has a deep sense of the loathsome sin which has been surrounding him since his birth. . . . He is aware of his pride and haughtiness of spirit. He knows of his constant bias to think more of himself than he ought to think. He is convicted of his vanity and thirst after the esteem and honor that comes from men. He knows that he has hatred, envy, jealousy, revenge, anger, malice, and bitterness. He admits to an inbred enmity both against God and against man, which appears in thousands of shapes. He admits to loving the world rather than loving God. . . . His evil past is now always in his sight. If he were to tell his faults, they would be more than he would be able to express. He may as well try to number the drops of the rain, the sands of the sea, or the days of eternity, as to number his many mistakes. The poor in spirit is now fully aware of his guilt. . . .

How can he make up for his past? . . . . If he were, from this very moment, to perform obedience to every command of God, this would make no amends for the past. He already owes God all the service he is able to perform. . . . Therefore, he sees himself utterly helpless with regard to atoning for his past sins. He is unable to make any amends to God. He cannot pay any ransom for his own soul. . . .

Poverty of spirit, then, is a just sense of both inward and outward sin. It is a sense of our true guilt and helplessness. It becomes the first step we take in running the spiritual race which is set before us. . . .

We must come to feel what the heathen could not even express. We must awake to the fact of our sins. We must come to know our true spiritual state. We must know and feel that we were shapen in wickedness. We must become aware that we have been in sin since our birth. . . . To be poor in spirit, we must cast off, renounce and abhor, all imaginations of ever being able to help ourselves. We must come to know that we can be purified and forgiven only through the grace of God which was given in Jesus. When this is done, we can then receive the promise. We then can witness, "Happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

**"He says,  
'In me dwells  
no good thing,  
but only that  
which is evil  
and  
abominable' "**

**"He cannot  
pay any  
ransom for  
his own soul"**

**"To be poor  
in spirit,  
we must  
cast off all  
imaginations  
of ever being  
able to help  
ourselves"**

HAPPINESS UNLIMITED—John Wesley's Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount—  
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by Myrna Walters

**Key passage:**  
**Proverbs 17:22**

Notes

When I hear the words "poor in spirit," I think of times when I am a little depressed, a little dejected, when my spirits are down—or "poor"—and I'm looking for some help.

But alas, what can I do?

Below I have given three suggestions to help you when you're feeling "poor in spirit." But as the Christian counselor Paul Welter, in his excellent book *Family Problems and Predicaments*, says, "When we are hurting, we want understanding, not advice." So do not add these suggestions to your list of things you "should do but don't"—one of depression's oldest tricks. Rather let me share with you three things that have helped most when darkness wraps around me.

### 1. I do something.

Sounds redundant doesn't it? But it works. Like many working wives, I struggle to keep up with my housework. It's an old battle with a rehearsed script. At the sight of one pair of dirty socks, a voice from deep within cries in despair, "Well, what do you expect from a busy professional, I'm not superwoman!" only to be answered arrogantly from my conscience, "If you could only get organized—look at Betty's house." However, I'm learning to work off this psychic storm by simply picking up the socks.

Not all my troubles melt so quickly in the heat of action, but a surprising number do. What plain preventative actions can you find? A letter to your parents, a ten minute after-class revision of your notes, subtracting the check you just wrote from your current balance, a fifteen minute visit with God before your day begins?

### 2. I remember who I am.

"I'm a child of the King, a child of the King! With Jesus my Savior, I'm a child of the King!"

It's a familiar hymn; you probably have sung it many times. I have, and yet only recently am I really beginning to understand what it means. I realize I was created to be all that I dream of becoming, and that someday I will. Someday I'll live in that "peaceable kingdom" without fear or anxiety bending my dreams and blurring my vision. It's a revolutionary idea. And it changes our lives—when we remember.

### 3. I make a friend.

When we're feeling unloved it is hard to reach out to others. Most of our energy is focused in on ourselves (i.e., "I'm so \_\_\_\_\_, I never \_\_\_\_\_, I can't \_\_\_\_\_," and etc.). But sometimes the best way to cure our myopic vision is to touch someone else's life.

I cherish the hour I spent with an elderly lady in my church who told me about her great adventures raising a family in a tent, in the midst of a Nebraska winter during the Depression.

The greatest gift I receive is from the students I teach and counsel. As they share with me their dreams and struggles, my world grows and I can see past my own reflection.

There is a lot to be discovered about the people around you—who will you begin with?

by William Barclay

Key passage:  
Psalm 34

Notes

As we have them the beatitudes are in Greek, and the word that is used for *poor* is the word *ptōchos*. In Greek there are two words for poor. There is the word *penēs* . . . *Penēs* describes the working man, the man who has nothing superfluous, the man who is not rich, but who is not destitute either. But, . . . it is not *penēs* that is used in this beatitude, it is *ptōchos*, which describes *absolute and abject poverty*. . . . So this beatitude becomes even more surprising. Blessed is the man who is abjectly and completely poverty-stricken. Blessed is the man who is absolutely destitute.

. . . Now the Jews had a special way of using the word *Poor*. In Hebrew the word is '*ani* or *ebiōn*. These words in Hebrew underwent a four-stage development of meaning. (i) They began by meaning simply *poor*. (ii) They went on to mean, *because poor, therefore having no influence or power, or help, or prestige*. (iii) They went on to mean, *because having no influence, therefore downtrodden and oppressed by men*. (iv) Finally, they came to describe *the man who, because he has no earthly resources whatever, puts his whole trust in God*. . . .

. . . *Ptochos* describes the man who is absolutely destitute, the man who has nothing at all; '*ani* and *ebion* describe the *poor, and humble, and helpless man who has put his whole trust in God*. Therefore, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit*" means:

Blessed is the man who has realized his own utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God.

If a man has realized his own utter helplessness, and has put his whole trust in God, there will enter into his life two things which are opposite sides of the same thing. He will become completely *detached from things*, for he will know that things have not got it in them to bring happiness or security; and he will become completely *attached to God*, for he will know that God alone can bring him help, and hope, and strength. The man who is poor in spirit is the man who has realized that things mean nothing, and that God means everything. . . .

Jesus says that to such poverty belongs the Kingdom of Heaven. Why should that be so? If we take the two petitions of the Lord's Prayer and set them together:

Thy Kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,

we get the definition: the Kingdom of God is a society where God's will is as perfectly done in earth as it is in heaven. That means that only he who does God's will is a citizen of the Kingdom; and we can only do God's will when we realize our own utter helplessness, our own utter ignorance, our own utter inability to cope with life, and when we put our whole trust in God. Obedience is always founded on trust. The Kingdom of God is the possession of the poor in spirit, because the poor in spirit have realized their own utter helplessness without God, and have learned to trust and obey.

So then, the first beatitude means:

O The bliss of the man who has realized his own utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God, for thus alone he can render to God that perfect obedience which will make him a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven!

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## REACT

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1. Ralph Dye, in the Introduction for this week's lesson, says that to be poor in spirit means to see yourself as you really are—as a spiritual midget (no matter how "good" you are) rather than as a spiritual giant. Do you agree? Is his definition complete? Explain.
2. Throughout the Bible God is always shown to be deeply concerned with the poor. Are we in the Christian church as concerned as is the Bible with the plight of the poor? What about in the Adventist Church?
3. John Wesley writes that the poor in spirit are those who say, "In me dwells no good thing, but only that which is evil and abominable." Do you agree? If so, how is one to maintain a good self-image when he considers himself in this way?
4. William Barclay mentions in the Opinion article that those who are members of the kingdom of God have become "completely *detached from things*" and "*attached to God*." Is this always true? Is this even *completely* possible? Is his statement more theoretically than practically correct?
5. If a person is by nature "rich in spirit," how is he to become poor?
6. What role does actual, physical poverty play in being "poor in spirit"? Explain the implications of your answer.
7. Some have charged Christianity with maintaining an attitude of indifference towards social problems, as it teaches that the poor and oppressed are in a more favorable position to receive the kingdom of God. What do you think about this? Are such charges correct?

# The Blessed Mourners



"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall  
be comforted." — Matthew 5:4

by **Karl-Heinz Schroeder**

In Genesis 1 God tells us six times that everything was very good as it came from the hands of the Creator (Genesis 1:10, 12, 21, 25, 31). There was no flaw to mar the beautiful harmony of God's creation. As each individual act of creating was finished, God saw that it was perfect. But by making everything good God took a chance. By giving man the ability to choose, the Creator provided man with the chance of disobeying. And it was man who destroyed through disobedience the perfect goodness of creation.

Ever since Adam and Eve's first act of disobedience, mankind has suffered. As we scan across the ages of the past and follow the course of mankind, we can see that suffering has not diminished as some people claim, but has been increasing and has come to such a point that we can hardly imagine that it could get worse. It has been estimated that during World War II the loss of people may have been as high as 40 million, including six million Jews who died in Nazi concentration camps. We have been told that the major portion of the Cambodian people died through political repression and starvation.

All through history man has groped for answers to this problem of suffering. Some have looked at it as an integral part of life. The teachings

of Buddha tell us that this is the case and that man will be re-born again and again into this life of suffering unless he achieves Nirvana or non-existence through complete self-denial. Life is basically a path of suffering and the sooner it is discarded the better. Modern evolutionary theory also tells us that suffering is a necessary part of life because it helps the strongest life forms to emerge. In certain political ideologies this natural suffering is supposed to lead upwards to a perfect world. And in the course to further the establishment of this perfect world order the worst human suffering has been inflicted on mankind in the twentieth century.

The Bible tells us that suffering is not natural. We are also told that we must do everything in our power to alleviate suffering (see Matthew 25:31-46). The whole ministry of Christ was concerned with the alleviation of spiritual and bodily suffering. The "good news" of Jesus Christ is a promise to restore the original perfect order. As Christians we have the privilege to participate, right now, in this beautiful work of restoration. For we are to be messengers of hope, the comforters of those who mourn.

by editors

Notes

**"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh" (Luke 6:21).**

Jesus presents God's answer to the problem of human suffering in the second beatitude. He does this not by revealing that God is not the author of suffering or by explaining why He permits it in our lives and in our world, but simply by promising us a sure consolation.

As the poor and the underprivileged of this world place their confidence in God's promises, there is and there will be consolation for them. The hope of a better world comforts them now; it is already a consolation for them, a source of joy. And the parable of the rich man and Lazarus teaches us that he who places his confidence in God and patiently endures suffering in this world will know the joy and happiness of God's children in the ages to come (see Luke 16:19-31). But there is more! For this beatitude, like the first, finds fuller meaning when it is applied to the spiritual life.

**"Blessed are they that mourn."** Indeed, **"Blessed are they that have godly sorrow for their sins."** For **"Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (II Cor. 7:10).** There is a tremendous difference between godly sorrow in spiritual mourning and worldly sorrow. The person who feels godly sorrow for sin admits his guilt and desires a reorientation in his life. He says, "I have sinned miserably, but I really desire to do what is right." The person who experiences worldly sorrow also admits his guilt, but his concern is not so much over committing sin, as it is over having the results of his sin catch up with him. This person may say, "I have sinned miserably (but if I don't get caught, I don't really care if I sin or not)." Peter is an example of the former "mourner over sin" and Judas an example of the latter.

**"Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; having the same conflict which you saw in me" (Phil. 1:29, 30).** Coming back now to a more physical interpretation of "Blessed are they that mourn," we see Christ speaking of suffering and mourning as something not to be shunned. Following Christ's example, the Christian should patiently endure the trials of the present life when his or her goal is the advancement of God's work on earth. Like Jesus who endured suffering **"for the joy that was set before him" (Hebrews 12:2),** His disciples will do it in anticipation of the joy and gladness that are reserved for the day when Jesus shall appear in His glory (see I Peter 4:13).

But let the Christian never feel alone in his suffering: The believer's older Brother knows what mourning and suffering is all about. **"When he drew near and saw the city he wept over it" (Luke 19:41). "Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane . . . he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death'" (Matthew 26:26-38; RSV; compare Hebrews 5:7, 8).**

Indeed, Jesus has experienced. He knows. So He can comfort.

**"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too" (II Cor. 1:3-5; RSV).**

selected by editors

The mourning here brought to view [Matt. 5:4] is true heart sorrow for sin. Jesus says, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." John 12:32. And as one is drawn to behold Jesus uplifted on the cross, he discerns the sinfulness of humanity. He sees that it is sin which scourged and crucified the Lord of glory. He sees that, while he has been loved with unspeakable tenderness, his life has been a continual scene of ingratitude and rebellion. He has forsaken his best Friend and abused heaven's most precious gift. He has crucified to himself the Son of God afresh and pierced anew that bleeding and stricken heart. He is separated from God by a gulf of sin that is broad and black and deep, and he mourns in brokenness of heart.

Such mourning "shall be comforted." God reveals to us our guilt that we may flee to Christ, and through Him be set free from the bondage of sin, and rejoice in the liberty of the sons of God. In true contrition we may come to the foot of the cross, and there leave our burdens.

The Saviour's words have a message of comfort to those also who are suffering affliction or bereavement. Our sorrows do not spring out of the ground. God "doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." Lamentations 3:33. When He permits trials and afflictions, it is "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." Hebrews 12:10. If received in faith, the trial that seems so bitter and hard to bear will prove a blessing. The cruel blow that blights the joys of earth will be the means of turning our eyes to heaven. How many there are who would never have known Jesus had not sorrow led them to seek comfort in Him!

The trials of life are God's workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. Their hewing, squaring, and chiseling, their burnishing and polishing, is a painful process; it is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace. . . .

God would not have us remain pressed down by dumb sorrow, with sore and breaking hearts. He would have us look up and behold His dear face of love. The blessed Saviour stands by many whose eyes are so blinded by tears that they do not discern Him. He longs to clasp our hands, to have us look to Him in simple faith, permitting Him to guide us. His heart is open to our griefs, our sorrows, and our trials. He has loved us with an everlasting love and with lovingkindness compassed us about. We may keep the heart stayed upon Him and meditate upon His loving-kindness all the day. He will lift the soul above the daily sorrow and perplexity, into a realm of peace.

Think of this, children of suffering and sorrow, and rejoice in hope. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." I John 5:4.

Blessed are they who weep with Jesus in sympathy with the world's sorrow and in sorrow for its sin.

(Taken from *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 9-13)

Key passage:  
Matthew 11:28-30

Notes

**"In true  
contrition  
we may  
come to the  
foot of the  
cross, and  
there leave  
our burdens"**

**"He would  
have us  
look up and  
behold His  
dear face  
of love"**

by Karl-Heinz Schroeder

Key passage:  
Romans 8:32

Notes

Below is an edited letter written in 1573 by an imprisoned Anabaptist young woman from Antwerp, Holland, to her one-month-old daughter.

"My dear little child, I commend you to the almighty God that He will keep you who are yet so young, and whom I must leave here in this wicked, evil, perverse world. He will be a Father to you, so that you shall have no lack here, if you only fear God; for he will be the Father of the orphans and the protector of the widows.

"Hence, my dear lamb, I who am imprisoned and bound here for the Lord's sake, can help you in no other way. Your father and I were permitted to live together only half a year, after which we were apprehended, because we sought the salvation of our souls. They took him from me, not knowing my condition, and I had to remain in imprisonment, and see him go before me. And now that I have abided the time, and borne you under my heart for nine months, and given birth to you here in prison, in great pain, they have taken you from me. Here I lie, expecting death every morning, and shall now soon follow your dear father. And I, your dear mother, write you, my dearest child, something for a remembrance, that you will thereby remember your father and mother.

"My dear Janneken, I leave you here; oh, that it had pleased the Lord that I might have brought you up; I should so gladly have done my best with respect to it; but it seems that it is not the Lord's will. Be not ashamed of us; it is the way which the prophets and the apostles want. Even Christ Himself did not spare Himself for us, but delivered Himself unto death for our sakes—how then should He not give us all things?

"Let it be your glory, that we did not die for any evildoing, and you, my dear, strive to do likewise, though they should also seek to kill you. If you follow that which is good, and seek peace, and ensue it, you shall receive the crown of eternal life; this crown I wish you.

"I leave you here among my family and friends. I hope that my father and my stepmother, and my brothers, and my sisters will do the best with you as long as they live. Be subject and obedient to them in everything, so far as it is not contrary to God.

I wrote this when you were but one month old."<sup>1</sup>

Here is an example of a person who knew the true meaning of the Beatitude: "Blessed are they that mourn."

<sup>1</sup> Copyright © 1968 by Hans J. Hillerbrand. *The Protestant Reformation*, ed. by Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Harper & Row Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 147-152. Used by permission.

by Karl-Heinz Schroeder

Key passage:  
Job 2

Notes

One of the most successful kinds of witnessing for Christ is to be a thoughtful comforter in times of grief and difficulty. This kind of mourning was certainly intended by Christ (read Matthew 5:4). He Himself was moved to tears when He faced the tomb of His friend Lazarus. Wherever suffering touches mankind, sorrow will be in the hearts of the disciples of Christ.

Many centuries before the Lazarus incident, another godly man suffered personal affliction. We are told that this ancient hero of faith was subjected to the most serious personal suffering—he lost his livelihood, he lost his children, and he even lost his wife’s support. Job suffered because Satan wanted to prove that Job’s spotless faith was only the result of his successful life (Job 1:9-11).

The news of Job’s dreadful fate soon reached the ears of his three friends. “By common consent they decided to go and offer him sympathy and consolation” (Job 2:11; *Jerusalem Bible*). When they saw him from far away they were unable to recognize their old friend. The emotional and physical suffering had taken a severe toll. They were so shaken by his sight that they showed their sympathy in typical Near Eastern fashion by weeping, tearing up their clothes, and throwing dust over their heads. And for a whole week, day and night, they sat beside him on the ground without speaking.

After the seven days Job broke the silence by giving vent to his tormented soul. And suddenly the sympathetic mourners attacked Job’s integrity. Instead of just continuing to sit and lend a sympathetic ear to this man of sorrows, the friends used all the classic arguments of their day to explain to him that he must be guilty (Job 22). Unfortunately all of these brilliant words were of no help to Job. We are told by the author of the book of Job that God was very displeased with their speeches (read Job 42:7, 8).

We often make the same mistake, however, as did the friends of Job. But in the face of suffering we should not try to explain it; we should comfort. It is not for us to explain the mystery of suffering, but it is our Christian duty to be compassionate comforters. What is needed is:

1. **A sympathetic ear that is willing to listen to the suffering heart.** Silent listening can be of great help. Knowing that somebody is willing to listen gives comfort and a feeling of security.
2. **A guarded tongue.** Often it is better to say nothing or very little. The mystery of suffering cannot be explained or argued away. A simple “I love you” will be more helpful than the most erudite discussion on God’s ultimate righteousness and man’s complete guilt.
3. **A loving touch and helpful hand.** Stretch out your arm and embrace the sufferer. Let him know that you are willing to be close in his need and that you are there to help under any circumstances.

selected by Karl-Heinz Schroeder

Key passage:  
John 15:18-27

Notes

"By 'mourning' Jesus, of course, means doing without what the world calls peace and prosperity: He means refusing to be in tune with the world or to accommodate oneself to its standards. Such men mourn for the world, for its guilt, its fate and its fortune. While the world keeps a holiday they stand aside, and while the world sings, 'Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,' they mourn. They see that for all the jollity on board, the ship is beginning to sink. The world dreams of progress, of power and of the future, but the disciples meditate on the end, the last judgement, and the coming of the kingdom. To such heights the world cannot rise. And so the disciples are strangers in the world, unwelcome guests and disturbers of the peace. No wonder the world rejects them!

"They simply bear the suffering which comes their way as they try to follow Jesus Christ, and bear it for *His* sake. Sorrow cannot tire them or wear them down, it cannot embitter them or cause them to break down under the strain; far from it, for they bear their sorrow in the strength of Him who bears them up, who bore the whole suffering of the world upon the cross . . . Thus do they find their home with their crucified Lord, both here and in eternity."

As disciples of Christ, we should not expect to be treated better than He was. And because Christ did suffer and mourn, we know that He can help us in a way no other friend can.

<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 121, 122.

## REACT

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1. By promising "mourners" a consolation which is not of this world, some have charged Christianity with offering "pie in the sky by and by." Is there some truth to this charge? Explain.
2. "I don't think I have ever really mourned over my sins. I want to be a Christian, but I have just not experienced any of this 'heart sorrow.' What should I do?"
3. Complete the following:  
I feel like mourning for my sins when . . .

I have/have not mourned over my sins recently because . . .

I like/do not like the idea of mourning over sins because . . .

4. Is there any relationship at all between a gloomy, morose personality and those that Christ has described in this beatitude?
5. What is the responsibility of an individual in mourning over the sins of an institution to which he belongs? What actions accompany this responsibility?
6. List five sins, either personal or within the Adventist Church, over which you should mourn.

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# The Meek

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"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." — Matthew 5:5

by Dean L. Hubbard

For two years they had wandered over this blistering desert. Sore feet, parched lips and sunburned foreheads combined to tell the story. Not that it was not exciting. It was great to be free. No more cursings or beatings from unreasonable Egyptian taskmasters. And then who could forget Sinai: the smoke, the thunder, the law; or the colorful tabernacle with its beautiful services? The new government promised order and security. But all those things were accomplished now. Everyone was restless. They yearned to be on the road toward the Promised Land, the so-called "land of milk and honey."

"But look. The cloud, instead of moving toward Kadesh on the border of Canaan, has started moving eastward!"

"Something's wrong, Lord. You're going the wrong way."

"That's barren country, filled with crevices, canyons and wilderness. Do we have to put up with more of that, Lord?"

"And then this manna. It was great at first, but after two years, please, can't we have some meat?"

And so it went. Nothing seemed to satisfy the Children of Israel. And since Moses was the leader and spokesman for God, he became the natural target of severe and malicious criticism. Even his own sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron, spoke against him.

"Who appointed you to be the boss, Moses?"

"Why did you marry a foreigner, a Cushite?" they sneered.

It was in this context, faced with

such ingratitude and hostility, that the Bible writer made the following observation about Moses: "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3; RSV).

Of all the Christian virtues, meekness is at once the most desirable and yet the hardest to understand and put into practice. In all the Bible, only Jesus and Moses are singled out for being particularly characterized by this virtue, and yet, throughout the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, Christians are admonished to incorporate this characteristic into their lives.

In the Old Testament, Zephaniah urges "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness" (Zeph. 2:3). In Galatians, meekness is included in Paul's outline of the results of God's Spirit working in the life. And his admonition to the Colossians was to "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience" (Col. 3:12; RSV).

Obviously, meekness is very important. But why is this? In the book *The Sanctified Life*, Ellen White says "The most precious fruit of sanctification is the grace of meekness. . . . Meekness . . . connects finite man with the infinite God" (pp. 14, 16). Could it be that without this state of mind we are unprepared to understand and appropriate to our lives what Christ has done for us?

by editors

Notes

**"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).**

In all the Scriptures God speaks with special affection of those who are gentle in character. Tenderly He encourages them with precious promises and then presents them to us as our examples.

**"Blessed are the meek" (Matthew 5:5).** The Hebrew word *anaw* and its Greek equivalent *praus* are not always translated in the same way. Modern languages give the word "meek" an implied meaning of "mousy," "tame," "timid," "docile"; so today meekness often suggests weakness or a lack of strength of character. So to understand this beatitude we should note the meaning of the word "meek."

"A distillation of inspired definition would seem to characterize meekness as an absence of self-seeking and a presence of self-forgetfulness. It is 'government of self' (4T, 348), 'a calm and trustful spirit,' 'lowliness of heart' (DA, 301), 'the ornament of God's own choice' (SL, 16). Meekness, then, is an inward calm and peace of mind that shows itself in outward precious, courteous, kind, and friendly behavior. It has been termed 'an attitude of mind and heart that prepares the way for sanctification' " (J. M. Lien, *Review and Herald*, August 16, 1973).

**"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28, 29).** Jesus is indeed the supreme illustration of what it means to be truly meek. Thus, He invites men to come to *Him*, He who is "meek and lowly in heart." The source of His gentleness and His humility is in Himself, in His heart, a heart filled with devotion and compassion for mankind (Matthew 9:36). Likewise, the source of any gentleness and humility—meekness—we might have is also to be found only in Him.

The apostle Paul understood this, and is thus an example of one whom Christ was able to transform. Note some of the expressions of Paul used to describe his character before conversion: "*blasphemer,*" "*persecutor,*" "*injurious,*" "*extremely zealous.*" **"I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it" (Gal. 1:13; RSV).** In the book of Acts, Luke points out the same brutality: **"Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison" (Luke 8:3; RSV).**

Several years later this same Paul, who had become an imitator of Christ, wrote: **"When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate" (I Cor. 4:12, 13; RSV).** And Paul exhorts all believers: **"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).** **"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience" (Col. 3:12; RSV); "I therefore . . . beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness" (Eph. 4:1, 2; RSV).**

Indeed, meekness is not weakness. It does not allow for the world to trample underfoot the message of heaven. Rather, the true strength of Christianity has been in the meek and gentle love that believers manifest one toward another.

**"Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5; RSV).**

**Meekness:  
"An attitude  
of mind and  
heart that  
prepares the  
way for  
sanctification"**

**"Meekness  
is not  
weakness"**

selected by editors

Key passage:  
Matthew 11:29

Notes

Throughout the Beatitudes there is an advancing line of Christian experience. Those who have felt their need of Christ, those who have mourned because of sin and have sat with Christ in the school of affliction, will learn meekness from the divine Teacher. . . .

Jesus emptied Himself, and in all that He did, self did not appear. He subordinated all things to the will of His Father. When His mission on earth was about to close, He could say, "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." John 17:4. And He bids us, "Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself" (Matthew 11:29; 16:24); let self be dethroned and no longer hold the supremacy of the soul.

He who beholds Christ in His self-denial, His lowliness of heart, will be constrained to say, as did Daniel, when he beheld One like the sons of men, "My comeliness was turned in me into corruption. Daniel 10:8. The independence and self-supremacy in which we glory are seen in their true vileness as tokens of servitude to Satan. Human nature is ever struggling for expression, ready for contest; but he who learns of Christ is emptied of self, of pride, of love of supremacy, and there is silence in the soul. Self is yielded to the disposal of the Holy Spirit. Then we are not anxious to have the highest place. We have no ambition to crowd and elbow ourselves into notice; but we feel that our highest place is at the feet of our Saviour. We look to Jesus, waiting for His hand to lead, listening for His voice to guide. The apostle Paul had this experience, and he said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:20.

When we receive Christ as an abiding guest in the soul, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. The Saviour's life on earth, though lived in the midst of conflict, was a life of peace. While angry enemies were constantly pursuing Him, He said, "He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him." John 8:29. No storm of human or satanic wrath could disturb the calm of that perfect communion with God. And He says to us "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest." John 14:27; Matthew 11:29. Bear with Me the yoke of service for the glory of God and the uplifting of humanity, and you will find the yoke easy and the burden light. . . .

The meekness of Christ, manifested in the home, will make the inmates happy; it provokes no quarrel, gives back no angry answer, but soothes the irritated temper and diffuses a gentleness that is felt by all within its charmed circle. Wherever cherished, it makes the families of earth a part of the one great family above.

Far better would it be for us to suffer under false accusation than to inflict upon ourselves the torture of retaliation upon our enemies. The spirit of hatred and revenge originated with Satan, and can bring only evil to him who cherishes it. Lowliness of heart, that meekness which is the fruit of abiding in Christ, is the true secret of blessing. "He will beautify the meek with salvation." Psalm 149:4.

(Taken From *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 13-17.)

**"We feel that our highest place is at the feet of our Savior"**

**"Meekness provokes no quarrel, gives back no angry answer . . ."**

by William Barclay

Key passage:  
Ephesians 4:1, 2

Notes

In our modern English idiom the word *meeek* is hardly one of the honourable words of life. Nowadays it carries with it an idea of spinelessness, and subservience, and mean-spiritedness. It paints the picture of a submissive and ineffective creature. But it so happens that the word *meeek*—in Greek *praos*—was one of the great Greek ethical words. . . .

Aristotle defines *meeekness*, *praotēs*, as the mean between *orgilotes*, which means *excessive anger*, and *aorgesia*, which means *excessive angerlessness*. *Praotēs*, *meeekness*, as Aristotle saw it, is the happy medium between too much and too little anger. And so the first possible translation of this beatitude is:

Blessed is the man who is always angry at the right time, and never angry at the wrong time.

If we ask what the right time and the wrong time are, we may say as a general rule for life that it is never right to be angry for any insult or injury done to ourselves; that is something that no Christian must ever resent; but that it is often right to be angry at injuries done to other people. Selfish anger is always a sin; selfless anger can be one of the great moral dynamics of the world.

But the word *praos* has a second standard Greek usage. It is the regular word for an animal which has been domesticated, which has been trained to obey the word of command, which has learned to answer to the reins. It is the word for an animal which has learned to accept control. So the second possible translation of this beatitude is:

Blessed is the man who has every instinct, every impulse, every passion under control. Blessed is the man who is entirely self-controlled.

The moment we have stated that, we see that it needs a change. It is not so much the blessing of the man who is *self-controlled*, for such complete self-control is beyond human capacity; rather, it is the blessing of the man who is completely *God-controlled*, for only in his service do we find our perfect freedom, and in doing his will our peace.

But there is still a third possible side from which we may approach this beatitude. The Greeks always contrasted the quality which they called *praotēs*, and which the Authorized Version translates *meeekness*, with the quality which they called *hupselokardia*, which means *lofty-heartedness*. . . .

*Praotēs* describes humility, the acceptance of the necessity to learn and of the necessity to be forgiven. It describes man's only proper attitude to God. So then, the third possible translation of this beatitude is:

Blessed is the man who has the humility to know his own ignorance, his own weakness, and his own need. . . .

It is clear that this word *praos* means far more than the English word *meeek* now means; it is, in fact, clear that there is no one English word which will translate it, although perhaps the word *gentle* comes nearest to it. The full translation of this third beatitude must read:

O the bliss of the man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time, who has every instinct, and impulse, and passion under control because he himself is God-controlled, who has the humility to realize his own ignorance and his own weakness, for such a man is a king among men!

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William Barclay was professor of divinity and biblical criticism at the University of Glasgow and a world-renowned Scottish New Testament interpreter.

by Dean L. Hubbard

Key passage:  
Psalm 25:9

Notes

Jesus was meek. Everything He did was an illustration of meekness. When He kicked over the tables, picked up the whip and drove the money changers from the Temple, He was displaying meekness. Likewise, He was meek as He stood silent while falsely accused, spit at, beaten, and nailed to a cross.

Moses was meek. Abraham was meek. But the difference between their meekness and Christ's is that their meekness was neither perfect nor consistent. On at least two occasions, Moses' meekness failed: when he killed the Egyptian guard and when he angrily struck the rock. When Abraham failed to trust God and lied to Pharaoh, claiming that Sarah was his sister instead of his wife, he was not being meek. As we contemplate these examples, there are at least three generalizations we can make about meekness.

**1. Meekness is essentially and first of all a correct view of ourselves.**

Moses and Abraham were their meekest when they realized and acknowledged their utter dependence upon God and their total lack of ability to succeed without Him. The person who is meek sees himself for what he really is and for what he is worth apart from Christ. He is not proud of himself. He sees nothing in himself to boast about, nor is he sensitive about himself. He is not anxious to have the highest place. Like David, he does not demand all of his rights as claims.

The meek person does not pity himself nor does he seek sympathy. He is not flattered by praise nor is he threatened by censure; he is secure in Christ. Of course, this is a negation of much popular advice that we should look out for number one, assert ourselves, and demand our rights as claims.

**2. Secondly, meekness is a willingness to be guided by God.** This is a natural sequel to a correct view of self. Psalm 25:9 says "The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way." Meekness, in this sense, is a disposition of the heart that is susceptible to the leading of the Holy Spirit, as opposed to a defiant and inflexible self will. This is what Moses' meekness consisted of. A willingness to wander around in a desert with a group of ex-slaves when he could have been king—because that is what God wanted! In this sense, meekness is very much akin to faith—faith to let God lead. It is like the wise youth who has such faith in the wisdom of his parents that he will accept their advice even when it goes against his own opinion, believing that he will be happier.

**3. Thirdly, meekness is self control, or rather "God control."** That person is meek who acts kindly when it is in his power to act severely. It is one thing not to retaliate when it is not in your power to do so, and quite another thing when you could, but choose not to. This is where Abraham demonstrated such great meekness with Lot. He could have exercised vengeance, but instead he displayed forgiveness.

Jesus was the crowning illustration of meekness, the personification of all that we have learned about this wonderful characteristic (read Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus emptied Himself in all that He did. He did not attempt to dazzle human senses with a display of outward show. He came humbly, unassuming and approachable, dedicated to serving and saving mankind.

Thus, "We are to enter the school of Christ, to learn from Him meekness and lowliness. Redemption is that process by which the soul is trained for heaven. This training means a knowledge of Christ" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 330).

by John R. W. Stott

It seems important to note that in the beatitudes "the meek" come between those who mourn over sin and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The particular form of meekness which Christ requires in his disciples will surely have something to do with this sequence. I believe Dr. Lloyd-Jones is right to emphasize that this meekness denotes a humble and gentle attitude to others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves. He points out that it is comparatively easy to be honest with ourselves before God and acknowledge ourselves to be sinners in his sight. He goes on: "But how much more difficult it is to allow *other people* to say things like that about me! I instinctively resent it. We all of us prefer to condemn ourselves than to allow somebody else to condemn us."

For example, if I may apply this principle to everyday ecclesiastical practice: I myself am quite happy to recite the General Confession in church and call myself a "miserable sinner." It causes me no great problem. I can take it in my stride. But let somebody else come up to me after church and call me a miserable sinner, and I want to punch him on the nose! In other words, I am not prepared to allow other people to think or speak of me what I have just acknowledged before God that I am. There is a basic hypocrisy here; there always is when meekness is absent.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones sums it up admirably: "Meekness is essentially a true view of oneself, expressing itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others . . . The man who is truly meek is the one who is truly amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do." This makes him gentle, humble, sensitive, patient in all his dealings with others.

These "meek" people, Jesus added, "shall inherit the earth." One would have expected the opposite. One would think the "meek" people get nowhere because everybody ignores them or else rides roughshod over them and tramples them underfoot. It is the tough, the overbearing who succeed in the struggle for existence; weaklings go to the wall. Even the children of Israel had to fight for their inheritance, although the Lord their God gave them the promised land. But the condition on which we enter our spiritual inheritance in Christ is not might but meekness, for . . . everything is ours if we are Christ's.

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Key passage:  
Psalm 8:3, 4

Notes

**Meekness:**  
"A humble and gentle attitude to others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves"

**"The man who is truly meek is the one who is truly amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do"**

## REACT

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1. Some believe that weakness is much more closely associated with meekness than many would like to think. This is generally based on the idea that the Christian is saved by and converted to be like the God of weakness (the God on the cross) rather than the God of power. But what do you think? To what—if any—degree is meekness weakness? Explain the implications of your answer.
2. John Stott, in the Evidence article for this week, describes meekness as “a humble and gentle attitude to others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves.” Explain this relationship between meekness and a proper understanding of oneself.
3. Discuss the relationship between meekness and power. How powerful in this world could a meek person be? What dangers are involved here?
4. Please mark the appropriate responses below.  
The meek:
  - shun all outward adornment (fancy cars, expensive homes, lavish vacations, etc.).
  - are usually found among the middle class in American society.
  - are constantly searching for new truth.
  - seek power so that they “can be an influence for good in the world.”
  - find themselves to be very closely associated with the world.
  - are usually found among what many consider to be the “dregs of society.”
  - silently suffer with the poor and oppressed.
5. Does the term “meekness” characterize mainly a spiritual condition (humble soul, contrite heart, etc.)? To what extent is it indicative of the entire person?



## The Hungering And Thirsting Ones

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

by H. Ward Hill

What leads a person to hunger and thirst after righteousness? In one sense, it may be the nature of our humanity. We were created to belong to God. No amount of pleasure, knowledge, or high moral actions is able to take the place of God. When we are brought into oneness with God, then we are able to solve the conflicts within ourselves, and between ourselves and other people.

In Maslow's famous "hierarchy of needs" there is the suggestion that our primitive, physical needs must be satisfied before we go on to higher needs which ultimately lead to self-fulfillment. We must be fed and clothed before we can properly appreciate song and prayer.

However, one's desire to be right with God can sometimes over-ride all other needs. The woman with whom Jesus spoke in John 4 left a container full of water behind when she began to drink of the "water" which Christ supplied.

Other people who thirsted for righteousness have gone to great lengths to satisfy this type of longing. Ascetic monks have denied themselves every type of bodily comfort in a misguided effort to

obtain righteousness. From the crusades to the Puritan quest for a Christian America, evidence has piled up suggesting a soul hunger and thirst that no material provision could ever satisfy.

When Balaam cried out, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like this" (Numbers 23:10), when the rich young ruler came running to the Master and asked, "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16), when the people at Pentecost pleadingly asked of Peter, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), they were expressing a universal thirst and hunger which Augustine described in the words, "Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee."

"Not by painful struggles or wearisome toil, not by gift or sacrifice, is righteousness obtained, but it is freely given to every soul who hungers and thirsts to receive it. . . . 'This is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' Isaiah 55:1; 54:17; Jeremiah 2:6" (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 18).

by editors

Notes

**"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6; RSV).**

Rare is the man who does not hunger and thirst after righteousness. In the evil world in which we live the unsatisfied are legion. Many are they who, consciously or unconsciously, feel the inner emptiness of human misery and suffer from a kind of soul sickness. Surely the hungering and thirsting after righteousness has never been greater than it is today.

But this metaphor was also especially meaningful to Christ's hearers, the most of whom were always hungry or only rarely satisfied, and all of whom had suffered from thirst. Moreover, no word could have been more pleasing to their ears than the promise of righteousness at a time when Israel was awaiting the advent of the Messiah with the hope that He would deliver them from their yoke of bondage, establish righteousness, and administer law over all people.

Concerning this word *righteousness*, the *S.D.A. Bible Commentary* has this to say: "In every instance of its use in the NT (94 times) *dikaiousuné* is translated 'righteousness.' Among the Greeks 'righteousness' consisted in conformity to accepted customs. To the Jews it was essentially a matter of conformity to the requirements of the law as interpreted by Jewish tradition. (See Gal. 2:16-21.) But for Christ's followers, righteousness took on a broader meaning. Instead of going about to establish their own righteousness, Christians were called to submit 'themselves unto the righteousness of God' (Romans 10:3). They sought for the righteousness 'which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith' (Phil. 3:9)" (vol. 5, p. 326).

Thus Jesus says, **"I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20; RSV).** Christ requires more than formal observance of the law's requirements. The scribes and Pharisees viewed the demands of the law as resting upon acts and deeds, but Jesus' requirements plumb the very secret intents of the heart. Our Lord requires more, not less, from those who are candidates for His kingdom.

And how does the believer receive the righteousness of God and thereby become a candidate for the heavenly kingdom? Paul answers, **"Now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:21-24; RSV).**

In speaking of the signs that are to take place just before the coming of our Lord in glory, the prophet Amos foretold a spiritual famine: **"not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11; RSV).** And, despite the Master's promise, the prophet specified further: **"In that day the fair virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst (verse 13; RSV),** because they have not drunk at the only Source able to quench their thirst.

It is not enough to hunger and thirst after righteousness in order to be filled. One still must go to Him who has been **"Made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (I Cor. 1:30).** Being the only Righteous One, He alone is able to invite men to come and drink at the Source of water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

selected by editors

Key passage:  
John 4:9-30

Notes

**"We receive  
righteousness  
by receiving  
Him"**

Righteousness is holiness, likeness to God, and "God is love." I John 4:16. It is conformity to the law of God, for "all Thy commandments are righteousness" (Psalm 119:172), and "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him.

Not by painful struggles or wearisome toil, not by gift or sacrifices, is righteousness obtained; but it is freely given to every soul who hungers and thirsts to receive it. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat, . . . without money and without price." "Their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord," and, "This is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." Isaiah 55:1; 54:17; Jeremiah 23:6. . . .

As we discern the perfection of our Saviour's character we shall desire to become wholly transformed and renewed in the image of His purity. The more we know of God, the higher will be our ideal of character and the more earnest our longing to reflect His likeness. A divine element combines with the human when the soul reaches out after God and the longing heart can say, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him." Psalm 62:5.

If you have a sense of need in your soul, if you hunger and thirst after righteousness, this is an evidence that Christ has wrought upon your heart, in order that He may be sought unto to do for you, through the endowment of the Holy Spirit, those things which it is impossible for you to do for yourself. We need not seek to quench our thirst at shallow streams; for the great fountain is just above us, of whose abundant waters we may freely drink, if we will rise a little higher in the pathway of faith. . . .

Jesus said, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." John 4:14. As the Holy Spirit opens to you the truth you will treasure up the most precious experiences and will long to speak to others of the comforting things that have been revealed to you. When brought into association with them you will communicate some fresh thought in regard to the character or the work of Christ. You will have some fresh revelation of His pitying love to impart to those who love Him and to those who love Him not. . . .

. . . To Jesus, who emptied Himself for the salvation of lost humanity, the Holy Spirit was given without measure. So it will be given to every follower of Christ when the whole heart is surrendered for His indwelling. Our Lord Himself has given the command, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18), and this command is also a promise of its fulfillment. It was the good pleasure of the Father that in Christ should "all the fullness dwell," and "in Him ye are made full." Colossians 1:19, RV; 2:10, RV.

God has poured out His love unstintedly, as the showers that refresh the earth. He says, "Let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together." "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." Isaiah 45:8; 41:17, 18.

**"When the  
poor and needy  
seek water . . .  
I will hear  
them"**

"Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace." John 1:16.

(Taken from *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 18-21.)

by John R. W. Stott

Already in the Virgin Mary's song, the Magnificat, the spiritually poor and the spiritually hungry have been associated, and both have been declared blessed. For God "has filled the *hungry* with good things, and the *rich* he has sent empty away." This general principle is here particularized. The hungry and thirsty whom God satisfies are those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness." Such spiritual hunger is a characteristic of all God's people, whose supreme ambition is not material but spiritual. Christians are not like pagans, engrossed in the pursuit of possession; what they have set themselves to "seek first" is God's kingdom and righteousness.

Righteousness in the Bible has at least three aspects: legal, moral and social.

Legal righteousness is justification, a right relationship with God. The Jews "pursued righteousness," Paul wrote later, but failed to attain it because they pursued it in the wrong way. They sought "to establish their own" righteousness and "did not submit to God's righteousness," which is Christ himself. Some commentators have seen such a reference here, but this is scarcely possible since Jesus is addressing those who already belong to him.

Moral righteousness is that righteousness of character and conduct which pleases God. Jesus goes on after the beatitudes to contrast this Christian righteousness with pharisaic righteousness. The latter was an external conformity to rules; the former is an inner righteousness of heart, mind and motive. For this we should hunger and thirst.

It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that the biblical word "righteousness" means only a right relationship with God on the one hand and a moral righteousness of character and conduct on the other. For biblical righteousness is more than a private and personal affair; it includes social righteousness as well. And social righteousness, as we learn from the law and the prophets, is concerned with seeking man's liberation from oppression, together with the promotion of civil rights, justice in the law courts, integrity in business dealings and honour in home and family affairs. Thus Christians are committed to hunger for righteousness in the whole human community as something pleasing to a righteous God.

Yet in this life our hunger will never be fully satisfied, nor our thirst fully quenched. True, we receive the satisfaction which the beatitude promises. But our hunger is satisfied only to break out again. Even the promise of Jesus that whoever drinks of the water he gives "will never thirst" is fulfilled only if we keep drinking. Beware of those who claim to have attained, and who look to past experience rather than to future development! Like all the qualities included in the beatitudes, hunger and thirst are perpetual characteristics of the disciples of Jesus, as perpetual as poverty of spirit, meekness and mourning. Not till we reach heaven will we "hunger no more, neither thirst any more," for only then will Christ our Shepherd lead us "to springs of living water."

Key passage:  
Romans 10:1-21

## Notes

**"Christians are not like pagans, engrossed in the pursuit of possession . . ."**

**"Biblical righteousness is more than a private and personal affair; it includes social righteousness as well"**

**"Our hunger is satisfied only to break out again"**

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# HOW TO Filled With Righteousness But Sinning

by H. Ward Hill

Key passage:  
Jude 21-25

Notes

While Matthew 5:6 concentrates on the crucial importance of hungering and thirsting for righteousness, the implication of the passage is that the righteousness which we "eat" and "drink" meets all of our needs. How can this be? What kind of experience should I expect if I am "filled" with righteousness?

Obviously, being filled with righteousness does not mean all of our conflicts with ourselves or with others are removed. Very real problems appear to be with us still. Forbidden foods may still taste good. Worldliness may lose some of its lure, but lust may still be alive. We may crave attention as before and relish a sense of power over others. The appeal of wantonness and wealth may not be totally lost on us.

The vexing question then is how we can be filled with righteousness and still experience a conflict between what we know we should do and what we find ourselves doing.

Conservative Christians generally emphasize a strong sense of the substitution of Christ's perfect life for our life. He stands in our place. When God looks at us, He sees Christ covering us with His righteousness. We are accepted because we are in Christ.

However, there is a hazard at this point. We might believe that once we're accepted in spite of our shortcomings that we do not need to mend our ways. The answer to this, though, is that a sense of the awful penalty which Christ bore for sin will give us both a sense of the horror of sin and the proper motivation for turning away from it.

There is an assumption which is the occasion for hungering and thirsting after righteousness. God who is the Author of righteousness is a particular type of Being. He is a loving Heavenly Father who wants above all else to be loved and trusted by His creatures. He then wants us to seek to know Him better every day, which involves two-way communication. Some deliberate effort (usually in the form of prayer and study) to bring about a sense of communion is therefore crucial. While certain periods may be more intense moments of communication, all of life is then lived with a sense of God being personally present with us.

We then seek to develop our talents to the maximum while at the same time seeing the need for balance in life. Health of body, mind and spirit do not usually just happen by chance. Deliberate efforts are made in which we are "workers together with God" (II Cor. 6:1).

We may not be of the type who is into check lists for such things, but we might find it helpful to keep reminding ourselves of the following:

1. Have I committed myself to God at the beginning of this day?
2. Have I had a sense of His presence in all that I have done?
3. Have I this day stretched my mind to grasp some truth or knowledge that I did not know before?
4. Have I engaged in some form of vigorous physical activity as my health permitted?
5. Have I taken an interest in other people and made it easier for somebody else to believe in God this day?
6. Have I relaxed sufficiently this day so that my work will not be cut short by the ill effects of stress?
7. Have I kept a sense of humor in what I did, not being frivolous, but being pleasant to be around?
8. Have I made progress in some area where known deficiencies exist?
9. Have I felt at peace with myself, with those about me and with God when the day was done?

by John Wesley

Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst. . . . To thoroughly understand this expression, we should understand that hunger and thirst are the strongest of all bodily appetites. In like manner, this hunger in the soul, this thirst after the image of God, is the strongest of all our spiritual appetites, once it is awakened in the heart. . . . Next, we should observe that from the time we begin to hunger and thirst, those appetites do not cease. They become more and more craving and demanding until we eat or drink, or die. . . . Thirdly, we may observe that hunger and thirst are satisfied with nothing but food and drink. He who needs these things seeks nothing else. . . . Whatever you offer besides, it is only lightly esteemed. He seeks no honor, riches or pleasure. He still says, "This is not the thing I want! Give me love, or else I will perish!"

It is impossible to satisfy a soul which is athirst for God with what the world calls religion. Worldly happiness cannot satisfy that soul either. The religion of the world implies three things: (1) Doing no harm, abstaining from outward sin; at least from that which is scandalous, such as robbery, theft, swearing, and drunkenness; (2) Doing good, relieving the poor; being charitable as it is called; (3) Using the means of grace, at least going to church and using the Lord's Supper. He in whom these three marks are found is termed a religious man by the world. But this will not satisfy him who hungers after God. This is not food for his soul. He wants a religion of a better kind. He seeks a religion higher and deeper than this. He can no more feed on this poor, shallow, formal thing than he can fill his stomach with the east wind. It is true that he is careful to abstain from any appearance of evil. He is also zealous of doing good works. He attends to all of the ordinances of God. But all of this is not what he longs for. Those are only the outside of the religion for which he insatiably hungers.

The knowledge of God as given in Jesus is what he seeks. He wants the life which is his with Jesus, in God. He yearns to be joined to the Lord in one spirit. He needs to have fellowship with the Father. He desires to walk in the light, as God is in the light. He needs to be purified, even as God is pure. This is the religion, the righteousness after which he thirsts. He cannot rest until he thus rests in God. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled". . . . Cease laboring for that which will not satisfy the soul. Can you hope to dig happiness out of the earth or to find it in the things of the world? Trample underfoot all of its pleasures. Despise all its honors. Count all its riches as worthless. Look only to the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus for the entire renewal of your soul in the image of God. It is for this the world was originally created. Beware of quenching that hunger and thirst by what the world calls religion. Religion of form, of outside show, leaves the heart as earthly and sensual as ever. Let nothing satisfy you but the power of godliness. Seek a religion that is Spirit and life. Seek to dwell in God and have God dwell in you. In doing this, you become an inhabitant of eternity. You enter into the kingdom of heaven by the blood of the sprinkling. You then sit in heavenly places with Jesus.

HAPPINESS UNLIMITED—John Wesley's Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount—  
edited and adapted by Clare G. Weakley, Jr. Copyright © 1979 by Logos International.

Key passage:  
Psalm 42:1, 2

Notes

"It is impossible to satisfy a soul which is athirst for God with what the world calls religion"

"The knowledge of God is what he seeks"

"Look only to the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus for the entire renewal of your soul in the image of God"

## REACT

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1. What does it mean to hunger and thirst after righteousness? How much human effort is needed here and how much of this hungering experience is original with the Divine?

Is a sense of guilt all we need in order to hunger and thirst after righteousness?

Is low self-esteem more likely to lead us to hunger and thirst after righteousness than a positive sense of self-worth?

2. What does Christ mean when He talks about being "filled" with righteousness? Does He have in mind a legal "filling" (justification) or a practical "filling" (sanctification), or is He discussing something which fits in neither—or both—of these two categories?
3. Are any of the wicked satisfied with their lives, or do all people sense a deep lack when they make no profession of serving Christ?

What is the Christian's role in helping the "worldling" recognize his spiritual starvation?

4. Can a person be a genuine Christian and yet not feel fulfilled in following Christ? Explain.
5. Jesus promises that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled. Do the millions living in those lands where the gospel message has never reached experience this hungering and thirsting? If so, and if no Christian missionary ever visits them, are they ever able to be filled, or is there forever in their lives a continual void?

# The Merciful



"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

— Matthew 5:7

by Eric Graham

He didn't look much different from us. But the way he paid attention to little things showed he was different. The transporter had landed in dense shrubbery and nobody noticed as he made his way through the crowds at campmeeting that afternoon. His computer-like mind made detailed notes about the activities he observed on the camp ground that Sabbath.

On returning to his planet, Klingon, those mental notes were turned into a printout analyzed by the new "Committee on Earthling's Behavioral Studies."

As one of the committee members took his laser pen from his ear and made a quick note on the light sensitive plastic in front of him, he turned to his colleagues and said, "What we don't understand here is this 'M' factor. Sometimes it's there and sometimes it's not. At best those humans 'D2' studied showed great quantities of 'M.' At worse, there seemed to be a total lack of it. We

seem to have no clear understanding of why humans have 'M' or don't have it."

If the beatitude "Blessed are the Merciful" makes any sense to us at all, what can we learn from "D2's" observations about us? Did he see you or me being unkind (unmerciful) to somebody there that Sabbath after church? Did he see us cutting down the speaker who seemed to make no sense? Did he see us meticulously avoiding those people from the other side of town who "simply don't know how to dress"?

The Klingon committee member went on. "I think we should attempt to discover the relationship between facial expressions and 'M' factor."

He's right. Everyone knows that the accurate way to translate *blessed* is *happy*. Look around you. Are the people who ignore other's needs and concerns usually smiling?

Are you usually smiling?

by editors

Notes

**"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).**

The preceding beatitude referred to the moral character of an individual. It affirmed that a soul hungering and thirsting to see right prevail would be abundantly filled.

The fifth beatitude, the subject of this week's lesson study, confronts the Christian with his obligation toward his neighbor, because it is impossible to be merciful without sharing what God Himself has in mercy given him. He who has been filled must in turn nourish those who hunger and thirst in this world in which we live. **"Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8)** is the Lord's mandate to His disciples.

Current language identifies mercy with compassion or pardon. But to give this word all the richness of meaning given it in the Bible, one must add the ideas of active kindness, graciousness, tender pity and, above all, fidelity. Actually, for the Bible writers, mercy is the coming together of two current thoughts—compassion and faithfulness: God's compassion toward men, His people, and fidelity to Himself and to His alliance.

The merciful, then, are those who follow the example of their Heavenly Father and show compassion toward their neighbor, whoever he might be, and who are faithful in their obligation toward God.

The Christian is merciful because God is merciful. God, revealing the very essence of His character to Moses, proclaimed, **"The Lord, the Lord a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, and forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6, 7; RSV).**

Actually, the whole Bible repeats again and again the thought, "Father of mercies," as the apostle Paul called Him (see 2 Cor. 1:3). The authors of the psalms were particularly happy to sing of the unfathomable mercy of God, unto which they never ceased to appeal. They discerned His mercy everywhere, operating throughout all the history of the Children of Israel. Even in His acts they discovered that **"the Lord is merciful and gracious" (Psalm 103:7, 8).**

Not only is God **"rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us" (Eph. 2:4)**, as the apostle Paul wrote, but, the prophet Micah states, he even **"delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18; compare Matthew 12:7).** And Paul writes concerning Jesus, **"For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of people" (Hebrews 2:17; NIV).**

Jesus invites us to imitate our Heavenly Father and says, **"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:36).** In this verse's parallel passage in Matthew's Gospel, we read **"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).** In other words, the perfection to which Jesus calls His disciples is expressed in the mercy that they show, after the example set by God, not only to those who love them, but also to their enemies, those who hate and persecute them (see Matthew 5:43-47; Luke 6:27-35).

The character of God which has been revealed to us is our standard for life. We are invited to become more and more like Him. **"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 4:32 through 5:1).**

selected by editors

Key passage:  
I John 4:7-21

Notes

**"God is Himself the source of all mercy"**

**The merciful "will seek to reclaim and not to condemn"**

**"The merciful are those who manifest compassion to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed"**

The heart of man is by nature cold and dark and unloving; whenever one manifests a spirit of mercy and forgiveness, he does it not of himself, but through the influence of the divine Spirit moving upon his heart. "We love, because He first loved us." I John 4:19, R.V.

God is Himself the source of all mercy. His name is "merciful and gracious." Exodus 34:6. He does not treat us according to our desert. He does not ask if we are worthy of His love, but He pours upon us the riches of His love, to make us worthy. He is not vindictive. He seeks not to punish, but to redeem. Even the severity which He manifests through His providences is manifested for the salvation of the wayward. He yearns with intense desire to relieve the woes of men and to apply His balsam to their wounds. It is true that God "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:7), but He would take away the guilt.

The merciful are "partakers of the divine nature," and in them the compassionate love of God finds expression. All whose hearts are in sympathy with the heart of Infinite Love will seek to reclaim and not to condemn. Christ dwelling in the soul is a spring that never runs dry. Where He abides, there will be an overflowing of beneficence.

To the appeal of the erring, the tempted, the wretched victims of want and sin, the Christian does not ask, Are they worthy? but, How can I benefit them? In the most wretched, the most debased, he sees souls whom Christ died to save and for whom God has given to His children the ministry of reconciliation.

The merciful are those who manifest compassion to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed. Job declares, "I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out." Job 29:12-16.

There are many to whom life is a painful struggle; they feel their deficiencies and are miserable and unbelieving; they think they have nothing for which to be grateful. Kind words, looks for sympathy, expressions of appreciation, would be to many a struggling and lonely one as the cup of cold water to a thirsty soul. A word of sympathy, an act of kindness, would lift burdens that rest heavily upon weary shoulders. And every word or deed of unselfish kindness is an expression of the love of Christ for lost humanity. . . .

He who has given his life to God in ministry to His children is linked with Him who has all the resources of the universe at His command. His life is bound up by the golden chain of the immutable promises with the life of God. The Lord will not fail him in the hour of suffering and need. "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19. And in the hour of final need the merciful shall find refuge in the mercy of the compassionate Saviour and shall be received into everlasting habitations.

(Taken from *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 21-24.)

by John R. W. Stott

"Mercy" is compassion for people in need. Richard Lenski helpfully distinguishes it from "grace": "The noun *e/eos* (mercy) . . . always deals with what we see of pain, misery and distress, these results of sin; and *charis* (grace) always deals with the sin and guilt itself. The one extends relief, the other pardon; the one cures, heals, helps, the other cleanses and reinstates."

Jesus does not specify the categories of people he has in mind to whom his disciples are to show mercy. He gives no indication whether he is thinking primarily of those overcome by disaster, like the traveller from Jerusalem to Jericho whom robbers assaulted and to whom the good Samaritan "showed mercy," or of the hungry, the sick and the outcast on whom he himself regularly took pity, or of those who wrong us so that justice cries out for punishment but mercy for forgiveness. There was no need for Jesus to elaborate. Our God is a merciful God and shows mercy continuously; the citizens of his kingdom must show mercy too.

Of course the world (at least when it is true to its own nature) is unmerciful, as indeed also the church in its wordliness has often been. The world prefers to insulate itself against the pains and calamities of men. It finds revenge delicious, and forgiveness, by comparison, tame. But those who show mercy find it. "How blest are those who show mercy; mercy shall be shown to them" (NEB). The same truth is echoed in the next chapter; "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you." This is not because we can merit mercy by mercy or forgiveness by forgiveness, but because we cannot receive the mercy and forgiveness of God unless we repent, and we cannot claim to have repented of *our* sins if we are unmerciful towards the sins of *others*. Nothing moves us to forgive like the wondering knowledge that we have ourselves been forgiven. Nothing proves more clearly that we have been forgiven than our own readiness to forgive. To forgive and to be forgiven, to show mercy and to receive mercy: these belong indissolubly together, as Jesus illustrated in his parable of the unmerciful servant. Or, interpreted in the context of the beatitudes, it is "the meek" who are also "the merciful." For to be meek is to acknowledge to others that we are sinners; to be merciful is to have compassion on others, for *they* are sinners too.

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Key passage:  
Matthew 18:23-25

Notes

**"... or of those who wrong us so that justice cries out for punishment but mercy for forgiveness"**

**"Nothing proves more clearly that we have been forgiven than our own readiness to forgive"**

by John Cowen

 Key passage:  
 Micah 6:8

Notes

I was mad. The teenager was mad. An elderly gentleman was emotionally injured. What was needed in this situation?

Not long ago, I was sitting in my car next to a teenager who was in his car waiting for a green light. As the light turned green in the congested traffic, an elderly gentleman in front of the teenager engaged the clutch of his car and accidentally rolled backwards a very short distance, gently bumping into the teenager's well-protected bumper. The excited teenager quickly jumped out of his car, surveyed the "damage" (even though there was none) and walked up to the elderly man, who was slowly getting out of the car, and wasted no time sharing his opinion of the man and his driving ability. The elderly gentleman steadied himself against the side of the car and rode out the storm of insults.

I remember the incident because it was so petty. I remember it because I had some things I wanted to tell that young driver. I wouldn't have tried to calm him by telling him to forgive—no damage had been done. But, I would have told him that he should have shown a little mercy to an elderly man who, because of age, wasn't driving as well as in years past.

How about us? Are we showing mercy in the petty as well as the major incidents we encounter? If not, what can we do?

**1. Pray.** Ask God, the supplier of mercy, to enable you to place the events of your life into proper perspective so you will recognize when you need to tap that inexhaustible supply of mercy.

**2. Be Big about it.** Usually mercy is called for when someone is at a disadvantage and we have the option of showing mercy or not showing mercy to that person. Be a BIG Christian! A mature Christian can afford to be generous in showing mercy.

**3. Walk a mile in his shoes.** Try to understand the person who needs you to show him mercy. Is he so unlike yourself? Haven't you made the same mistake once? (maybe twice!) Is the problem really all that important?

**4. Ask, what would Jesus do?** These are words to live your entire life by. However, when it comes to mercy, what better question could we ask to give us a true answer concerning mercy? Man has wronged God to a degree that cannot be matched by *any* wrong we shall ever encounter, and yet what does God do? He shows us mercy.

In the parable of the unmerciful debtor, Matthew 18, we can readily see God's opinion of someone who is unable to show mercy.

"'Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee!' And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, til he should pay all that was due unto him" (vs. 33, 34).

As servants of a Lord who has shown us so much compassion and mercy, surely we should be willing to show mercy to others in every situation, no matter how preposterous the wrong—no matter how petty.

by Eric Graham

**Key passage:**  
**Matthew 5:40-42**

**Notes**

1. It is a rainy, stormy night. It is late. You are headed home in a warm car, and it has been a long drive. Your headlights cover the figure of a woman standing beside her car parked by the road. She is soaking wet and in the window you can see two small children. You tell yourself she will be all right: She is probably just waiting for her husband to return with help. Or could it be a setup to trap you? You have heard such stories.

Question: What is the mercy response?

2. Your friend down the hall struggles with his math. He asked you, over supper, if you would help tonight. You know that "help" in his mind means getting some answers quickly in order to save time. Others do it for him, and he depends on it. Tonight he is asking you for help.

Question: What is the mercy response?

3. The directions sent you into a part of the city you rarely see. Twilight is just descending as you park the car and get out in front of the specialty shop to which your boss has sent you. As you leave the store, a man in a rumpled mis-matched suit approaches. His breath gets to you first and lets you know there is more in his veins than just blood. He mumbles something about help . . . "Just a few dollars."

Question: What is the mercy response?

4. It was a great church service. One of those Sabbath mornings when everything clicked. The music was inspiring, the sermon was uplifting and challenging. The whole atmosphere was conducive to a celebration of God's special day of rest. As you finish your Sabbath dinner, the doorbell rings. It is your next door neighbor. He is finishing the engine on the Model "T" he is restoring. Something has slipped and unless he can get an extra set of hands to help him adjust things, he won't be able to finish the project in time for the big parade. Will you give him a hand?

Question: What is the mercy response?

5. You know your best friend is in love with a new girl. She is incredible, intelligent, beautiful and fascinating. But there are things in her background that make you realize she could be a bad influence on your friend. He asks you to help set up that first meeting. Should you protect him? Should you help him?

Question: What is the mercy response?

## REACT

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1. Most people seem to be fairly merciful towards those who wrong them as individuals, but much more harsh towards those who hold positions of responsibility in an institution and do wrong within or to that organization. Is this right? Explain.
2. John Stott, in the Evidence article for this week, sees mercy as active compassion for the needy: curing, healing, helping, building, etc. Do you feel that our church is involved enough in the social acts of mercy? Do you feel that you are involved enough? How much is "enough"?

To what extent is an organization to which one belongs able to carry the responsibility of social action in the stead of the individual? For example, the Ingathering program in the Adventist Church provides numerous funds for welfare and relief—merciful—work. And yet, to what extent is a member of the Adventist Church who contributes to the Ingathering program but does no welfare and relief work of his own able to participate in the blessings promised to the merciful?

3. In times of war, what is the responsibility of the merciful Christian—the one who is to treat others (i.e., the "enemy") not as they deserve, but as Christ deserves?
4. What is the relationship between the merciful obtaining (meriting?) mercy and justification by faith?
5. Complete the following sentences:

If I were as merciful as I should be I would . . .

I am sometimes scared to be totally merciful because . . .

When I am merciful and others aren't, I want to . . .

Considering how actively concerned God has been for the needy and oppressed, I . . .

# The Pure In Heart

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

— Matthew 5:8

by Thomas a' Kempis

CHRIST. My son, walk thou before Me in truth, and in the simplicity of thine heart seek Me evermore. He that walketh before Me in truth shall be defended from evil attacks, and the Truth shall set him free from seducers, and from the slanders of unjust men. *If the Truth shall have made thee free, thou shalt be free indeed*, and shalt not care for the vain words of men.

THE DISCIPLE. O Lord, it is true. According as Thou sayest, so, I beseech thee, let it be with me; let Thy Truth teach me, itself guard me, and preserve me to an end of safety. Let it set me free from all evil affection and inordinate love; and I shall walk with Thee in great liberty of heart.

CHRIST . . . I will teach thee (saith the Truth) those things which are right and pleasing in My sight.

Reflect on thy sins with great displeasure and grief; and never esteem thyself to be any thing, because of good works.

In truth thou art a sinner; thou art subject to and entangled with many passions. Of thyself thou always tendest to nothing; speedily confused, speedily dissolved. Thou hast nothing whereof thou canst glory, but many things for which thou oughtest to account thyself vile; for thou art much weaker than thou art able to comprehend.

Let nothing therefore seem much unto thee of all the things thou doest. Let nothing seem great, nothing precious and wonderful, nothing worthy of estimation, nothing high, nothing truly commendable and to be desired, but that alone which is eternal. Let the eternal Truth be above all things pleasing to thee. Let thy own extreme unworthiness be always displeasing to thee. Fear nothing so much, blame nothing, flee nothing, so much as thy vices and sins; which ought to be more pleasing to thee than any losses whatsoever of things earthly.

Some walk not sincerely in My sight, but led by a certain curiosity and arrogance wish to know My secrets, and to understand the deep things of God, neglecting themselves and their own salvation. These oftentimes, when I resist them, for their pride and curiosity do fall into great temptations and sins. Fear the judgments of God; dread the wrath of the Almighty. Do not, however, discuss the works of the Most High, but search diligently thine own iniquities, in how great things thou hast offended, and how many things thou has neglected.

Some carry their devotion only in books, some in pictures, some in outward signs and figures. Some have Me in their mouth; but little of Me there is in their heart.

Others there are who, being illuminated in their understandings, and purged in their affection, do always pant after things eternal, are unwilling to hear of earthly things, and do serve the necessities of nature with grief; and these perceive what the Spirit of Truth speaketh in them, for He teacheth them to despise earthly, and to love heavenly things; to neglect the world, and to desire Heaven all the day and night.

Thomas a' Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*. trans. & intro. by Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 107-109.

by editors

Notes

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

With the sixth beatitude Jesus leads us to the wellspring of our being, the heart. One author has called it “the inner sanctuary of the soul.” It is on the state of the heart that purity of thought, word, and action depend. **“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”**

The word “heart” is used hundreds of times in the Bible, but only rarely—not to say “never”—does the word refer to the organ itself. For us today, the heart is usually linked with the emotions; in the Bible, it designates the inward man, the intimate, hidden area of the being, as well as the center of emotions, the will and the intellect.

The heart of man in the Bible is also seen as the source of evil. **“What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man” (Matthew 15:18-20; RSV; see also Mark 7:21-23).** Hence, the statement, **“First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate,”** Jesus advised them, **“that the outside also may be clean” (Matthew 23:26; RSV).** Without a real transformation of the heart, man cannot bear good fruit. At best, he may appear righteous to men on the outside, but within he remains **“full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:28).** Indeed, **“The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).**

**“Blessed are the pure in heart.”** God is concerned with a religion of the heart. Here Jesus addresses straightforward, simple, sincere men and promises them a vision of God because of the purity of their intentions. Only one thing is important; to enter into a loving and personal relationship with the Source of life, to be possessed by God for life. “It was not ceremonial purity that Jesus had in mind (Matthew 15:18-20; 23:25), but inward cleanness of heart. If the motives are pure, the life will be pure.

“Those with pure hearts have forsaken sin as a ruling principle in the life, and their lives are without reserve consecrated to God. . . . To be ‘pure in heart’ does not mean that one is absolutely sinless, but it does mean that his motives are right, that by the grace of Christ he has turned his back on past mistakes, and that he is pressing toward the mark of perfection in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13-15)” (*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 327).

Thus, God wants to make a covenant with your heart. **“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Hebrews 8:10).**

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

selected by editors

The Jews were so exacting in regard to ceremonial purity that their regulations were extremely burdensome. Their minds were occupied with rules and restrictions and the fear of outward defilement, and they did not perceive the stain that selfishness and malice impart to the soul.

Jesus does not mention this ceremonial purity as one of the conditions of entering into His kingdom, but points out the need of purity of heart. The wisdom that is from above "is first pure." James 3:17. Into the city of God there will enter nothing that defiles. All who are to be dwellers there will here have become pure in heart. In one who is learning of Jesus, there will be manifest a growing distaste for careless manners, unseemly language, and coarse thought. When Christ abides in the heart, there will be purity and refinement of thought and manner.

But the words of Jesus, "Blessed are the pure in heart," have a deeper meaning—not merely pure in the sense in which the world understands purity, free from that which is sensual, pure from lust, but true in the hidden purposes and motives of the soul, free from pride and self-seeking, humble, unselfish, childlike.

Only like can appreciate like. Unless you accept in your own life the principle of self-sacrificing love, which is the principle of His character, you cannot know God. The heart that is deceived by Satan, looks upon God as a tyrannical, relentless being; the selfish characteristics of humanity, even of Satan himself, are a tribute to the loving Creator. "Thou thoughtest," He says, "that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Psalm 50:21. His providences are interpreted as the expression of an arbitrary, vindictive nature. So with the Bible, the treasure house of the riches of His grace. The glory of its truths, that are as high as heaven and compass eternity, is undiscerned. To the great mass of mankind, Christ Himself is "as a root out of a dry ground," and they see in Him "no beauty that" they "should desire Him." Isaiah 53:2. When Jesus was among men, the revelation of God in humanity, the scribes and Pharisees declared to Him, "Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil." John 8:48. Even His disciples were so blinded by the selfishness of their hearts that they were slow to understand Him who had come to manifest to them the Father's love. This was why Jesus walked in solitude in the midst of men. He was understood fully in heaven alone. . . .

But to hearts that have become purified through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, all is changed. These can know God. Moses was hid in the cleft of the rock when the glory of the Lord was revealed to him; and it is when we are hid in Christ that we behold the love of God.

"He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the King shall be his friend." Proverbs 22:11. By faith we behold Him here and now. In our daily experience we discern His goodness and compassion in the manifestation of His providence. We recognize Him in the character of His Son. The Holy Spirit takes the truth concerning God and Him whom He hath sent, and opens it to the understanding and to the heart. The pure in heart see God in a new and endearing relation, as their Redeemer; and while they discern the purity and loveliness of His character, they long to reflect His image. They see Him as a Father longing to embrace a repenting son, and their hearts are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

(Taken from *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 24-27.)

**Key passage:**  
 James 3:13-18

Notes

**Purity:**  
 true in  
 motive, free  
 from pride,  
 humble,  
 unselfish,  
 childlike

**"The pure  
 in heart  
 see God in  
 a new and  
 endearing  
 relation, as  
 their  
 Redeemer"**

by John R. W. Stott

Key passage:  
1 Peter 3:3-4

Notes

The popular interpretation is to regard purity of heart as an expression for inward purity, for the quality of those who have been cleansed from moral—as opposed to ceremonial—defilement. And there is good biblical precedent for this, especially in the Psalms. It was recognized that no one could ascend the Lord's hill or stand in his holy place unless he had "clean hands and a pure heart." So David, conscious that his Lord desired "truth in the inward being," could pray, "Teach me wisdom in my secret heart," and, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Jesus took up this theme in his controversy with the Pharisees and complained about their obsession with external, ceremonial purity. "You Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness." They were "like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

Luther gave this distinction between inward and outward purity a characteristically earthly turn. For he contrasted purity of heart not only with ceremonial defilement, but also with actual physical dirt. "Christ . . . wants to have the heart pure, though outwardly the person may be a drudge in the kitchen, black, sooty, and grimy doing all sorts of dirty work." Again, "Though a common labourer, a shoemaker or a blacksmith may be dirty and sooty or may smell because he is covered with dirt and pitch, . . . and though he stinks outwardly, inwardly he is pure incense before God" because he ponders the word of God in his heart and obeys it. . . .

More precisely, the primary reference is to sincerity. Already in the verses of Psalm 24, quoted above, the person with "clean hands and a pure heart" is one "who does not swear deceitfully." That is, in his relations with both God and man he is free from falsehood. So the pure in heart are "the utterly sincere" (JBP). Their whole life, public and private, is transparent before God and men. Their very heart—including their thoughts and motives—is pure, unmixed with anything devious, ulterior or base. Hypocrisy and deceit are abhorrent to them; they are without guile.

Yet how few of us live one life and live it in the open! We are tempted to wear a different mask and play a different role according to each occasion. This is not reality but play-acting, which is the essence of hypocrisy. Some people weave round themselves such a tissue of lies that they can no longer tell which part of them is real and which is make-believe. Alone among men Jesus Christ was absolutely pure in heart, being entirely guileless.

Only the pure in heart will see God, see him now with the eye of faith and see his glory in the hereafter, for only the utterly sincere can bear the dazzling vision in whose light the darkness of deceit must vanish and by whose fire all shams are burned up.

**"The pure  
in heart are  
the utterly  
sincere"**

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by Ruthita Fike

Key passage:  
Matthew 18:2-5

Notes

Recently my husband and I took our two small children to Disney World in Florida. My four year old stood wide eyed as we entered the amusement park and reviewed the brochure explaining all of the fascinating adventures awaiting us.

"Wow, this is a great place," he beamed, "but not as good as heaven, huh, mom?"

Throughout our Florida trip he made similar comparisons. Sea World had three small dolphins that played with a killer whale. In the wild they would have been afraid of their natural enemy. "In heaven they will play together too," my fair haired child commented.

On the last day of the trip we went sight-seeing longer than usual and both children fell asleep in the car before we reached our destination. As we carried their tanned bodies to our sleeping accommodations I was impressed with how completely innocent and pure they looked. Of course, I realize that all parents say that their children look angelic when they are asleep. But the truth is that, in general, children are more pure than adults. I thought about how real heaven and Jesus are to my son and realized that spiritual things are on his mind much more than on my own.

How, then, can we become "as little children," and have a pure heart?

### 1. Establish a personal relationship with the Lord.

Heart religion cannot be taught or fully explained. It must be experienced. Knowing the Lord as a friend and parent results in deep affection. A heart that loves God without reservation is a pure heart.

### 2. Request forgiveness from your Parent-Friend.

Past sins need not keep a Christian from having a pure heart. Once they are confessed they are covered by the righteousness and purity of Jesus.

### 3. Maintain the friendship.

Jesus is real. A "best friend" relationship with Him requires time with Him in Bible study, prayer and meditation. When you spend that time you will find that you will think about Him and talk about Him, just as my son does. A pure heart will be the result of a healthy, growing relationship with our great Creator.

by Ruthita Fike

Key passage:  
Psalm 42:1, 2

Notes

Becoming totally committed to God with purity of heart involves a struggle with our carnal nature. John Donne, a seventeenth century poet, wrote a sonnet that vividly expresses the problems a Christian may encounter in attempting to live a pure and committed life.

Batter my heart, three-personed God, for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
I, like an usurped town, to another due,  
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end.  
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,  
But am betrothed unto your enemy;  
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

In this poem Donne pleads for the Lord to "batter" his heart. In other words, the poet desires Christ to forcibly make him be a Christian. Of course, Christ does not do that, but He sometimes does allow trying circumstances to help "purify" His followers.

"The trials of life are God's workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. Their hewing, squaring, and chiseling, their burnishing and polishing, is a painful process; it is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace" (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 10).

In line 10 of Donne's sonnet, the poet complains that he is married to Satan, and pleads for the Lord to help break that knot! The terminology suggests a type of spiritual adultery which can be cured only by a heart that loves God completely. As the poet explains in the last two lines, Christians cannot be free unless they are "enthralled," nor chaste (pure) unless they are "ravished" by the King of kings. That kind of passionate desire to surrender to the Lord is expressed by David when he wrote in Psalms 42:1-2: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" Furthermore, that text again emphasizes the relationship between knowing God and seeing Him. Like David, the committed Christian may reap the joy and reward of the sixth beatitude while yet on earth.

## REACT

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1. "I don't have a pure heart. In fact, my heart is anything but pure. How can I ever hope to see God?"
  
2. Does every heart that is pure "see God"? What about those who have never had the chance to even hear the name of Jesus—will they also "see God"? What about "pure in heart" non-Christians, or atheists (if, indeed, you would allow there to be "pure in heart" non-Christians)?
  
3. How much human effort is involved in making one's heart pure enough to see God?
  
4. John Stott, in the Evidence article for this week, defines the pure in heart as being those who are utterly sincere, free from phoniness, living their whole lives as transparent before God and men.

In the light of this definition, which of these would the "pure in heart" feel comfortable doing?

- manipulating statistics so as to show more improvement than what one has actually made, for promotional purposes
  - working with a famous trial lawyer
  - being an actor or an actress
  - working for a Madison Avenue advertising firm
  - working as an intelligence agent
  - using high-pressure sales tactics
  - not necessarily revealing *everything* about a used car you intend to sell
  - being President of the United States
-

# Blessed Are The Peacemakers



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

— Matthew 5:9

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” The followers of Jesus have been called to peace. When he called them they found their peace, for he is their peace. But now they are told that they must not only *have* peace but *make* it. And to that end they renounce all violence and tumult. In the cause of Christ nothing is to be gained by such methods. His kingdom is one of peace and the mutual greeting of his flock is a greeting of peace. His disciples keep the peace by choosing to endure suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others. They maintain fellowship where others would break it off. They renounce all self-assertion, and quietly suffer in the face of hatred and wrong. In so doing they overcome evil with good, and establish the peace of God in the midst of a world of war and hate. But nowhere will that peace be more manifest than where they meet the wicked in peace and are ready to suffer at their hands. The peacemakers will carry the cross with their Lord, for it was on the cross that peace was made. Now that they are partners in Christ’s work of reconciliation, they are called the sons of God as he is the Son of God.

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by editors

Notes

**"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9).**

The word peacemaker used here in the original Greek is not found elsewhere in the Bible, although the verb "to make peace" is often used. Thus, "In order to appreciate what Christ meant when He spoke of 'peacemakers' it is helpful to take note of the meaning of peace in Semitic thinking and speech. The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *eirene* is *shalom*, meaning 'completeness,' 'soundness,' 'prosperity,' 'condition of well-being'" (*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 328).

This "completeness" or "one-with-God-ness" is not man's nature. **"We all . . . were by nature the children of wrath. . . ." (Eph. 2:3).** But through the reconciliation with God, provided by the blood on the cross, **"we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).** **"In him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:19, 21; RSV).** **"For he [Christ] is our peace" (Eph. 2:14).**

The Christian experiences this peace on three different planes. The first level is *peace with God*, as we discussed above (see also Isaiah 53:5; Col. 2:12, 14; Romans 8:1, 16, 17). The second is *peace with ourselves*: **"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death. . . . For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:2, 6).** Indeed, Christ's peace brings harmony to all the functions of the soul.

The third level of experience is *peace with others*: **"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18).** It is important here to note that the seventh beatitude does not say "Blessed are those who are at peace with God"—this condition is assumed among Christ's followers. What it does say is, **"Blessed are the peacemakers."** "Blessed are those who are devoted to bringing peace to their fellow men." "Blessed are those who reconcile man with man, man with society, and man with God." Such are to be called **"the children of God."**

by editors

In August of 1862, James White wrote an editorial in the *Review* called "The Nation," which sparked great discussion and disagreement among Advent believers regarding what it meant to be a "peacemaker" in a time of war.

As the nation had been involved in the Civil War for well over a year, and every home had been affected by the warring states, it was important for the church to take a stand relative to this wartime situation. Thus, James White wrote expressing his views as to why "our people have not taken that part in the present struggle that others have"<sup>1</sup> and had thus failed to volunteer for military service. His points, two in number, were these:

"1. The hope which stimulates others, that the war will soon terminate with the freedom of the millions of 'bond-men and bond-women' of North America, . . . we do not cherish. We think we see, through the prophetic word, the continuation of slavery down to the end of all earthly governments."<sup>2</sup> This he based on Revelation 6:12-17 (" . . . and every bond-man . . . said to the mountains and rocks. . .").

"2. The position which our people have taken relative to the perpetuity and sacredness of the law of God contained in the ten commandments, is not in harmony with all the requirements of war. The fourth precept of that law says, 'Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy'; the sixth says, 'Thou shalt not kill.' [Thus, the early Adventists did not volunteer.] *But in the case of drafting, the government assumes the responsibility of the violation of the law of God, and it would be madness to resist.* He who would resist until, in the administration of military law, he was shot down, goes too far, we think in taking the responsibility of suicide."<sup>3</sup>

Elder White goes on to say that "Those who despise civil law, should at once pack up and be off for some spot on God's foot-stool where there is no civil law."<sup>4</sup> But "Those who are loyal to the government of Heaven, true to the constitution and laws of the Ruler of the universe, are the last men to 'sneak' off to Canada, or to Europe, or to stand trembling in their shoes for fear of a military draft."<sup>5</sup>

It was just a small article in the *Review*, only a column and a half in length. But what an impact it had on the early association of believers.

Within the next two weeks James White was accused of teaching Sabbath-breaking and murder.<sup>6</sup> "Hold! brethren," he wrote, "You had better all go to God with this matter, and secure to yourselves a humble, teachable spirit. . . ."<sup>7</sup> And he made an appeal for well-written articles on this subject to be submitted for publication to the *Review*.

On September 16, 1862, another article was written in the *Review* in which the author—supposedly Elder White—once again argues that "it would be madness to resist military law"<sup>8</sup> in the case of draft, but allows that Christians would make poor soldiers because "the sporting, swearing, godless appearance of our military camps, is painful to those who truly fear God."<sup>9</sup> He concluded his editorial by specifically asking ". . . O. Nichols, Bourdeaus, Cornell, Andrews, . . . Waggoner, Loughborough" and others "to give the brethren light upon the subject by writing *Review*-articles substantiating either position regarding military service."<sup>10</sup>

J. H. Waggoner was the first to respond to Elder White's appeal for "light upon the subject." He confessed "that at first sight I was somewhat startled by his [White's] article; but on carefully reading it I freely expressed my opinion that it would result in good to the cause. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

Key passage:  
Matthew 5:21-24

Notes

**"In the case of drafting, the government assumes the responsibility of the violation of the law of God"**

**"Hold! brethren"**

Elder Waggoner argued that Christians should “feel grateful” to their government for two reasons:

“1. A draft is not an act of oppression, but of necessity. All human governments depend on the war powers for their existence.”

“2. The *design* of government in drafting, is not to oppress, but to defend. We should remember that the efforts of our rulers, and of the thousands of men on the field of battle, who are toiling, bleeding, and dying, are all made in *our defense*.”<sup>12</sup>

Joseph Clarke, in an article entitled “The War! The War!”, of the same *Review* issue as that which Waggoner’s article appeared, wrote of having “the war fever so high, that it injured me somewhat.”<sup>13</sup> He confessed that he had “wished sometimes that I had it *where Joab had Absalom*, and almost fancied that the time might come when a regiment of Sabbath-keepers would strike this rebellion a staggering blow, in the strength of Him who always helped his valiant people when they kept his statutes. . . .

“Still we must be patient, for we at the North have sinned by our cowardly submission to the monster [slavery] in years past, and must meet our punishment. After that, let southern traitors tremble.”<sup>14</sup>

J. N. Loughborough was among the next to write. In this September 30, 1862, article, he sided with James White’s position, stating “The longer I look at it, . . . the more I am satisfied it is correct.”<sup>15</sup> In this article, he dealt with John the Baptist’s statement—“Do violence to no man”—and interpreted it to mean that men should abstain “from all unnecessary violence and pillage,” and from “lawless indulgence in rapine and lust which soldiers of ancient times were apt to be guilty of.”<sup>16</sup>

In the October 14 issue of the *Review*, R. F. Cottrell and B. F. Snook responded. Cottrell remained uncommitted to either one side or the other, and Snook leaned heavily on Paul’s counsel to obey civil governments and on Old and New Testament examples in order to support James White’s formerly-stated opinion.

Henry E. Carver was one of the first to enter the debates opposing James White in the *Review*. His article appeared in the October 21 issue. “That article [White’s] astonished and grieved me very much,” he wrote. “My faith, which was becoming stronger and stronger in the protecting care of God . . . , was terribly shaken. . . .”<sup>17</sup> Carver argues against Elder White’s position that “In case of drafting, the government assumes the responsibility of violating the law of God.” He comments: “This seems to me to be untenable and dangerous ground; for if the government can assume the responsibility now for the violation of two of those holy precepts, and we go clear, why may not the same government assume the responsibility for the violation of the Sabbath law and we go clear when the edict goes forth that all shall observe the first day of the week?”

“If it can be shown that the government can assume the responsibility, and relieve the individual, I should be glad to see the proof.”<sup>18</sup> Centering the rest of his discussion primarily on the biblical case of Daniel and the three Hebrews, Brother Carver draws a parallel with the present war situation, and suggests that men of his day should stand as true to Christian principles as did Daniel and his friends, and thus be willing to face persecution and even death on such matters of conscience.

Immediately following Carver’s article came an article by James White, in which he refuted points made by Brother Carver—denying “that there is a parallel between the cases of Daniel and the three Hebrews and ours in case of a draft”<sup>19</sup>—and reestablished his own position.

In the December 16 issue of the *Review*, Elder O. Nichols had written

**“The design of government in drafting, is not to oppress, but to defend”**

**“Let southern traitors tremble”**

**“That article astonished and grieved me very much”**

**“Men should stand as true to Christian principles as did Daniel and his friends”**

an article in which he declared, "The gospel of Christ is a new dispensation. Paul calls it, 'the gospel of Peace.'"<sup>20</sup> In this article, Nichols discusses the "kingdom of heaven," Paul's interesting counsel to submit to government leaders, and Jesus' statements to Peter ("Put up thy sword," Matthew 26:51, 52) and Pilate ("My kingdom is not of this world," John 18:36) relative to the Christian's responsibility in times of war.

Siding with Brother Carver, Nichols could not "see any difference between special 'civil enactments that are passed and enforced to drive us from obedience to the law of God,' and others that were not designed to interpose against our duties to God. It is evil to obey any civil or ecclesiastical law that requires disobedience to God."<sup>21</sup> And in his concluding remarks he states: "Babylon refers to the corrupt churches or religious associations. If it is our duty to separate from the corrupt religious bodies of the land, then it is our duty also to keep from all corrupt or demoralizing organizations, whether the navy or the army."<sup>22</sup>

During this time that the debate on war was being waged, Ellen White did not accept her husband's offer for "well-written" articles to throw "light upon the subject" in the pages of the *Review*. She does write in the *Testimonies*, however, that "I was shown the excitement created among our people by the article in the *Review* headed, 'The Nation.'" Some understood it one way, and some another. The plain statements were distorted, and made to mean what the writer did not intend. He gave the best light that he then had. It was necessary that something be said. The attention of many was turned to Sabbath-keepers, because they manifested no greater interest in the war, and did not volunteer. In some places they were looked upon as sympathizing with the Rebellion. The time had come for our true sentiments in relation to slavery and the Rebellion to be made known. There was need of moving with wisdom to turn away the suspicions excited against Sabbath-keepers. We should act with great caution. 'If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.' We can obey this admonition, and not sacrifice one principle of our faith."<sup>23</sup> Later, Ellen White said, "I was shown that God's people, who are His peculiar treasure, cannot engage in this perplexing war, for it is opposed to every principle of their faith," and that in the armed forces, "There would be a continual violation of conscience."<sup>24</sup>

On a quiet mountainside two thousand years ago, Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Throughout our history, we Adventists have had difficulty interpreting that statement. Some have felt that peace comes by way of the sword—or a store of nuclear weapons. Others have felt that the admittedly impractical, but truly Christlike, approach to violence is pacifism.

But Jesus said, "He that uses the sword shall perish with the sword"; to Peter, "Put away thy sword"; to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." And to Christians in every situation and under every kind of government, He is saying, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

<sup>1</sup> James White, "The Nation," *Review and Herald*, vol. XX, #11, August 12, 1862, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84 (emphasis mine).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>6</sup> James White, editorial comment, *Review and Herald*, vol. XX, #13, August 26, 1862, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> James White, "Our Duty in Reference to War," *Review and Herald*, vol. XX, #16, September 16, 1862, p. 124.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>11</sup> J. H. Waggoner, "Our Duty and The Nation," *Review and Herald*, vol. XX, #17, September 23, 1862, p. 132.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Clarke, "The War! The War!", *Review and Herald*, vol. XX, #17, September 23, 1862, p. 134.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>15</sup> J. N. Loughborough, "Do Violence to No Man," *Review and Herald*, vol. XX, #18, September 30, 1862, p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> Henry E. Carver, "The War," *Review and Herald*, vol. XX, #21, October 21, 1862, pp. 166, 167.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 166, 167.

<sup>19</sup> James White, "Letter to Brother Carver," *Review and Herald*, vol. XX, #21, October 21, 1862, p. 67.

<sup>20</sup> O. Nichols, "Our Duty Relative to the War," *Review and Herald*, vol. XXI, #3, December 18, 1862, pp. 22, 23.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Ellen White, *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 356.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Brock, "When Seventh-day Adventists First Faced War," *Adventist Heritage*, vol. 1, #1, January 1974, p. 25.

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

(Read Matthew 5:38-42.)

Jesus classes this saying about an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth with the commandments which he has already quoted from the Old Testament, for instance, the sixth commandment against murder. He recognizes this saying, like the sixth commandment, as the veritable law of God. This law, like all the others, is not abrogated, but fulfilled to the last iota. Jesus will not countenance the modern practice of putting the decalogue on a higher level than the rest of the Old Testament law. For him the law of the Old Testament is a unity, and he insists to his disciples that it must be fulfilled.

The followers of Jesus for his sake renounce every personal right. He calls them blessed because they are meek. If after giving up everything else for his sake they still wanted to cling to their own rights, they would then have ceased to follow him. This passage therefore is simply an elaboration of the beatitudes.

In the Old Testament personal rights are protected by a divinely established system of retribution. Every evil must be requited. The aim of retribution is to establish a proper community, to convict and overcome evil and eradicate it from the body politic of the people of God. That is the purpose of the law which is maintained by retribution.

Jesus takes up this declaration of the divine will and affirms the power of retribution to convict and overcome evil and to ensure the fellowship of the disciples as the true Israel. By exercising the right kind of retribution evil is to be overcome and thus the true disciple will prove himself.

The right way to requite evil, according to Jesus, is not to resist it.

This saying of Christ removes the Church from the sphere of politics and law. The Church is not to be a national community like the old Israel, but a community of believers without political or national ties. The old Israel had been both—the chosen people of God *and* a national community, and it was therefore his will that they should meet force with force. But with the Church it is different: it has abandoned political and national status, and therefore it must patiently endure aggression. Otherwise evil will be heaped upon evil. Only thus can fellowship be established and maintained.

At this point it becomes evident that when a Christian meets with injustice, he no longer clings to his rights and defends them at all costs. He is absolutely free from possessions and bound to Christ alone. Again, his witness to this exclusive adherence to Jesus creates the only workable basis for fellowship, and leaves the aggressor for him to deal with.

The only way to overcome evil is to let it run itself to a standstill because it does not find the resistance it is looking for. Resistance merely creates further evil and adds fuel to the flames. But when evil meets no opposition and encounters no obstacle but only patient endurance, its sting is drawn, and at last it meets an opponent which is more than its match. Of course this can only happen when the last ounce of resistance is abandoned, and the renunciation of revenge is complete. Then evil cannot find its mark, it can breed no further evil, and is left barren.

By willing endurance we cause suffering to pass. Evil becomes a spent force when we put up no resistance. By refusing to pay back the enemy in his own coin, and by preferring to suffer without resistance, the Christian exhibits the sinfulness of contumely and insult. Violence

 Key passage: 1  
 Matthew 5:38-42

Notes

**"The followers of Jesus for his sake renounce every personal right"**

**"The right way to requite evil is not to resist it"**

stands condemned by its failure to evoke counter-violence. When a man unjustly demands that I should give him my coat, I offer him my cloak also, and so counter his demand; when he requires me to go the other mile, I go willingly, and show up his exploitation of my service for what it is. To leave everything behind at the call of Christ is to be content with him alone, and to follow only him. By his willingly renouncing self-defense, the Christian affirms his absolute adherence to Jesus, and his freedom from the tyranny of his own ego. The exclusiveness of this adherence is the only power which can overcome evil.

We are convinced not with evil in the abstract, but with the evil person. Jesus bluntly calls the evil person evil. If I am assailed, I am not to condone or justify aggression. Patient endurance of evil does not mean a recognition of its rights. That is sheer sentimentality, and Jesus will have nothing to do with it. The shameful assault, the deed of violence and the act of exploitation are still evil. The disciple must realize this, and bear witness to it as Jesus did, just because this is the only way evil can be met and overcome. The very fact that the evil which assaults him is unjustifiable makes it imperative that he should not resist it, but play it out and overcome it by patiently enduring the evil person. Suffering willingly endured is stronger than evil, it spells death to evil.

There is no deed on earth so outrageous as to justify a different attitude. The worse the evil, the readier must the Christian be to suffer; he must let the evil person fall into Jesus' hands.

The Reformers offered a decisively new interpretation of this passage, and contributed a new idea of paramount importance. They distinguished between personal sufferings and those incurred by Christians in the performance of duty as bearers of an office ordained by God, maintaining that the precept of nonviolence applies to the first but not to the second. In the second case we are not only freed from obligation to eschew violence, but if we want to act in a genuine spirit of love we must do the very opposite, and meet force with force in order to check the assault of evil. It was along these lines that the Reformers justified war and other legal sanctions against evil. But this distinction between person and office is wholly alien to the teaching of Jesus. He says nothing about that. He addresses his disciples as men who have left all to follow him, and the precept of nonviolence applies equally to private life and official duty. He is the Lord of all life, and demands undivided allegiance. Furthermore, when it comes to practice, this distinction raises insoluble difficulties. Am I ever acting only as a private person or only in an official capacity? If I am attacked am I not at once the father of my children, the pastor of my flock, and e.g., a government official? Am I not bound for that very reason to defend myself against every attack, for reason of responsibility to my office? And am I not also always an individual, face to face with Jesus, even in the performance of my official duties? Am I not therefore obliged to resist every attack just because of my responsibility for my office? Is it right to forget that the follower of Jesus is always utterly alone, always the individual, who in the last resort can only decide and act for himself? Don't we act most responsible on behalf of those entrusted to our care if we act in this aloneness?

How then can the precept of Jesus be justified in the light of experience? It is obvious that weakness and defenselessness only invite aggression. Is then the demand of Jesus nothing but an impracticable

**“Violence stands condemned by its failure to evoke counter-violence”**

**“To leave everything behind at the call of Christ is to be content with him alone”**

**“The precept of nonviolence applies equally to private life and official duty”**

ideal? Does he refuse to face up to realities—or shall we say, to the sin of the world? There may of course be a legitimate place for such an ideal in the inner life of the Christian community, but in the outside world such an ideal appears to wear the blinkers of perfectionism, and to take no account of sin. Living as we do in a world of sin and evil, we can have no truck with anything as impracticable as that.

Jesus, however, tells us that it is just *because* we live in the world, and just *because* the world is evil, that the precept of nonresistance must be put into practice. Surely we do not wish to accuse Jesus of ignoring the reality and power of evil! Why, the whole of his life was one long conflict with the devil. He calls evil evil, and that is the very reason why he speaks to his followers in this way. How is that possible?

If we took the precept of nonresistance as an ethical blueprint for general application, we should indeed be indulging in idealistic dreams; we should be dreaming of a utopia with laws which the world would never obey. To make nonresistance a principle for secular life is to deny God, by undermining his gracious ordinance for the preservation of the world. But Jesus is no draughtsman of political blueprints, he is the one who vanquished evil through suffering. It looked as though evil had triumphed on the cross, but the real victory belonged to Jesus. And the cross is the only justification for the precept of nonviolence, for it alone can kindle a faith in the victory over evil which will enable men to obey that precept. And only such obedience is blessed with the promise that we shall be partakers of Christ's victory as well as his sufferings.

The passion of Christ is the victory of divine love over the powers of evil, and therefore it is the only supportable basis for Christian obedience. Once again, Jesus calls those who follow him to share his passion. How can we convince the world by our preaching of the passion when we shrink from that passion in our own lives? On the cross Jesus fulfilled the law he himself established and thus graciously keeps his disciples in the fellowship of his suffering. The cross is the only power in the world which proves that suffering love can avenge and vanquish evil. But it was just this participation in the cross which the disciples were granted when Jesus called them to him. They are called blessed because of their visible participation in the cross.

**“Just because we live in the world, the precept of nonviolence must be put into practice”**

**“Jesus is the one who vanquished evil through suffering”**

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by David Smith

Key passage:  
Philippians 4:7

Notes

In his book *The Psychology of Christian Personality* Ernest Ligon points out that the peace of which Christ spoke "was a steadfastness and tranquility of heart, which would make them [His followers] able to face the future undismayed."<sup>1</sup> Can you think of a more needed and desired characteristic for those of us who face the future as we now see it? If you could peddle this peace in a bottle, with its qualities described in appropriate advertising terminology, how many bottles do you think you would sell? How much could you charge for each bottle? It is amazing to consider the power of God's peace to transform a troubled life, and then to realize that it is free and readily available.

As peacemakers, it is our task to proclaim this good news of the gospel of peace. If God had asked us to sell something it would have been one thing, but we have only to let the world know of His bargain offer.

Ligon goes on to point out the three kinds of conflicts which challenge the peacemaker: (1) "the struggle between the various forces within the individual"; (2) "the conflict which arises between the individual and his society"; and (3) "those forms of economic and political warfare constitute the most serious of our social problems."<sup>2</sup> But as Ligon notes, "all three of them are essentially one . . . inner conflict."<sup>3</sup> How important this concept is to the Christian peacemaker. To spend our time trying to bring peace to society as a whole, or to approach peace from an economic or political slant, will only render our efforts ineffective. We must introduce Christ into the heart to be effective. The Henry Kissingers of this world have their place, but the work of the Christian peacemaker is far more encompassing, important and worthwhile.

But peacemakers need to be concerned with families, as well as with individuals and society. Ligon shares some practical ideas with parents who are attempting to raise peacemakers:

**1. Parents should not shelter their children too much because the child who is too sheltered from the world, who withdraws from the world, cannot be an effective peacemaker.** For a child who is sheltered tends to withdraw from others rather than to reach out to them.

**2. Parents should do all they can to develop true sportsmanship in the child to prevent conflicts between the child and his social environment.** The child needs to learn how to relate to others in a sportsman-like way by making the best use of the rules of fair play in each area of his life.

**3. Children should be trained to "hold attitudes of confidence, respect, and generosity toward other groups" thus helping to resolve conflicts which can exist between larger groups "such as class, race, and nation."<sup>4</sup>**

**4. Parents should do all within their power to discourage the development of fear, anger, and lust in the child.** Ligon aptly notes that "having a personality free of these elements is in itself the strongest force in bringing about the same kind of personality in others."<sup>5</sup>

Being a peacemaker isn't easy, but shod with the equipment of the gospel of peace, we must do all that we can to bring a peace which passeth understanding to a deeply troubled world.

<sup>1</sup> Ernest M. Ligon, *The Psychology of Christian Personality* (Schenectady, New York: Character Research Press, 1975), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 82.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 83.

by David Smith

Key passage:  
John 14:25-27

Notes

Christ's peacemaker statement on the mount stunned the people. Its paradoxical nature went against the grain of everything the Pharisees had taught them. "The people had come to think that happiness consisted in the possession of the things of this world, and that fame and the honor of men were much to be coveted." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 305. The peace the people sought came from material things, not from spiritual grace.

In this respect, Christ's peace statement is still at variance with the multitudes today. Christ says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27, R.S.V.). Often, we seek our peace in cheap entertainments and material possessions. The peace these things offer is short-lived and unsatisfying. But Christ offers a lasting and satisfying relationship, one which brings real peace of mind.

Christ's statement is at odds with the world's point of view in one other important way. In Matthew 10:34 Christ states: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (R.S.V.). Christ's Jewish listeners were ready to seek peace by fighting the Romans. Today, we also rally our armies and fight in the name of peace.

Christ, however, offers a peace won by fighting against the spirit of powers of darkness, not against flesh and blood. As Romans 16:20, R.S.V. states, the "God of peace" will "crush" Satan. How strange for a peaceful God to act! But this is the only way true peace will be wrought. Armed with the sword of the Spirit, we are to join God in this great battle. In this spiritual war we must be fully armed and prepared, having our feet shod "with the equipment of the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15, R.S.V.). Steve Marshall notes that the gospel of peace is what you stand on when you fight. It forms the foundation of your battle plan, and it is firmly grounded on the Rock upon which you stand, Jesus Christ. This gospel of peace is the firm assurance that Christ has redeemed us, that He will meet our every need.

How strange it seems that to be effective peacemakers we must engage in fighting, in "crushing" the foe. But the end result of this battle will bring a far more lasting peace than human wars.

Do you want to be a peacemaker, a child of God? Then equip your feet with the gospel of peace, stand firmly on the Rock of our salvation, and go forth to crush the foe. Let the world fight its battles, you have a better fight to fight.

## REACT

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1. What is the Christian's responsibility as a peacemaker in the world today?

Is this responsibility confined to his community and church, or is it global and political?

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in the Introduction to this week's lesson, says of the followers of Christ, "His disciples keep the peace by choosing to endure suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others. They maintain fellowship where others would break it off. They renounce all self-assertion, and quietly suffer in the face of hatred and wrong." Do you agree with his thoughts here? Explain.

If one is truly a peacemaker, how can he keep from being trampled upon by his enemies or by a contrary society? Or is such the Christian's lot?

3. Many Christians are very conservative in their views on military preparedness, believing that the best way to secure peace in the world is through a more-than-adequate supply of conventional and nuclear weaponry. Do you agree?

During World War II many Christians felt that it was necessary for the United States to declare war on certain aggressive powers in order to build a foundation for a future peace. But is war ever a justified option for a peacemaker? When does turning the other cheek apply in global situations—if ever?

4. Now in a different line of thought, modern psychology tells us it is important to "let off steam," to work through our negative emotions. How is the peacemaker to relate to this?

# The Persecuted



庚申年夏  
[Seal]



"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

— Matthew 5:10

by Larry McGill

He was a lonely shepherd boy who loved being outdoors in the beauty and peace of nature. He was handsome, well built and strong, a masculine young man. He was brave and faithful and yet humble in his office as a shepherd. And God had chosen him to be captain of His people.

But now King Saul was jealous of David's accomplishments and hated him. And it got to the point that he tried to hurt David in every way he could. David had married Saul's daughter, Michal. He loved Michal more than anything else in the world and Michal loved him. But Saul, determined to destroy his son-in-law, issued a command to the officers of the court to take David's life. Michal heard about her father's wicked plan and urged David to flee. And that was one of the last times that David was able to be with the woman he loved so much.

Jonathan, the king's son, and David were very close friends. They shared with each other their joys, hurts, pains, and secrets. They truly loved each other. But Saul determined to destroy their friendship as well. Thus, it became unsafe for David and Jonathan to be seen with each other. The Bible tells us how the two wept bitterly over their parting as they each went a separate way. Now David had no one!

Always running, David was in constant fear of being discovered. He hid among the mountains of Judah to elude Saul's soldiers who sought to kill him. He wasn't safe anywhere and doubtless there were times when he thought he could trust no one. And yet, it was during this time that

David learned to trust the Lord. It was during this time that he found a deeper peace than ever before. And it was during this time that he wrote some of his most outstanding psalms. "In the Lord I take refuge . . . his eyes behold the children of men . . ." (Psalm 11:1, 4; RSV). "My help comes from the Lord . . . he who keeps you will not stumble" (Psalm 121:2, 3; RSV).

During a time of severe persecution David developed his reliance and trust in the Lord. He was driven to total dependence upon God, and in that dependence found true peace, true happiness, and true contentment.

Later on in his successful life as the king of Israel, David's faith slipped and in turn he lost hold of his source of true peace and happiness. He had all the earthly fame and possessions he ever wanted. But what he lacked was the happiness, peace and contentment that he had known earlier—during times of hardship and persecution.

Perhaps it is during a time of loneliness, persecution, or desperation that a person begins to rely on God's divine strength. Perhaps God is able to work to a greater degree in bringing about true happiness, true peace of mind, and true contentment when a person is vulnerable. Perhaps this is the reason that Jesus said, "Happy you will be when men shall persecute you, hate you, and even try to kill you."

by editors

Notes

**“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10; RSV).**

Unlike the preceding beatitudes, which allow defining the different stages of spiritual development of the inner man, the last beatitude deals with the experiences and duties that await the Christian.

On several occasions Jesus warned His disciples that they would be persecuted. **“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. 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” (John 15:18-20).** Jesus is indeed the God of peace, but His message is at variance with the systems of the world, and thus the world rises in rebellion against Him and His own (see Matthew 10:34-36). Thus, Paul stated, **“All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (II Tim. 3:11, 12).**

Persecution in itself is certainly nothing to be happy about. Oppressive powers and overbearing persons are nothing over which to rejoice. But, **“If you are reproached for the name of Christ,”** then **“you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. . . . If one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God” (I Peter 4:14-16; RSV).** Satisfaction to the persecuted Christian comes because he is a **“partaker of Christ’s sufferings” (v.13),** because he knows that he is suffering as a Christian, and because he has proof that the **“spirit of glory and of God resteth”** on him.

In apostolic times the name Christian was first given to ridicule those who followed Christ (Acts 11:26). That is why the apostle exhorts Christians not to be ashamed, but rather to glory. And that is exactly what happened. Christians of the first centuries made themselves an object of glory by being persecuted for Christ’s sake.

In an attempt to justify persecution to His disciples, Jesus said, **“This will be a time for you to bear testimony” (Luke 21:13; RSV; compare Mark 13:9).** While Jesus is here showing the good which results from persecution—an opportunity for witness—it would be a mistake to believe that God brings it about for the good of His children and the progress of His work. God never causes evil, nor does He ever wish it for His children. But where sin abounds, grace much more abounds (Romans 5:20), as where persecution rages, God accords grace to endure and to triumph, in order to bear testimony to truth.

**“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33; NIV).** Jesus not only warned His disciples of the tribulations they would have to endure, but above all He encouraged and assured them that they would gain the final victory. For, **“greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (I John 4:4).**

Who shall separate us from the love of God? **“Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:35-39).**

selected by editors

Jesus does not present to His followers the hope of attaining earthly glory and riches, and of having a life free from trial, but He presents to them the privilege of walking with their Master in the paths of self-denial and reproach, because the world knows them not.

He who came to redeem the lost world was opposed by the united forces of the adversaries of God and man. In an un pitying confederacy, evil men and evil angels arrayed themselves against the Prince of Peace. Though His every word and act breathed of divine compassion, His unlikeness to the world provoked the bitterest hostility. Because He would give no license for the exercise of the evil passions of our nature, He aroused the fiercest opposition and enmity. . . .

As men seek to come into harmony with God, they will find that the offense of the cross has not ceased. Principalities and powers and wicked spirits in high places are arrayed against all who yield obedience to the law of heaven. Therefore, so far from causing grief, persecution should bring joy to the disciples of Christ, for it is an evidence that they are following in the steps of their Master.

While the Lord has not promised His people exemption from trials, He has promised that which is far better. He has said, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Deuteronomy 33:25; 2 Corinthians 12:9. If you are called to go through the fiery furnace for His sake, Jesus will be by your side even as He was with the faithful three in Babylon. Those who love their Redeemer will rejoice at every opportunity of sharing with Him humiliation and reproach. The love they bear their Lord makes suffering for His sake sweet.

In all ages Satan has persecuted the people of God. He has tortured them and put them to death, but in dying they became conquerors. They revealed in their steadfast faith a mightier One than Satan. Satan could torture and kill the body, but he could not touch the life that was hid with Christ in God. He could incarcerate in prison walls, but he could not bind the spirit. They could look beyond the gloom to the glory, saying, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17.

Through trials and persecution, the glory—character—of God is revealed in His chosen ones. The church of God, hated and persecuted by the world, are educated and disciplined in the school of Christ. They walk in narrow paths on earth; they are purified in the furnace of affliction. They follow Christ through sore conflicts; they endure self-denial and experience bitter disappointments; but their painful experience teaches them the guilt and woe of sin, and they look upon it with abhorrence. Being partakers of Christ's sufferings, they are destined to be partakers of His glory.

(Taken from *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 29-31.)

**Key passage:**  
**Romans 8:31-39**  
**II Cor. 6:4-10**

**Notes**

**"Jesus does not present to His followers the hope of obtaining earthly glory and riches"**

**"Those who love their Redeemer will rejoice at every opportunity of sharing with Him humiliation and reproach"**

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

**Editor's note:** Written while suffering persecution in a Nazi prison camp, Dietrich Bonhoeffer discusses the "this-worldliness" of true Christianity—which brings with it sufferings—in a letter to his dear friend, Eberhard Bethage.

Key passage:  
Jeremiah 45  
Philippians 2:6-11

Notes

[Tegel] 21 July [1944]

Dear Eberhard,

All I want to do today is to send you a short greeting. I expect you are often with us here in your thoughts and are always glad of any sign of life, even if the theological discussion stops for a moment. These theological thoughts are, in fact, always occupying my mind; but there are times when I am just content to live the life of faith without worrying about its problems. At those times I simply take pleasure in the days' readings—in particular those of yesterday and today; and I'm always glad to go back to Paul Gerhardt's beautiful hymns.

During the last year or so I've come to know and understand more and more the profound this-worldliness of Christianity. The Christian is not a *homo religiosus*, but simply a man, as Jesus was a man—in contrast, shall we say, to John the Baptist. I don't mean the shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the busy, the comfortable, or the lascivious, but the profound this-worldliness, characterized by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection. I think Luther lived a this-worldly life in this sense.

I remember a conversation that I had in America thirteen years ago with a young French pastor. We were asking ourselves quite simply what we wanted to do with our lives. He said he would like to become a saint (and I think it's quite likely that he did become one). At the time I was very impressed, but I disagreed with him, and said, in effect, that I should like to learn to have faith. For a long time I didn't realize the depth of the contrast. I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. I suppose I wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* as the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote.

I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world—watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith. . . . How can success make us arrogant, or failure lead us astray, when we share in God's sufferings through a life of this kind?

May God in his mercy lead us through these times; but above all, may he lead us to himself. . . .

Good-bye. Keep well, and don't lose hope that we shall all meet again soon. I always think of you in faithfulness and gratitude.

Your Dietrich

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by editors

Key passage:  
Matthew 5:10-12

Notes

Barbara Johanon was a junior executive with a large advertising firm in New York City. She was attractive, thirty years old and single.

Philip Stance, president and chief executive officer of the corporation, had for the last few months been watching Barbara—and not without lust in his eyes.

One afternoon, after working side by side on a proposal for a client, Barbara felt strangely uneasy: Philip kept staring at her. And after a while neither were able to continue their work. Flustered, Barbara sat down in an easy chair, her forehead resting in her hand, trying to regain her composure. It was then that Philip made, what Barbara would later term, "sexual advances." Thoroughly disgusted Barbara stomped out of the office. Later that week she received notice that she had been demoted and placed as an assistant in the composition department.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake . . ." As a Christian, Barbara pondered these words. "How can this be?" she wondered. And indeed, how is the Christian to consider himself blessed when standing face to face with persecution?

**1. Realize that as a Christian, your only possession is Christ.** Your security is not in a job, education, money or advancement. It is not in health or in power or in prestige. Your security is in Christ alone—your sole possession is only the Lord.

Thus, no position can be taken from the Christian; for he finds his position in Christ. No demotion may occur; for he sits on the right hand of God. No security may others deprive him of; for Christ is his only refuge. Indeed, a Christian need never be threatened or intimidated, as he always has Christ.

**2. Try to understand those persecuting you.** "Walk a mile in the other man's moccasins" is the American Indian's way of saying it. And it is this perspective the Christian takes as well.

Nobody knows the troubles of another man's heart. Philip Stance, in the story above, is thought of as a most sinful and wicked man. And indeed he certainly may be. What he did was not right. But nobody knows of the disrespect with which he is treated by his children. Nobody knows of the sleepless nights when loneliness and guilt and anxiety will not relax their strangleholds.

Certainly, there should be no persecution in this world. But when you are persecuted, as a Christian, really try to understand.

**3. Follow Jesus' advice.** He said: "pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Have you ever tried this? It really works, doesn't it?

"Father," Barbara should pray, "Please bless Philip. That guy—he is really disgusting to me. But I know You love him, and I know You understand him.

"Bless him in his work and in his home-life. He must be having some real problems. Help him, Father, to know the fullness of Christian love, and to rest in Your forgiveness. Help him to see . . .

"Amen."

by editors

Key passage:  
Acts 4:16-24,  
29-31

Notes

Paging through *The German Churches Under Hitler*, an historical account of the relationships between Christian churches and the German Nazi government, I was impressed with the courage of some church organizations and dismayed at the weakness of others during times of persecution.

Reviewing some correspondence between various churches and Adolph Hitler, I ran across an interesting, yet sometimes typical letter. Concerned with the future of his denomination's work in Nazi Germany, a church official wrote "His Excellency" in an effort to assure the Fuhrer of the patriotism of the church members and of the willingness of the church to work with the government, in order that the church might escape persecution. The response of Hitler was that as long as the church preached about a heaven to come and did not interfere with the present German society or government, all would be well. And all was well. This particular denomination managed to survive quite comfortably with the demonic Nazi regime.

But Matthew 5:10, the beatitude we have been studying this week, seems to be based on the presupposition that if the Christian is fulfilling his heaven-sent responsibility in society, then persecution will be ineludible. Why is this so? William Barclay explains: "The Church, when it really is the Church, is bound to be the conscience of the nations and the conscience of society. Where there is good the Church must praise; where there is evil the Church must condemn—and inevitably men will try to silence the troublesome voice of conscience."<sup>1</sup>

**"The Church is bound to be the conscience of the nations and society"**

Millions were eliminated by the Nazis in World War II. Fortunately most of the members of the before-mentioned denomination were not among those eliminated. These escaped persecution, but were they God's instrument to speak out against oppression and gross tyranny? No. Their lives were spared at the expense of their Christian commission. Jesus did not counsel His church to compromise its witness and thereby escape persecution; He commanded the church to courageously stand against that which is un-Christlike and with joy and gladness accept the consequences, and thereby share in the sufferings of the One who died for the oppressed.

Scanning further in this *German Churches* book, I ran across a declaration from another church in Germany—a church which lived up to its God-given responsibility. In the face of the Nazi Regime, it had this to say: "Killing is bad in itself, even when it is done in the interest of the common welfare; against innocent and defenseless mentally ill and other sick . . . against innocent hostages and disarmed war and other prisoners; against people of an alien race and descent."<sup>2</sup>

As Adventist Christians today, should we not be bold to condemn the evils in society? Indeed, we must not love ourselves or our institutions to such an extent that we flee from persecution in order to provide for organizational maintenance. If we as a church speak out—if we accept our responsibility as a conscience to society—persecution will be the inevitable result. But "rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven."

<sup>1</sup> From THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW, Volume 1 (Revised Edition), translated and interpreted by William Barclay. Copyright © 1975 William Barclay. Published in the U.S.A. by The Westminster Press. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Christian Helmrich, *The German Churches Under Hitler* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), p. 364.

by Martin Luther

Key passage:

So far we have been treating almost all the elements of a Christian's way of life and the spiritual fruits under these two headings: first, that in his own person he is poor, troubled, miserable, needy, and hungry; second, that in relation to others he is a useful, kind, merciful, and peaceable man, who does nothing but good works. Now He adds the last: how he fares in all this. Although he is full of good works, even toward his enemies and rascals, for all this he must get this reward from the world: he is persecuted and runs the risk of losing his body, his life, and everything.

If you want to be a Christian, therefore, consider this well, lest you be frightened, lose heart, and become impatient. But be cheerful and content, knowing that you are not badly off when this happens to you. He and all the saints had the same experience, as He says a little later. For this reason He issues a warning beforehand to those who want to be Christians, that they should and must suffer persecution. Therefore you may take your choice. You have two ways before you—either to heaven and eternal life or to hell, either with Christ or with the world. But this you must know: if you live in order to have a good time here without persecution, then you will not get to heaven with Christ, and vice versa. In short, you must either surrender Christ and heaven or make up your mind that you are willing to suffer every kind of persecution and torture in the world. Briefly, anyone who wants to have Christ must put in jeopardy his body, life, goods, reputation and popularity in the world. He dare not let himself be scared off by contempt, ingratitude, or persecution. . . .

But it is significant that He should add the phrase: "for righteousness' sake," to show that where this condition is absent, persecution alone will not accomplish this. The devil and wicked people also have to suffer persecution. Rascals often get into each other's hair, and there is no love lost between them. So one murderer persecutes another, and the Turk battles against the Tartar; but this does not make them blessed. This statement applies only to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. So also I Peter 4:15 says: "Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or a wrongdoer." Therefore bragging and yelling about great suffering is worthless without this condition. So the godless monks have deceived the poor people whom they have led away to be punished, consoling them with the statement that with their death they were paying for their sins. Beware of any death that is supposed to pay for your sin, for it belongs in the abyss of hell. First there must come righteousness and the death of Christ, the Lord.

See to it, therefore, that you have a genuine divine cause for whose sake you suffer persecution, and that you are really convinced of it so that your conscience can take a stand and stick by it, even though the whole world should stand up against you. The primary thing is that you grasp the Word of God firmly and surely so that there can be no doubt or hesitation there. Suppose that the Emperor, the bishops, or the princes were to forbid marriage, freedom in the choice of food, the use of both kinds in the Sacrament, and the like, and were to persecute you for these things. Then you would have to see to it that your heart is convinced and persuaded that the Word of God has made these things free and unprohibited, that it even commands us to take them seriously and to stake our lives upon them. Then you can have the confidence to say: "This cause does not belong to me but to Christ, my Lord. For I have not concocted it out of my own head. I have not assumed or begun

**"Anyone who wants to have Christ must put in jeopardy his body, life, goods, reputation and popularity"**

**"Beware of any death that is supposed to pay for your sin"**

it on my own or at the advice or suggestion of any man. But it has been brought and announced to me from heaven through the mouth of Christ, who never deludes or deceives me but is Himself sheer Truth and Righteousness. At this Man's Word I will take the risk of suffering, of doing and forsaking whatever I should. All by itself, His Word will accomplish more to comfort and strengthen my heart than the raging and threatening of all the devils and of the world can accomplish to frighten me."

Who cares if a crazy prince or foolish emperor fumes in his rage and threatens me with sword, fire, or the gallows! Just as long as my Christ is talking dearly to my heart, comforting me with the promises that I am blessed, that I am right with God in heaven, and that all the heavenly host and creation call me blessed. Just let my heart and mind be ready to suffer for the sake of His Word and work. Then why should I let myself be scared by these miserable people, who rage and foam in their hostility to God but suddenly disappear like a puff of smoke or a bubble, as the prophet Isaiah says (Isa. 51:12, 13): "I, I am He that comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass, and have forgotten the Lord, who made you, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth?" That is to say: "He who comforts you and takes pleasure in you is almighty and eternal. When it is all over with them, He will still be sitting up there, and so will you. Why, then, let the threatening and fuming of a miserable, stinking bag of worms concern you more than this divine comfort and approval? Be grateful to God and happy in your heart that you are worthy of suffering this, as the apostles went forth (Acts 5:41) leaping for joy over the fact that they were disgraced and beaten down."

You see, these words are a great blessing to us if only we receive them with love and thanks, since we have no shortage of persecution. But our great advantage is that our enemies themselves cannot condemn our cause and must acknowledge—no thanks to them!—that it is right and true. What is wrong is the fact that we are teaching it, for they refuse to learn and accept it from you. Such a thing is unprecedented and unheard of. What we suffer on this account, therefore, is a holy and blessed suffering, as they themselves must testify. This is no longer a human persecution, but a truly demonic one, when they say that we must not and dare not call it the Word of God but must keep our mouth shut and not preach unless first we go and fall at the pope's feet, asking for approval from him and from his masks.

So let us be all the more willing and happy to suffer everything they can do against us, since we have the strong and certain comfort and the great and glorious satisfaction that their own mouth confirms our teaching and our cause. In addition, we hear the wonderful and delightful promise here that we shall be well rewarded in heaven and that we should be happy and rejoice over this, as people who do not have to yearn for heaven but already have it. All they do by their persecution is to further this, actually driving and chasing us to heaven. Now tell me whether these simple, short words do not encourage you as much as the whole world can, and provide more comfort and joy than all the suffering and torture our enemies can inflict upon us. We should not listen to them with only *half* an ear, but take them to heart and ponder them.

**"Who cares if a crazy prince or foolish emperor fumes in his rage!"**

**"When it is all over with them, He will still be sitting up there, and so will you"**

**Rejoice over heaven as people who already have it**

1. The Christian church today is suffering relatively little persecution throughout the world. Why is this so?

2. William Barclay, in the Opinion article for this week, writes, "The Church, when it really is the Church, is bound to be the conscience of the nations and the conscience of society. Where there is good the Church must praise; where there is evil the church must condemn—and inevitably men will try to silence the troublesome voice of conscience."

Do you agree with his idea here? If so, what then is the Adventist Church's responsibility to those people under governments which deny them their basic human rights? What is its responsibility in speaking out for equal rights among women and minorities? What role should the church play in working for more fair and equitable governments, at home and abroad?

3. The suffering of God and Christian suffering is important in the thinking of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Reread his letter to Eberhard Bethage and carefully consider and then discuss this concept of suffering.

4. Is persecution necessary to make "good Christians"? Why do sufferings befall God's people?

# The Reviled And Slandered



“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

by editors

When Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" (Matthew 5:11, 12; NIV), He was laying a spiritual foundation for His church to stand upon when it was later to face relentless slander and persecution.

And face that slander and persecution it did! As Christianity spread and became a movement to be reckoned with, charges circulated that the followers of Christ were atheists, cannibals, frequenters of sexual orgies and opponents of the Roman government.

The charge of atheism which was made against the early Christians was certainly the most detrimental of any of the circulating slander. As they had "forsaken" the God of the Jews and failed to acknowledge any Roman deity, these Christians were looked upon as "unbelievers" and pests of society.

The statement of Jesus, "This is my body . . . take, eat . . .," also caused problems for the early Christian church. To the pagan mind, this phrase meant exactly what it said. Thus, it was reported that during the Lord's Supper Christians would sacrifice and eat one from among their members—usually a child.

As if that were not enough, think of the connotations a pagan would associate with the phrase "agape" or "love feast." Indeed, it was rumored about that at such times the Christians participated in sexual orgies and frequently engaged in incest.

Of course, Christians vehemently denied these charges and accusations. But for many years their testimony was not accepted, the slanderous reports circulated about them were believed true, and thus persecution—though generally

sporadic—dealt them its blow.

The fourth century historian Eusebius describes some of these persecutions: "Some were scraped, racked, . . . given to the flames; some were submerged in the sea; others cheerfully stretched out their necks to the headsman's axe; some died under torture; others were starved to death; others again were crucified, . . . some with still greater cruelty nailed the other way up, head down, and kept alive till they starved to death on the very cross."<sup>1</sup>

But Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven . . ." (Matthew 5:11, 12; NIV).

Did all of the early Christians trust in this saying of Jesus? No, not all of them. But many of them did. Many were so convinced of the sovereignty and love of God that they faced this suffering and persecution with a boldness akin to their Lord's.

Eusebius continues: "All the time I observed a most wonderful eagerness and a truly divine power and enthusiasm in those who had put their trust in the Christ of God. No sooner had the batch been sentenced, than others from every side would jump on to the platform in front of the judge and proclaim themselves Christians. They paid no heed to torture in all its terrifying forms, but undaunted spoke boldly of their devotion to the God of the universe and with joy, laughter and gaiety received the final sentence of death: they sang and sent up hymns of thanksgiving to the God of the universe till their very last breath."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *The History of The Church*, trans. by G. A. Williamson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), pp. 337-338.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

by editors

Notes

**“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).**

From their content these words of Jesus seem to be a simple unfolding of the statement made in the last beatitude; by the verb forms, however, it appears that the Master was speaking directly to His disciples, that He was no longer satisfied to speak in a general way to all the congregation assembled around Him. Supporting this deduction is the change from the impersonal third-person form in these verses. Here the Master is no longer making a simple statement of blessing for those who meet the qualifications pointed out in the preceding beatitudes; instead He is addressing His disciples in a personal, direct way, inviting them to be happy to be counted worthy of suffering shame for His name and to rejoice in anticipation of the recompense awaiting them in heaven.

The true cause of the happiness of those whom Jesus declared “blessed” is not found in themselves. Rather it is in the Lord’s promise to them. In each beatitude Jesus stated the reason for happiness in the second part of the declaration. The poor in spirit, they that mourn, those who hunger and thirst, the persecuted, all are blessed because Jesus is able to promise them the kingdom of heaven, consolation, satisfaction, the title “Son of God,” a vision of God.

Throughout the ages God has warned of impending persecutions through His prophets. Perhaps the best known of these prophecies among the Seventh-day Adventists is that found in Daniel 7: **“I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them, until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High. . . . He shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time”** (vs. 21, 22, 25); Daniel 12 pictures a **“time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation”** (vs. 1), and Revelation 13 pictures an authority giving **“breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed”** (vs. 15; NIV). As it has been throughout history, even more so in the near future will God’s people be facing troublesome times and earth-shaking experiences. But remember: **“thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book”** (Daniel 12:1).

**“Blessed are ye when men shall . . . persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, . . . for great is your reward in heaven. . . .”**

**“What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? . . . Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple”** (Rev. 7:13-15).

selected by editors

Key passage:  
Philippians 2:14-18

Notes

Ever since his fall, Satan has worked by means of deception. As he has misrepresented God, so, through his agents, he misrepresents the children of God. The Saviour says, "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon Me." Psalm 69:9. In like manner they fall upon His disciples.

There was never one who walked among men more cruelly slandered than the Son of man. He was derided and mocked because of His unswerving obedience to the principles of God's holy law. They hated Him without cause. Yet He stood calmly before His enemies, declaring that reproach is a part of the Christian's legacy, counseling His followers how to meet the arrows of malice, bidding them not to faint under persecution.

While slander may blacken the reputation, it cannot stain the character. That is in God's keeping. So long as we do not consent to sin, there is no power, whether human or satanic, that can bring a stain upon the soul. A man whose heart is stayed upon God is just the same in the hour of his most afflicting trials and most discouraging surroundings as when he was in prosperity, when the light and favor of God seemed to be upon him. His words, his motives, his actions, may be misrepresented and falsified, but he does not mind it, because he has greater interests at stake. Like Moses, he endures as "seeing Him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27); looking "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Christ is acquainted with all that is misunderstood and misrepresented by men. His children can afford to wait in calm patience and trust, no matter how much maligned and despised; for nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest, and those who honor God shall be honored by Him in the presence of men and angels.

"When men shall revile you, and persecute you," said Jesus, "rejoice, and be exceeding glad." And He pointed His hearers to the prophets who had spoken in the name of the Lord, as "an example of suffering affliction, and of patience." James 5:10. Abel, the very first Christian of Adam's children, died a martyr. Enoch walked with God, and the world knew him not. Noah was mocked as a fanatic and an alarmist. "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection." Hebrews 11:36, 35. . . .

Great is the reward in heaven of those who are witnesses for Christ through persecution and reproach. While the people are looking for earthly good, Jesus points them to a heavenly reward. But He does not place it all in the future life; it begins here. The Lord appeared of old time to Abraham and said, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward". . . .

It was this joy that filled the hearts of Paul and Silas when they prayed and sang praises to God at midnight in the Philippian dungeon. Christ was beside them there, and the light of His presence irradiated the gloom with the glory of the courts above. From Rome, Paul wrote, unmindful of his fetters as he saw the spread of the gospel, "I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." Philippians 1:18. And the very words of Christ upon the mount are re-echoed in Paul's message to the Philippian church, in the midst of their persecutions, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." Philippians 4:4.

(Taken from *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 31-35.)

by John Wesley

"Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." This cannot fail. It is the very badge of discipleship. It is one of the seals of God's calling. It is a sureness of reviling which will fall on all the children of God. If we have not been reviled for our new living faith, we are not true sons of God. The children of God are of good report among their own brothers. They are known as being meek, serious, humble and zealous lovers of God and man. This way of living brings evil reports from the world. In spite of righteousness, the world continues to count and treat them as filth, and the refuse of the world, because they are different.

Who ever imagined that this scandal and mistreatment will cease before the times of this world end? . . . Jesus' words are clear. "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Because you are not of the world, the world hates you." The serious follower of Jesus can expect to be hated by the world as cordially and sincerely as it hated Jesus himself.

Only one question remains. How are spiritual followers of Jesus to behave under persecution? First, they ought not do anything to bring it on themselves. That is contrary to both the example and advice of Jesus and all of His apostles. They taught us not only to not seek, but to avoid it. We are to avoid it as far as we can without injuring our conscience. We cannot give up any part of that righteousness which we are to prefer before life itself. So, Jesus expressly said, "When they persecute you in this city, flee to another." When this can be done, it is the best way of avoiding persecution. . . .

So you should neither desire to avoid it, nor to completely escape it. If you do, you are not a follower of Jesus. If you escape the persecutions, you will miss the blessings. There is a blessing for all of those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. If you are not persecuted for righteousness' sake, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us."

Then, rejoice and be glad when you are persecuted for His sake. When they persecute you by reviling you and saying all manner of evil against you falsely, be glad. They will blacken you to excuse themselves. Therefore, they will not fail to mix in with their reviling every kind of persecution. "For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." They persecuted those who were most eminently holy in heart and life. Yes, they persecuted all the righteous who have been since the beginning of the world. Rejoice, because by this mark, you know to whom you belong. Great will be your reward in heaven. It is a reward purchased by the blood of the covenant. It is freely bestowed in proportion to your sufferings, as well as to your holiness in heart and life. Be glad, knowing these light afflictions, which are but for a little while, work out for you a far more eternal weight of glory.

HAPPINESS UNLIMITED—John Wesley's Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount—edited and adapted by Clare G. Weakley, Jr. Copyright © 1979 by Logos International.

Key passage:  
Matthew 10:24-39

## Notes

**"If we have not been reviled for our new living faith, we are not true sons of God"**

**"Rejoice, because by this mark, you know to whom you belong"**

by Virginia Simmons

Key passage:  
Titus 2:1-8

Notes

In the beatitude we have been studying this week, Jesus says, "Blessed are you when people . . . say all kinds of evil against you because of me" (Matthew 5:11; NIV). But this statement of His is sometimes difficult to understand. Who wants to be falsely accused when notes of praise, admiration and acclaim are so pleasant to the ear and ego? How can one rejoice when others have defamed his good name? What is it that can bring about joyful acceptance of slander and persecution?

1. **Be sure the ill-treatment from which you are suffering is really for "righteousness' sake" and not a result of your unsound judgment or blundering.** It is possible to possess an unpleasant disposition, bad manners and poor judgment and believe that people are resenting our goodness when it is actually our lack of goodness which is provoking animosity. If prayerful self-scrutiny reveals it is truly not unpleasant personal traits but a firm stand for Christian principle that is bringing abuse, then. . . .
2. **Make sure you know just what you believe and have supporting evidence for why you believe it.** Strength to be different comes from an internalized value system. Retaliatory impulses originate in self-doubt.
3. **Differentiate between reputation and character.** Recognize that Christ and you are in control of your inner self, your character. Nothing external can change that inner self unless *you* allow it. Slander may blacken a reputation but it cannot stain character. Even though being scorned and laughed at may be more painful than being beaten, it can damage internally only as you choose to let it.
4. **Make use of the weapons available to Christians.** Reinforce your strength through earnest prayer and Bible study. Someone has said that the only defense a Christian has is his Christianity. Live so faultlessly that your life puts to shame those who make false accusations against you.
5. **Recognize that evil hastens good.** Agitation caused by false accusations may be just that which stimulates others to investigate the cause for which you stand. The crucifixion of Jesus demonstrates that, in their most unbridled excesses, man's wrath and hate work toward the ultimate purposes of God's will.
6. **Learn now not to covet or expect praise.** Jesus has said that the cross is the Christian's lot. Dissonance theory suggests that we come to love most that which costs us most. An inward joy and peace accompanies the knowledge that revilings, false accusations and persecution may be a part of processing you for heaven. Unjust treatment just might be tangible proof that you are on the right side; that your life is such a vibrant, positive influence for good that it is regarded by the world as dangerous. That alone gives cause for rejoicing.

If there is no suffering there is no glory  
If there is no struggle there is no victory  
If there is no persecution there is no reward

by William Barclay

Key passage:  
Hebrews 12:1-12

Notes

**Polycarp:**  
"I thank thee  
that thou hast  
graciously  
thought me  
worthy of this  
day and hour"

When we see how persecution arose, we are in a position to see the real glory of the martyr's way. It may seem an extraordinary thing to talk about the bliss of the persecuted; but for him who had eyes to see beyond the immediate present, and a mind to understand the greatness of the issues involved, there must have been a glory in that blood-stained way.

(i) To have to suffer persecution was an opportunity to show one's loyalty of Jesus Christ. One of the most famous of all the martyrs was Polycarp, the aged bishop of Smyrna. The mob dragged him to the tribunal of the Roman magistrate. He was given the inevitable choice—sacrifice to the godhead of Caesar or die. "Eighty and six years," came the immortal reply, "have I served Christ, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?" So they brought him to the stake, and he prayed his last prayer: "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy well-beloved and ever-blessed son, by whom we have received the knowledge of thee . . . I thank thee that thou hast graciously thought me worthy of this day and hour." Here was the supreme opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to Jesus Christ. . . .

(ii) To have to suffer persecution is, as Jesus Himself said, the way to walk the same road as the prophets, and the saints, and the martyrs have walked. To suffer for the right is to gain a share in a great succession. The man who has to suffer something for his faith can throw back his head and say,

"Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod."

(iii) To have to suffer persecution is to share in the great occasion. There is always something thrilling in even being present on the great occasion, in being there when something memorable and crucial is happening. . . .

When a man is called on to suffer something for his Christianity that is always a crucial moment; it is the great occasion; it is the clash between the world and Christ; it is a moment in the drama of eternity. To have a share in such a moment is not a penalty but a glory. . . .

(iv) To suffer persecution is to make things easier for those who are to follow. Today we enjoy the blessing of liberty because men in the past were willing to buy it for us at the cost of blood, and sweat, and tears. They made it easier for us, and by a steadfast and immovable witness of Christ we may make it easier for others who are still to come. . . .

(v) Still further, no man ever suffers persecution alone; if a man is called upon to bear material loss, the failure of friends, slander, loneliness, even the death of love, for his principles, he will not be left alone. Christ will be nearer to him than at any other time. . . .

[See Daniel 3:19-25.]

It is not likely that death awaits us because of our loyalty to the Christian faith. But insult awaits the man who insists on Christian honour. Mockery awaits the man who practises Christian love and Christian forgiveness. Actual persecution may well await the Christian in industry who insists on doing an honest day's work. Christ still needs his witnesses; he needs those who are prepared, not so much to die for him, as to live for him. The Christian struggle and the Christian glory still exist.

From THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW, Volume 1 (Revised Edition), translated and interpreted by William Barclay. Copyright © 1975 William Barclay. Published in the U.S.A. by The Westminster Press. Used by permission.

**William Barclay was professor of divinity and biblical criticism at the University of Glasgow and a world renowned Scottish New Testament interpreter.**

1. The fourth century historian Eusebius writes of an enthusiasm and eagerness existing among the early Christians as they were being led to their martyrdom. Do you consider such enthusiasm to be fanaticism or complete trust in the words of Christ, "happy are you when men shall revile you and persecute you?"

2. Martin Luther denounced his opponents with the most caustic and acrid terms. Some have justified him in doing this by explaining that those whom he so "reviled" were heretics of the church and therefore more than worthy of such treatment.

To what degree should Christians participate in slandering and reviling? Is it ever justified? When speaking of one who is "clearly" a heretic of the church, how should he be referred to? How should those who hold different beliefs than the majority be dealt with? Can Christians be guilty of reviling?

3. Which of the following are worth being persecuted for and which should one compromise his stand on in order to avoid persecution? Put a *P* for persecution and a *C* for compromise to mark your decisions.

\_\_\_ the Christian belief in the Trinity

\_\_\_ proper observance of the Sabbath

\_\_\_ conserving energy

\_\_\_ the belief in the divinity of Christ

\_\_\_ the principle of non-adornment

\_\_\_ equal rights for minorities

\_\_\_ salvation by grace through faith alone

\_\_\_ the Adventist teaching on state of the dead

\_\_\_ the idea that all people around the world should enjoy their basic human rights

\_\_\_ a belief in a literal heaven and hell

\_\_\_ Daniel 8:14

\_\_\_ vegetarianism

Did you decide to compromise on some of these issues and to stand against persecution on others? Why? What made the difference between those issues you would compromise on and those you would not?

# Salt Of The Earth



"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

— Matthew 5:13

by Ken Downing

A cover-up was in progress. Something was missing and every attempt was being made to conceal the fact that it was missing. It was a miniature "Mission Impossible" and I felt some small pangs of guilt being a party to it. My wife had sent me out to find some basil, rosemary, marjoram, and other assorted items that her manual had said would help effectively conceal the "thing" that was missing. It was fortunate that she told me where to go to buy the items, otherwise I would have looked in the phone book or a dictionary of military terms to find the strangely named products. As it was, I dutifully made my way to the local grocery store and there, mixed in with the cinnamon and garlic salt, I found the spices she needed.

The journey was necessary because my father-in-law was on a special, salt-free diet and his daughter (my wife) had taken upon herself the task of making food that was edible without salt. The recipe for the casserole of the day included sprinkles from bottles of spices which, though not guaranteed, were supposed to conceal the fact that salt was missing. Dessert was also a special concoction of more spices mixed in with unsalted, unsweetened, flavorless applesauce. As the recipe book had said, the meal was edible. But reactions to it ran something like this:

My father-in-law: "I really appreciate your efforts, dear."

My wife: "I thought it was absolutely horrible."

Myself: "It could have been worse, honey. I don't know how, but I'm sure it could have been."

My son (age 2): "ICKY! Want reg'lar applesauce."

Needless to say, the cover-up was a failure. No fancy blend of spices was able to conceal the fact that salt was missing.

Christ's statement that we are "the salt of the earth" follows the beatitudes which describe the Christian virtues that make us "a savour of life unto life" (II Cor. 2:16). We are here to add a little flavor to a world that has tried to "spice life up" with fancy homes and flashy cars, strong drink and late night parties, superficial status and inflated egos. But eventually people begin to realize that something vital is missing. And that is where our work as Christians begins.

Just as salt is composed of a perfect blend of sodium and chloride, so are we, in our relationship to Jesus, to be a balanced blend of the virtues that He puts in us, the virtues outlined in the beatitudes. Each day as you study this lesson about salt, re-read the beatitudes and remind yourself of the necessary elements that make us Christians an indispensable flavoring in the world. For in the final analysis, we will be found to have each been a part of the greatest movement ever to flavor the earth, or to have been part of the worst cover-up the world has ever known.

by editors

Notes

**"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Matthew 5:13).**

Jesus called His friends "the salt of the earth." There are at least three important points to notice here:

**1. Jesus stressed the fact that His followers were to use their truth-filled insights to help others, instead of flaunting them or letting them go unused.**

At the time of Christ's first advent, salt was used both to make food palatable and to preserve it. Christ's hearers must have been conscious of the role they should have been playing in making attractive and preserving the values of the kingdom of God in society. Jesus had just enunciated the operating principles of God's government in heaven as well as on earth. All those who claimed to be friends of God had a responsibility of living these principles as well as sharing them with their non-believing friends.

Thus, cries the prophet Hosea: **"Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land" (Hosea 4:1).**

**2. Jesus urged His followers to meet people and actively share their faith.**

Salt is useless unless it becomes thoroughly mixed with that which it is to season and preserve. Likewise, Christianity is ineffective and irrelevant unless it becomes thoroughly mixed with the societies of the world. **"As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). "Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again. . . ." (Luke 6:35). "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."** The position of Christianity is not one of withdrawal. Rather, *involvement* with his enemies and with his neighbors—anyone who needs his help—is the true Christian's hallmark.

**"Involvement  
is the true  
Christian's  
hallmark"**

To be the salt of the earth is to actively love that which is worth preserving.

**3. By referring to His church as "the salt of the earth" Jesus was issuing a warning: Salt that has lost its savor hasn't much value, and is usually discarded and replaced.**

Fitting this statement within the context of our discussion above we could say: "Christianity" that has lost its love hasn't much value. . . . The apostle Paul builds on this thought: **"If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (I Cor. 13:1-3; NIV).**

To the Christian church today the condemnation is given: **"You have forsaken your first love. . . . Repent. . . ." (Rev. 2:4, 5; NIV).** For **"ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour . . . it is thenceforth good for nothing."**

selected by editors

Key passage:  
Ephesians 3:13-21

Notes

Salt is valued for its preservative properties; and when God calls His children salt, He would teach them that His purpose in making them the subjects of His grace is that they may become agents in saving others. The object of God in choosing a people before all the world was not only that He might adopt them as His sons and daughters, but that through them the world might receive the grace that bringeth salvation. Titus 2:11. . . . In like manner Christians who are purified through the truth will possess saving qualities that preserve the world from utter moral corruption.

Salt must be mingled with the substance to which it is added; it must penetrate and infuse in order to preserve. So it is through personal contact and association that men are reached by the saving power of the gospel. They are not saved in masses, but as individuals. Personal influence is a power. We must come close to those whom we desire to benefit.

The savor of the salt represents the vital power of the Christian—the love of Jesus in the heart, the righteousness of Christ pervading the life. The love of Christ is diffusive and aggressive. If it is dwelling in us, it will flow out to others. We shall come close to them till their hearts are warmed by our unselfish interest and love. The sincere believers diffuse vital energy, which is penetrating and imparts new moral power to the souls for whom they labor. It is not the power of the man himself, but the power of the Holy Spirit that does the transforming work. . . .

Without a living faith in Christ as a personal Saviour it is impossible to make our influence felt in a skeptical world. We cannot give to others that which we do not ourselves possess. It is in proportion to our own devotion and consecration to Christ that we exert an influence for the blessing and uplifting of mankind. If there is no actual service, no genuine love, no reality of experience, there is no power to help, no connection with heaven, no savor of Christ in the life. Unless the Holy Spirit can use us as agents through whom to communicate to the world the truth as it is in Jesus, we are as salt that has lost its savor and is entirely worthless. By our lack of the grace of Christ we testify to the world the truth which we claim to believe has no sanctifying power; and thus, so far as our influence goes, we make of no effect the word of God. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing." 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, ARV.

When love fills the heart, it will flow out to others, not because of favors received from them, but because love is the principle of action. Love modifies the character, governs the impulses, subdues enmity, and ennobles the affections. This love is as broad as the universe, and is in harmony with that of the angel workers. Cherished in the heart, it sweetens the entire life and sheds its blessing all around. It is this, and this only, that can make us the salt of the earth.

**"We must come close to those whom we desire to benefit"**

**"Without a living faith in Christ as a personal Saviour it is impossible to make our influence felt"**

**Love only can make us the salt of the earth**

(Taken from *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 35-38.)

by Martin Luther

Key passage:  
Proverbs 9:7-10

Notes

By the word "salt," as we have said, He points out what their [the disciples'] office is to be. Salt is not salt for itself, it cannot salt itself. But it is used to salt meat and other things in the kitchen so that they keep their taste, stay fresh, and do not rot. "So," He says, "you are also salt"—not the kind that belongs in the kitchen but the kind for salting this flesh, that is, the whole world. . . . But for this a man must be ready, as He has already taught them, to be poor, miserable, thirsty, and meek, and to suffer all sorts of persecution, shame and slander. . . .

Now this salting process is easy to understand. One must get up and say: "Everything that is born and lives on earth is useless, it is rotten and corrupt before God". . . . From this it must follow that everything in the world bearing the name "flesh" or "man" must be denounced and thoroughly salted. Thus we condemn the sanctity, wisdom, and worship which the whole world has thought up for itself, apart from the Word of God and without holding to Christ alone, as the devil's invention, which belongs in the abyss of hell. This is a harsh proclamation. It makes us disagreeable to the world, and it earns for us the enmity of men and a punch in the teeth.

The world cannot tolerate it if we proclaimed Christ and all the articles of faith correctly. But if we want to seize it and salt it by showing that its wisdom and sanctity are worthless, indeed, blind and damned, this it cannot and will not tolerate. It accuses the preachers of doing nothing but criticizing and biting, of causing revolutions and discord, and of maligning the clergy and good works. But what can we do? Salting has to bite. Although they criticize us as biters, we know that this is how it has to be and that Christ has commanded the salt to be sharp and continually caustic, as we shall hear. St. Paul is always rebuking the whole world and criticizing everything it praises and does without faith in Christ. And Christ says (John 16:8): "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will convince the world." That is to say: "He will attack everything He finds in the world, without exception or discrimination. He will not rebuke some and praise others, or punish only the thieves and criminals. He will throw everything on one pile, one with another—great, small, pious, wise, holy, or whatever—in short, everything that is not Christ." There is need for the Holy Spirit to come and to send preachers into the world, to uncover and to punish, not the outwardly gross sins like adultery and murder, which the world can know and punish by itself, but the things it regards as the most precious and its highest asset, the claim to piety, holiness, and the service of God.

So it is a mistake when some wiseacres maintain how that it is enough for a preacher to tell everyone what is right and simply to preach the Gospel, but not to touch the pope, the bishops, the princes, and other stations or persons, since this causes unrest and discord. But what He means is this: "If you want to preach the Gospel and help people, you must be sharp and rub salt into their wounds, showing the reverse side and denouncing what is not right, like the Masses, monkery, indulgences, and all their works and ways, so that these scandals are eliminated and no longer deceive people." Therefore we must keep up this salting, be on our guard, and leave no room for such things to come back or sneak in secretly.

**"Salting has to bite"****"There is need for the Holy Spirit to send preachers to uncover and punish the claim to piety, holiness, and the service of God"**

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by Ken Downing

Key passage:  
Mark 5:1-20

Notes

Look at the back of the cereal box on your breakfast table. With few exceptions you will find a few long, impressive sounding names mixed in with the regular ingredients, and in parentheses following these, a notation: "used as a preservative." Back in Christ's time, if labels had been required on the food packaging they might have read something like this: "Fresh, sun-dried Sea of Galilee fish, and salt (a preservative)." Without fancy preservatives and refrigerators to keep food fresh, large quantities of salt were used to help preserve food in Christ's day. He might have been thinking of the fish markets when He told His disciples that they were "the salt of the earth."

As Christians we have been called to help preserve the world from total moral corruption. We are the salt of the earth because God has given us a multitude of blessings to be shared with a world turning sour. The beatitudes describe people who have been blessed by God and whom God now wants to use to share those blessings. And the Christians He sends out preserve their own souls only because they are totally dedicated to preserving the souls of others.

In other words, the way to preserve a preservative, the way to maintain the blessings you have received from God, is to use those blessings for others. In the daily Christian life the implications are clear:

**1. Don't congregate in small parochial groups.** Much of the salt in Christ's day was taken from the Dead Sea and was not pure sodium chloride. If the salt went unused, moisture would in time dissolve the salt content, leaving a white brine that was useless and which was in fact used to help pave the roads of Palestine. To keep from suffering the same fate of being "cast out and trodden under foot," we cannot confine ourselves to small Adventist societies and communities such as one often finds around an Adventist school or other church institutions. Like the briney salt, we too are impure, and so to preserve what blessings we do have we must share them freely. Otherwise we will lose them.

**2. Associate with the world on more than a social basis.** Another way that salt loses its flavor is by absorbing impurities from the environment around it, thereby losing its preserving and flavoring qualities. Indeed, it is not enough to break away from our confined Adventist "cliques." Our association with the world must be distinctly Christian. To associate in the world without consciously sharing the blessings that make us "the salt of the earth" is not only failing to preserve the world, but transforming us to be like it. It is like the little quote seen on many executive desks—"If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem."

**3. Share your blessings sparingly.** Salt is intended to flavor food as well as preserve it. There is sometimes a collective guilt we feel because we have not shared our blessings as we know we should have. Then when someone shows an interest in Christianity (which we translate into an interest in "Adventism") we dump all our understanding of God's expectations on them, leaving them dazed, overwhelmed, and confused about what Christianity really is. To illustrate, have you ever noticed what happens when a new interest brings fried chicken to the Sabbath potluck? The salt Christ is talking about is the subtle, overpowering influence of a blessed Christian life which shares its flavoring and preserving qualities in a way that is as "wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

by John R. W. Stott

“Salt and light have one thing in common: they give and expend themselves—and thus are the opposite of any and every kind of self-centered religiosity” (Thielicke, p. 33).

Nevertheless, the kind of service each renders is different. In fact, their effects are complementary. The function of salt is largely negative: it prevents decay. The function of light is positive: it illumines the darkness.

So Jesus calls his disciple to exert a double influence on the secular community, a negative influence by arresting its decay and a positive influence by bringing light into its darkness. For it is one thing to stop the spread of evil; it is another to promote the spread of truth, beauty and goodness.

Putting the two metaphors together, it seems legitimate to discern in them the proper relation between evangelism and social action in the total mission of Christ in the world—a relation which perplexes many believers today. We are called to be both salt and light to the secular community. . . .

And alongside this condemnation of what is false and evil, we should take our stand boldly for what is true, good and decent whether in our neighborhood, in our college, profession or business, or in the wider sphere of national life, including the mass media.

Christian salt takes effect by deeds as well as words. We have already seen that God has created both the state and the family as social structures to restrain evil and encourage goodness. And Christians have a responsibility to see that these structures are not only preserved but are also operated with justice. Too often evangelical Christians have interpreted their social responsibility in terms only of helping the casualties of a sick society, and have done nothing to change the structures which cause the casualties. Just as doctors are concerned not only with the treatment of patients but also with preventive medicine and public health, so we should concern ourselves with what might be called preventive social medicine and higher standards of moral hygiene. However small our part may be, we cannot opt out of seeking to create better social structures, which guarantee justice in legislation and law enforcement, the freedom and dignity of the individual, civil rights for minorities and the abolition of social and racial discrimination. We should neither despise these things nor avoid our responsibility for them. They are part of God’s purpose for his people. Whenever Christians are conscientious citizens, they are acting like salt in the community. As Sir Frederick Catherwood put it in his contribution to the symposium *Is revolution change?* “To try to improve society is not worldliness but love. To wash your hands of society is not love but worldliness.”

But fallen human beings need more than barricades to stop them becoming as bad as they could be. They need regeneration, new life through the gospel. Hence our second vocation to be “the light of the world”. . . .

So then, we should never put out two vocations to be salt and light, our Christian social and evangelistic responsibilities, over against each other as if we had to choose between them. We should not exaggerate either, nor disparage either, at the expense of the other. Neither can be a substitute for the other. The world needs both. It is bad and needs salt; it is dark and needs light.

Key passage:  
Isaiah 40:1-11

Notes

**“We are called to be both salt and light to the secular community”**

**“To try to improve society is not worldliness but love. To wash your hands of society is not love but worldliness”**

**“But fallen human beings need regeneration”**

Taken from *Christian Counter-Culture* by John R. W. Stott. © John R. W. Stott, 1978 and used by permission of InterVarsity Press.

1. Too much salt can spoil the taste of food even more so than too little. Does this say anything about "love" or the qualities found in the beatitudes? Can we have too much of these qualities or spread them too liberally?
2. Some states use salt to melt snow and ice on the roads. It saves tires but also corrodes car metal. Does our Christianity necessarily do both, or does that carry the analogy too far?
3. Martin Luther discusses the biting, caustic qualities of salt and mentions that it is the duty of the preachers to uncover sin among both the laity and the hierarchy of the church organization itself. Do you agree? If so, to what extent should this be done? How should this be done?
4. Over and over again the idea has been developed that in order to do any good, the salt must be thoroughly mixed with that which it hopes to flavor or preserve. Does this therefore mean that Christians ought to become involved with civic organizations in their communities? Does it mean that they should run for public office or simply keep abreast of current events? Or does it mean something even deeper? If so, what?
5. John Stott, in the Opinion article for this week, discusses the need for Christians to become involved with what he calls "preventive social medicine." This he defines as the creation of social structures which are more capable than existing structures of producing better societies. Thus, he encourages Christians to become involved in working for necessary social change.

But how involved should Christians be? With billions of people who have yet to hear the gospel, how involved should believers get in social action?

# Light Of The World



庚申年夏



"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid."

— Matthew 5:14

by Maylan Schurch

(Author's note: I was assigned the Sermon on the Mount's "Light of the World" allegory, and buried between the "light" comments in Matthew 5 is a reference to the much-neglected "city on a hill." Since the principle's the same, I'd like to offer this parable:)

In a certain country it has always been the custom to build cities on hills. They're easier to see from the lowlands, and thus easier to escape to when in danger. Three of these cities, within a mile or two of each other, perch atop abrupt little mounds in the wildest and most dangerous area of the country. As sunset nears, the anxious traveler is naturally interested to know which of these cities will provide him the best night's lodging.

The first, seen from a distance, is hardly recognizable as a city. Indeed, it seems more like a low, squarish hill; dust, drifting along the lowland floor, has ascended the sides of the mound and has banked itself high up on the walls. The slender road leading to this city is also partly overblown: the people inside are notorious for their desire to keep to themselves, and for their little travel, and they don't bother to keep the road in condition. Visitors to the city are therefore infrequent—no one knows exactly what to expect there—and the few who've been there say with a certain impatience that though its inhabitants do ask one to stay, their chatter is mechanical and very meaningless, and is confined to superficial topics like the weather and the crops. Lately word has gotten round, and in spite of the danger from terrorists, passing travellers are inclined to avoid this city and to continue down the great highway, glancing curiously from time to time at the nearly lifeless mound, the city which wants to be hidden.

The second city is sharply different. It is very visible at the top of its rather prominent hill. Its walls are a gleaming, chalky white, and an enterprising civic leader has painted the city's name in wide phosphorescent orange letters on its walls.

Electric arrow-signs along the great

highway also flash its name and point its location, but the pitted road leading there is almost as neglected as that of the first city. The rather large number of visitors drawn by its advertisement and appearance say that though the city's people welcome them heartily, laughing in the cheeriest of manners and slapping them on the back, one's stomach begins gradually to tighten as the evening wears on, as higher and more strenuous levels of mirth are reached. Thus, most visitors resolve to rearrange their travel plans to avoid this city—the city which feels its duty is to be vigorously visible.

There's little to be said about the third city. Planted solidly on its mound, it is neither obscured nor advertised, but its walls look safe enough. Standing at intervals along the stone parapets, alert men with binoculars and two-way radios scan the great way for miles along its length, and occasionally motorcycle brigades roar from its walls to rescue travellers discomfited by terrorists. Its road is smooth, gleaming asphalt, and when visitors have passed along it and through the gates, a number of friendly citizens take them personally to their own homes, where a restful coziness prevails, and every effort is made to relax and revivify them from the weariness of the great highway. And the next morning, after breakfast, the visitors are given guidebooks and maps, as well as the latest information about weather and dangerous conditions on the road. It is all quite low-key and genial, and as the travellers go out the gates they feel a sense of peace and safety which lasts them many miles beyond this city, set on a hill, which radiates comfort to all.

by editors

Notes

**"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-15; NIV).**

In this passage, Jesus calls Christians the "light of the world," the illumination of terra. Christians have no more power of their own to spiritually enlighten their fellowmen than the moon does of its own to light the earth. But as the moon enters into the proper relationship between this world and the sun, it reflects a "glory from above," and is in essence a light in itself.

So it is with believers. In Christ "was life" and His "life was the light of men" (John 1:4). But "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor. 4:6). Thus Christians are both recipients and reflectors of this heavenly illumination, and are practically speaking, "the light of the world."

But "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Such resistance against the light of heaven is difficult to combat. Oftentimes, reason and discussion will be to no avail. Therefore, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Ellen White comments, ". . . a Christ-like life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 9, p. 21).

Jesus came to earth as the Word of God. The Word, not so much spoken, as revealed in action. In such a manner are Christians to shine before their world—with action, or "good works." Thus, consecrated believers may clear away misconceptions that have enslaved the world and be able to repeat the words of Jesus, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4).

In terms of their responsibility to be the light of the world, church members have three alternatives. They may, as their first century spiritual ancestors did, become religiously exclusive, arrogant, and selfish. They may hoard their blessings under the guise of maintaining internal purity.

Secondly, some church members may conclude that the cost of discipleship is too high. Evangelism becomes a means of getting close to the world they have come to adore. The argument runs they must become very knowledgeable in the ways of the world in order that they might reach unbelievers. They cease to be selective in their enjoyment of the cultures in which they live, and they come to accept the value system that moves the world, a value system based on selfishness, personal status, and gain.

Happily, there is a third alternative for those who wish to take seriously the commission to be the light of the world. It is a Christlike missionary motive which balances humility and a sense of service with gleaming confidence in the values of the kingdom of heaven. This involves a compulsion to share.

selected by editors

Key passage:  
I Peter 2:12-25

Notes

As Jesus taught the people, He made His lessons interesting and held the attention of His hearers by frequent illustrations, from the scenes of nature about them. The people had come together while it was yet morning. The glorious sun, climbing higher and higher in the blue sky, was chasing away the shadows that lurked in the valleys and among the narrow defiles of the mountains. The glory of the eastern heavens had not yet faded out. The sunlight flooded the land with its splendor; the placid surface of the lake reflected the golden light and mirrored the rosy clouds of morning. Every bud and flower and leafy spray glistened with dewdrops. Nature smiled under the benediction of a new day, and the birds sang sweetly among the trees. The Saviour looked upon the company before Him, and then to the rising sun, and said to His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world." As the sun goes forth on its errand of love, dispelling the shades of night and awakening the world to life, so the followers of Christ are to go forth on their mission, diffusing the light of heaven upon those who are in the darkness of error and sin. . . .

No other light ever has shone or ever will shine upon fallen man save that which emanated from Christ. Jesus, the Saviour, is the only light that can illuminate the darkness of a world lying in sin. Of Christ it is written, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." John 1:4. It was by receiving of His life that His disciples could become light bearers. The life of Christ in the soul, His love revealed in the character, would make them the light of the world. . . .

Christ's followers are to be more than a light in the midst of men. They are *the* light of the world. Jesus says to all who have named His name, You have given yourselves to Me, and I have given you to the world as My representatives. As the Father had sent Him into the world, so, He declares, "have I also sent them into the world." John 17:18. As Christ is the channel for the revelation of the Father, so we are to be the channel for the revelation of Christ. While our Saviour is the great source of illumination, forget not, O Christian, that He is revealed through humanity. God's blessings are bestowed through human instrumentality. Christ Himself came to the world as the Son of man. Humanity, united to the divine nature, must touch humanity. The church of Christ, every individual disciple of the Master, is heaven's appointed channel for the revelation of God to men. Angels of glory wait to communicate through you heaven's light and power to souls that are ready to perish. Shall the human agent fail of accomplishing his appointed work? Oh, then to that degree is the world robbed of the promised influence of the Holy Spirit!

But Jesus did not bid the disciples, "Strive to *make* your light shine"; He said, "*Let* it shine." If Christ is dwelling in the heart, it is impossible to conceal the light of His presence. If those who profess to be followers of Christ are not the light of the world, it is because the vital power has left them; if they have no light to give, it is because they have no connection with the Source of light. . . .

Trials patiently borne, blessings gratefully received, temptations manfully resisted, meekness, kindness, mercy, and love habitually revealed, are the lights that shine forth in the character in contrast with the darkness of the selfish heart, into which the light of life has never shone.

(Taken from *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 38-44.)

**"No other light ever has shone or ever will shine . . ."**

**"Forget not, O Christian, that He is revealed through humanity"**

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The call of Jesus makes the disciple community not only the salt but also the light of the world: their activity is visible, as well as imperceptible. "Ye are the light." Once again it is not: "You are to be the light," they are already the light because Christ has called them, they are a light which is seen of men, they cannot be otherwise, and if they were it would be a sign that they had not been called. . . . Nor does Jesus say: "You have the light." The light is not an instrument which has been put into their hands, such as their preaching. It is the disciples themselves. The same Jesus who, speaking of himself, said, "I am the light," says to his followers: "You are the light in your whole existence, provided you remain faithful to your calling. . . ."

Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him. "Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand." Once again we are confronted with an alternative; the light may be covered of its own choice; it may be extinguished under a bushel, and the call may be denied. The bushel may be the fear of men, or perhaps deliberate conformity to the world for some ulterior motive, a missionary purpose for example, or a sentimental humanitarianism. . . . For when all is said and done, it is the light of the call of Jesus which shines here.

It is in *this* light that the good works of the disciples are meant to be seen. Men are not to see the disciples but their good works, says Jesus. And these works are none other than those which the Lord Jesus himself has created in them by calling them to be the light of the world under the shadow of the cross. The good works are poverty, peregrination, meekness, peaceableness, and finally persecution and rejection. All these good works are a bearing of the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross is the strange light which alone illuminates these good works of the disciples. Jesus does not say that men will see God; they will see the good works of the cross, the poverty and renunciation of the blessed in the beatitudes, these are the things which will become visible. Neither the cross, nor their membership in such a community betoken any merit of their own—the praise is due to God alone. If the good works were a galaxy of human virtues, we should then have to glorify the disciples, not God. But there is nothing for us to glorify in the disciple who bears the cross, or in the community whose light so shines because it stands visibly on the hill—only the Father which is in heaven can be praised for the "good works." It is by *seeing* the cross and the community beneath it that men come to believe in God. But that is the light of the Resurrection.

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Key passage:  
Matthew 5:14-16

Notes

**The light  
is the disciples  
themselves**

**"Flight into  
the invisible  
is a denial  
of the call"**

**"The good  
works are  
poverty,  
peregrination,  
meekness,  
peaceableness,  
rejection"**

**"The cross  
illuminates  
these good  
works"**

by Jana Ford-Harder

Key passage:  
Acts 1:4-8

Notes

When the Catholics did it in the New World, they sometimes dismembered those among the Indians who opposed them.

When the Protestants did it in Europe, they at times would burn at the stake those who disagreed with them theologically.

When evangelicals do it today, they oftentimes go at it with exaggerated claims, pot-banging and threats of committing the unpardonable sin.

Indeed, what has come of Jesus' statement, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven?"

Without a doubt, Christians have really blown some of their witnessing opportunities in the past. But that should set no precedent or put a damper on the situation for us today. Each rising generation receives Christ's commission anew: "Let it shine." Below are some suggestions for doing just that.

**1. Make sure that you have a good Source of Light.** Christ's love—as experienced by you—is the best motivation for Christian witnessing. A sense of duty, fear of divine anger, or a desire to earn credit with God can serve for some as the motivation for good works, but these will not provide any real satisfaction, and when witnessing becomes hard, these kinds of motivations quickly fail. Be sure, therefore, that you maintain a constant and close relationship with the true Source of Light.

**2. Do not be afraid of contact with non-Christians, for it is through personal, friendly contact that you can best convey God's love to others.** Remember that light usually produces warmth as well as illumination. By analogy, the Christians whose lights are shining will be warm people, attracting their friends to God.

**3. Evaluate your own strengths and weaknesses and use them as clues to develop best your style of witnessing.** Not all lights are the same, yet all lights are valuable. Candles give a soft, glowing light, while searchlights penetrate the darkest night with blazing intensity. Lights come in all colors and all strengths. People have the same sorts of differences; they should capitalize on their own strengths.

**4. Do not allow your light to blind someone.** In other words, make sure that your witness will *attract* others to Christ rather than repel them by a "hard sell." Christians who bombard strangers with loud demands to "accept Jesus" are likely to be ignored.

**5. Be creative.** Look to your job, your hobby, your leisure time activities as potential witnessing ventures. The amateur photographer who includes several photographs of Christian love in action (maybe someone comforting a mourner) in his state fair entry is using a creative method of conveying his values.

by Watchman Nee

Key passage:  
1 John 4:1-21

Notes

Without fear of challenge Jesus could say: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). His claim does not surprise us in the least. What is surprising, however, is that he should then say to his disciples, and so by implication to us: "Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). For he does not exhort us to be that light; he plainly says that we *are* the world's light, whether we bring our illumination out into places where men can see it, or hide it away from them. The divine life planted in us, which itself is so utterly foreign to the world all around it, is a light source designed to illumine to mankind the world's true character by emphasizing through contrast its inherent darkness. Accordingly Jesus goes on: "Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." From this it is clear that to separate ourselves from the world today, and thus deprive it of its only light, in no way glorifies God. It merely thwarts his purpose in us and in mankind.

It is true that . . . the career of John the Baptist was rather different. He did in fact withdraw from the world to live austere in desert places apart, subsisting, we are told, on locusts and wild honey. Men went out there to seek him, for even there he was a burning and shining light. Yet we are reminded that "he was not that Light." He came only to bear witness to it. His testimony was the last and greatest of an old prophetic order, but it was so because it pointed forward to Jesus. Jesus alone was "the true light which lighteth every man, coming into the world"; and he certainly "was in the world," not outside of it (John 1:9, 10). Christianity derives from him. God can use a John crying in the wilderness, but he never intended his Church to be a select company living by the principle of abstinence.

Earlier we saw how abstinence—"handle not, nor taste, nor touch"—was merely one more element in the world system, and as such was itself suspect (Col. 2:21). But we must go a stage further than this, and once again the apostle Paul comes to our help. In Romans 14:17 he shows how the Christian life is something removed altogether from controversy about what we do and what we don't do. "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking"—not, that is to say, to be conceived in those terms at all—"but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost," which are in a realm wholly different. The Christian lives, and is guided, not by rules specifying just how far he may mix with men, but by these inward qualities which are mediated to him by God's Holy Spirit. . . .

"Righteousness and peace and joy": with such things is the kingdom of God concerned. Never let us be drawn away, therefore, into the old realm of "eating and drinking," for it is neither the prescription of these things nor their prohibition that concerns us, but another world altogether. . . . We overcome the world not by giving up the world's things but by being otherworldly in a positive way; by possessing, that is, a love and a joy and a peace that the world cannot give and that men sorely need.

Far from seeking to avoid the world we need to see how privileged we are to have been placed there by God. "As thou didst send me into the world, even so send I them into the world." What a statement! The Church is Jesus' successor, a divine settlement planted here right in the midst of Satan's territory. It is something that Satan cannot abide, any more than he could abide Jesus himself, and yet it is something that he

**"The Christian lives, not by rules specifying just how far he may mix with men, but by these inward qualities"**

cannot by any means rid himself of. It is a colony of heaven, an alien intrusion on his territory, and one against which he is utterly powerless. "Children of God," Paul calls us, "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights of the world" (Phil. 2:15). God has deliberately placed us in the *kosmos* to show it up for what it is. We are to expose to the divine light, for all men to see them, its God-defying rebelliousness on the one hand and its hollowness and emptiness on the other.

And our task does not stop there. We are to proclaim to men the good news that, if they will turn to it, that light of God in the face of Jesus Christ will set them free from the world's vain emptiness into the fullness that is his. . . .

"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15). This is the Christian's privilege. It is also his duty. Those who try to opt out of the world only demonstrate that they are still in some degree in bondage to its ways of thinking. We who are "not of it" have no reason at all to try to leave it, for *it is where we should be*.

So there is no need for us to give up our secular employments. Far from it, for they are our mission field. In this matter there are no secular considerations, only spiritual ones. We do not live our lives in separate compartments, as Christians in the Church and as secular beings the rest of the time. There is not a thing in our profession or in our employment that God intends should be dissociated from our life as his children. Everything we do, be it in field or highway, in shop, factory, kitchen, hospital or school, has spiritual value in terms of the kingdom of Christ. Everything is to be claimed for him. Satan would much prefer to have no Christians in any of these places, for they are decidedly in his way there. He tries therefore to frighten us out of the world, and if he cannot do that, to get us involved in his world system, thinking in its terms, regulating our behavior by its standards. Either would be a triumph for him. But for us to be in the world, yet with all our hopes, all our interests and all our prospects out of the world, that is Satan's defeat and God's glory.

Of Jesus' presence in the world it is written that "the darkness overcame it not" (John 1:5 margin). Nowhere in Scripture does it tell us of sin that we are to "overcome" it, but it distinctly says we are to overcome the world. In relation to sin God's word speaks only of deliverance; it is in relation to the world that it speaks of victory.

We need deliverance from sin, because God never intended we should have any touch with it; but we do not need, nor should we seek, deliverance from the world, for it is in the purpose of God that we touch it. We are not delivered out of the world, but being born from above, we have victory over it. And we have that victory in the same sense, and with the same unailing certainty, that light overcame darkness.

"This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith. And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4, 5). The key to victory is always our faith relationship with the victorious Son. "Be of good cheer," he said. "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Only Jesus could make such a claim; and he could do so because he could earlier affirm: "The prince of the world . . . hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). It was the first time that anyone on earth had said such a thing. He said it, and he overcame. And through his overcoming the prince of the world was cast out and Jesus began to draw men to himself.

**The world is where we should be**

**"So there is no need for us to give up our secular employments"**

**"In relation to the world God's word speaks of victory"**

And because He said it, we now dare say it too. Because of my new birth, because "whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world," I can be in the same world as my Lord was in, and in the same sense as he was I can be utterly apart from it, a lamp set on a lampstand, giving light to all who enter the house. "As he is, so are we in this world" (I John 4:17). The Church glorifies God, not by getting out of the world but by radiating his light in it. Heaven is not the place to glorify God; it will be the place to praise him. The place to glorify him is here.

**"The place  
to glorify  
God is  
here"**

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Watchman Nee, *Love Not the World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978), pp. 66-74. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois.

## REACT

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1. The Logos article for this week points out that some, in becoming a light of the world, have become a part of the very world which they went out to illuminate. What precautions may the Christian take to prevent this from happening?
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in the Evidence article for this week, makes a point of the fact that Jesus told His disciples, "You are the light," not "You are to be the light," or "You have the light." What difference does this distinction make?
3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer also states that the good works which the Christian's light is to illuminate are poverty, peregrination, meekness, peaceableness, persecution and rejection. Do you feel that this list is complete? If not, how would you add to it?

Bonhoeffer then adds that the cross of Christ is what illuminates these good works. What does this mean?

4. Watchman Nee, in the Opinion article for this week, makes a point of the fact that the world is where the Christian ought to be. "So," he says, "there is no need for us to give up our secular employments . . . for they are our mission field." Do you agree with him on this point? If so, what are the implications of his statement on Adventist employment? Where should the large majority of Adventists be seeking jobs and what types of people should our institutions be hiring?

Watchman Nee also says, "Never let us be drawn away, therefore, into the old realm of 'eating and drinking,' for it is neither the prescription of these things nor their prohibition that concerns us, but another world altogether. . . . We overcome the world not by giving up the world's things but by being otherworldly in a positive way; by possessing, that is, a love and a joy and a peace that the world cannot give and that men sorely need." Do you agree with him? Explain.

5. Are our "good works" the only light in a dark world? What about John 1:9? Does God only use Christians to witness?
6. The Jewish leaders were accused of being "blind guides" (Matthew 23:10). Could that happen in our church today?
7. Light from some stars takes thousands of years to reach us. What lesson can be drawn from that regarding our witness?

# The Two Ways



“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

— Matthew 7:13, 14



by Doug Morgan

"Getting saved is the easiest thing in the world," cried Reverend Goodman to the multi-million viewers of his weekly TV program, the *Light and Life Hour*. "Salvation and success, righteousness and riches, peace and prosperity can all be yours if you'll just come to Jesus tonight. If you'll just fall on your knees and reach out with the hand of faith you can grasp eternal life *right now*. Do it now, come to Jesus and He'll replace your anxiety with answers, your fears with fulfillment, your gloom with glory, your debts with dreams come true. If you'll just believe, you need never worry again, you can be certain that the abundant life will be yours for eternity. Join the millions in the *Light and Life Hour* who have found that the blessings of eternity can be theirs just by taking this simple step. And once you've found the dynamic difference that Jesus makes, I know that as a natural outflowing of the gratitude welling up in your heart, you'll want to share a love offering with this ministry so that thousands of others, like yourself, can join that burgeoning bandwagon bound for Beulah land. And if you'll just send me a love offering of \$25 dollars or more at the address appearing now on your TV screen, I'll be happy to send you a free copy of my recently published spiritual autobiography entitled *From Country Roads of Gritty Gravel to Heavenly Streets of Glittering Gold*. And now as the choir sings 'We're Marching to Zion,' I pray that you'll make that crucial decision that will mean an eternity of satisfaction and join this mighty movement as we march down that prosperous pathway to Paradise. And now this is Reverend Gabriel Goodman thanking you for joining us for this week's *Light and Life Hour*, and leaving you with a reminder that there's a mansion waiting just over the hilltop for all those who will come to the Lord and join the great *Light and Life Hour* family with a love offering of \$25 or more. Goodnight and may God's richest blessings be yours."

by editors

Notes

**"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13, 14; NIV).**

The concept of two roads or gates—one being broad and appealing, the other, narrow and foreboding—is common to both secular and religious literature. Usually the metaphor of two ways refers to our struggle with self as in selfishness.

Solomon saw the selfishness of the human race leading men down a terminating route and commented: **"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).** David speaks of the **"way of the wicked"** as a place where men are **"like chaff that the wind blows away,"** not standing **"in the judgment,"** and perishing (Psalm 1:4-6; NIV). From Moses to Malachi, Bible writers deplored sinful conditions and cautioned against the road of unrighteousness, and John the Baptist called for unconditional repentance. Hence, Jesus could say, **"wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (NIV).**

The road of destruction is wide and therefore easy to travel. What would impede one traveling the strait way would hardly be noticed on the broad boulevard. Self-sufficiency, thinking better of oneself than one ought to think, self-seeking—these things do not fit through the narrow gate, but are accommodated for in the broad.

**"Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke 13:24).** We live in a time of de-emphasis on striving. Yet Luke says, **"strive," "agonizomai"!** Commenting on this, Ellen White suggests: "I have stated before them that, from what was shown me, but a small number of those now professing to believe the truth would eventually be saved—not because they could not be saved, but because they would not be saved in God's own appointed way. The way marked out by our divine Lord is too narrow and the gate too strait to admit them while grasping the world or while cherishing selfishness or sin of any kind. . . ."

**"The words of Christ are plain: 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate' "** (*Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 445, 446).

The prophet Micah said, **"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (6:8).** God's way is indeed a very "strait and narrow" way. It runs against the grain of the human heart to **"do justly."** It is a terribly painful experience to **"love mercy."** We are everyone too proud to **"walk humbly"** with our God.

And yet, **"Strive to enter in at the strait gate."** Throw yourself on the mercy of the Beloved.

**"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).** For **"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).**

**"Two roads  
diverged in a  
wood, and I—  
I took the one  
less traveled  
by, and that  
has made all  
the difference"  
—Robert Frost**

paraphrased by Ralph Neall

A paraphrase: The road that leads to death is wide enough for everyone to ride on. Whatever you drive, and whatever load you carry, there is room for you. You could become popular or famous or even a hero, cheered by thousands as you are swept along by the admiring crowd. Bring your love of the world, your pride, and your anger—there is room for you. The gate is easy to find. Really, it's no gate at all—you just do what comes naturally.

The other road is far too narrow for most people. One *cherished* sin can keep you out. There is no room for the world on that road. After a while you will have to leave your load by the side of the road, and still later you will have to abandon your vehicle and walk. The path will be tough; you will find blood on the stones, and if you keep going there will be more blood from your own bruised feet.

But on the other hand, do not think that the upward path is always hard and the downward road always easy. All along the wide road there are pains, sorrows, and warnings. God loves you too much to let you slide heedlessly to hell. Satan puts neon lights around the entrance, but like a movie set, it is all a deception. The bright lights fade into darkness of despair. There may be roses along the way, but every rose has a thorn. Those who follow that path descend into the shadow of everlasting night.

If we follow Christ along the path that leads upward, He will lead us safely. The worst sinner need not miss the way. Fearful though you may be, you can walk in pure and holy light, knowing that God cares for you.

The narrow road will indeed be rough, and the ascent steep; there will be ditches on the right and on the left; we may have to toil beyond the point of exhaustion; we may have to fight beyond discouragement; but with Christ as our guide we shall certainly reach heaven at last. Going before us, He Himself has smoothed the path for our feet.

And all the way up the steep road to life there are springs of joy to refresh you when you are weary. Even in trouble you can be joyful because He whom you love walks, invisible, beside you. At every upward step you feel more clearly the touch of His hand; at every step you see brighter gleams of glory from above. "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (Prov. 4:18; NIV).

(For the original, read *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 138-141.)

Key passage:  
1 Cor. 2:9-16

## Notes

**"You just do what comes naturally"**

**"But do not think that the upward path is always hard and the downward road always easy"**

**"The worst sinner need not miss the way"**

by Ralph Neall

Key passage:  
Luke 13:24-30

Notes

In Matthew 7:21-23 the narrow road gets narrower yet. Jesus seems determined to make it impossible. He describes two kinds of people who think they were on the road to life, but to their astonishment find themselves shut out of the kingdom of heaven.

The first group is made up of church members who have broken the third commandment. They have taken the name of the Lord, but they have taken it in vain. They took His name when they were baptized, but they are not doing His will. They confess, but their words do not follow through.

Who is Jesus talking to? The words, "not everyone" in verse 21 leave room for some who say, "Lord, Lord," and really mean it. We cannot judge a man by his profession. In fact, Christ is not asking us to judge anyone here. We can only beware lest we ourselves sink into a mere nominal Christianity.

It's not hard to see that those who merely say, "Lord, Lord," will be shut out of the kingdom of heaven, but what shall we say about those who not only say, "Lord, Lord," but also do the works of Christ? What is wrong with them? They have prophesied, driven out demons, and done many miracles in His name. What more does He expect?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Christian whose faith impelled him to resist the Hitler regime during World War II, and who sealed his witness with his blood in 1945, wrote a book called, *The Cost of Discipleship*. In that book he suggests that there is indeed a satanic possibility of doing the deeds of discipleship without Christ. Such deeds are those described in 1 Corinthians 13:3—"If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (NIV).

Who then can be saved? Bonhoeffer's answer is that only those to whom Jesus says, "I know you." It will not be enough in the last day to tell the Lord either what we have said or what we have done. Whatever good we may have done, if He does not know us, then we are "evildoers." There will be nothing of our own to cling to—only His Word: "I have known thee."

The question will not be whether we have known the Lord, but whether He has known us. Here is the climax of the entire sermon. Here is what everything has been pointing to. Here at the door of judgment we hear the fulfillment of the call to discipleship which we heard at the beginning of the sermon: "Come, follow me."<sup>1</sup>

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by Pat Childers

Key passage:  
Matthew 7:14

Notes

"Narrow is the way . . . and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14).

The warning sounds ominous. Visions of legend-like monsters arise, their presence lurking in the medieval landscape of the mind, ready to shove Christians off the path of life into the utter darkness below. . . .

I may be overstating it a bit, but that is how that particular verse has always struck me. I feel uneasy and a certain desperation sets in. What possible hope is there for a plain Jane Doe like myself of ever becoming one of "the few" that walk the narrow way successfully?

Thank God the Scriptures don't gloss life over. When I read about the deceitfulness of Abraham, the violence of Moses, the lust of Samson and David, I begin to appreciate what Christ means by "saving to the uttermost." If God can sort out the tangles of "the saints' " attempts at walking the straight and narrow, I am confident He can help me if I let Him. But How?

**1. The first thing I need to realize about walking the narrow way is that Jesus Christ has walked it already for me.** Furthermore, He is "the Way." This means that I will face no temptation or discouragement that He is not familiar with, and that I can make no mistake that His perfect life cannot cover.

Do you realize what that means? Paul describes it in Romans 8:38, 39: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, not any powers . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

However, there are some who "slip away," aren't there? How does this happen when, according to the Scriptures, we are so well protected from the evil one? That brings me to the next point.

**2. Once Christ is accepted into the life there is no power in heaven or earth that can separate a Christian from His salvation, and yet the Christian retains the right to, at any time, change his mind regarding his Christian commitment.** Now I'm not talking about the stumbles that we all make in those moments of weakness. I'm not even talking about distinguishing the big mistakes from the little ones. When we stumble, our Big Brother is more than capable of setting us back on our feet again regardless of how major the disaster. What I'm talking about is a complete change of direction, an "about face." If at some point we decide that we no longer wish to be led towards heaven, Christ does not grab us by the scruff of the neck and cry, "Once saved always saved." Yet He is there if we ever change our minds again. And that's real love.

**3. When a Christian decides to forsake the narrow way it generally boils down to a matter of pride.** There is the magnificent pride that says, "I'm strong; I know what I want; I can take charge of my own life." Then there is the snivelling pride that says, "I have sinned just too many times; I'm a hypocrite; I'm wishy-washy; I just can't ask for forgiveness again." And both forms of pride can be deadly.

**4. The last thing I'd like to mention is that we should consider how our brother is getting along on life's pathway.** Do we suppose he might be offended if we notice that he wasn't doing too well, maybe even broken a "spiritual leg"? He very well might, but ignoring the obvious won't help. I know, it's hard. But when we consider the alternative, do we really have a choice? Let's lend our brother a hand. Let's point him to the Master.

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

A little band of men, the followers of Christ, are separated from the rest of the world. The disciples are few in number, and will always be few. This saying of Jesus [Matt. 7:13-23] forestalls all exaggerated hopes of success. Never let a disciple of Jesus pin his hope on large numbers. "Few there be. . . ." The rest of the world are many, and will always be many. But they are on the road to perdition. The only comfort the disciples have in face of this prospect is the promise of life and eternal fellowship with Jesus.

The path of discipleship is narrow, and it is fatally easy to miss one's way and stray from the path, even after years of discipleship. And it is hard to find. On either side of the narrow path deep chasms yawn. To be called to a life of extraordinary quality, to live up to it, and yet to be unconscious of it is indeed a narrow way. To confess and testify to the truth as it is in Jesus, and at the same time to love the enemies of that truth, his enemies and ours, and to love them with the infinite love of Jesus Christ, is indeed a narrow way. To believe the promise of Jesus that his followers shall possess the earth, and at the same time to face our enemies unarmed and defenceless preferring to incur injustice rather than to do wrong ourselves, is indeed a narrow way. To see the weakness and wrong in others, and at the same time refrain from judging them; to deliver the gospel message without casting pearls before swine, is indeed a narrow way. The way is unutterably hard, and at every moment we are in danger of straying from it. If we regard this way as one we follow in obedience to an external command, if we are afraid of ourselves all the time, it is indeed an impossible way. But if we behold Jesus Christ going on before step by step, we shall not go astray. But if we worry about the dangers that beset us, if we gaze at the road instead of at him who goes before, we are already straying from the path. For he is himself the way, the narrow way and the strait gate. He, and he alone, is our journey's end. When we know that, we are able to proceed along the narrow way through the strait gate of the cross, and on to eternal life, and the very narrowness of the road will increase our certainty. The way which the Son of God trod on earth, and the way which we too must tread as citizens of two worlds on the razor edge between this world and the kingdom of heaven, could hardly be a broad way. The narrow way is bound to be right.

Key passage:  
II Cor. 3:12-18

Notes

"Few there  
be. . . ."

"The way is  
unutterably  
hard"

"He is our  
journey's  
end"

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1. In a classic comic scene, two robust people try to get through a narrow door. It is interesting to note that there is no crowding at the narrow gate in Matthew 7. Why?
2. Are the gate and road narrow because there is only one true set of beliefs? Is there no room in the church for any discussion and difference? Is the narrow way to be associated with the narrow minded?
3. Some non-Christians have become upset at Christ's teaching that there is only one way to a fulfilled life—the Christian way. This they see as being unfair to the billions who have never heard the gospel and to those who are in such an environment that the gospel seed is unable to grow.

Is there indeed only one way? If so, how would you counter the charge above?

4. Considering "Reverend Goodman's Salvation Show," the Introduction for this week's lesson, do you consider the "one way" of salvation he offers a viable option? Explain.
5. Does it bother you that there will be so few saved in the end? Some have difficulty with this, thinking that if all were judged simply according to the light they had been given, then more than "a few" would find eternal life. Do you agree? Why? Explain your thoughts.
6. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer has said, The Christian's way "is unutterably hard." And yet, "Ye are saved by grace, through faith . . . it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." How do you reconcile these two seemingly conflicting ideas?
7. "I want to be a Christian, but the way is too restricting. Not that I wouldn't like to cooperate with these restrictions, but I find that I just can't possibly do everything that's required of me. What should I do?"





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