



SALT & LIGHT

the character of a disciple

Real Christianity Series Volume 2

MAURICE BARRATT

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ALSO BY MAURICE BARRATT

Will The Real Christians Please Stand Up?

Radical Christianity Series Volume 1

by Maurice Barratt

The introductory volume of the Radical Christianity Series, an in-depth practical study of the Sermon on the Mount, challenging Christians today to live the life of discipleship which Jesus commanded.

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by

MAURICE BARRATT

Radical Christianity Series Volume 2



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SALT AND LIGHT - the character of a disciple

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Introduction

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble. Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

1 Corinthians 3:10-13

In my first book in this series on radical discipleship I endeavoured to lay a foundation of principles that would be helpful in all future studies of real Christianity. However, foundations are only of use if a building is erected on them. We now need to see a clear picture of what the finished building should look like. Paul says in Hebrews 6:1-2 that we should *lay aside our foundations* (and he mentions basic doctrines) and *go on to perfection*. When Paul talks about “perfection” he does not mean sinlessness, he is talking about maturity — a condition and a place where we are of use to God.

Paul talks of being *seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus* in Ephesians 2:6, and we understand that this

is not a physical position but a spiritual one. However, this information will not be of benefit to us if we do not know the responsibilities of that position. Jesus is in heavenly places at the right hand of God, and it is a place of intercession. It is where his ministry, as God's own High Priest after the order of Melchisedek, is conducted. If we are to be of use to Jesus, we will also have to be priests of reconciliation and intercession. Discipleship is only a means to an end. Discipline must never become the end, or it loses its purpose. The end of discipleship is for a man to have such a close relationship with God that it will allow him to be a mediator, a person whom God loves, respects, and listens to.

In any legal system it is wise for an advocate or mediator to know the protocol of the judicial system. This allows him to address the judge correctly. It is also wise to understand the character of the accused, if he is to avail at all in his pleading.

As God is the supreme judge we need to know his character and have a close and intimate relationship with him. We also need to know the fallen nature of man and be exposed to the deceit of men's hearts, including our own.

A person who is not holy can not plead effectively to God for others, and self-righteous people who have forgotten where they have come from will never move God for the needs of others.

Discipleship - a building, not a tent

Discipleship is like erecting a building. It takes many hard years of labour and toil. It is not like a tent that can be put up overnight. It is not for the faint-hearted or the impatient enthusiast. This building must stand the wind, rain and storms and must be built on the rock of obedience

to Jesus' teachings. All other foundations and temporary buildings will not stand this test. I have not come to this point of view from a theological or doctrinal study, but from hard and painful experiences in my own life and ministry. Jesus concludes his Sermon on the Mount by telling his disciples that if the foundations are not correct, *great will be the fall of their house*.

A testimony

Many years ago I was one of a small group of Christians who felt the call to intercession. The call came after a prophecy from a godly lady, in the form of an appeal. It was similar to missionary conventions where an appeal is made for people to make a full commitment. Some of us responded in a positive way and we each made a commitment in the form of a prayer.

We were diligent and started to meet regularly for prayer and fasting to intercede that God would send a revival to our country. God spoke very plainly and told us that for him to free England he would have to remove the evil spirits that were in control of the whole country. The disciples of Jesus had great difficulty casting out the devil from even one boy. Did we really think that we were in that position of intercession for God to answer our mountain of a prayer?

We realised we were rather presumptuous and our faith was not quite up to that, so we lowered our sights and began to pray for our city, Manchester (with only two and a half million residents!) After we had prayed in this way for a few weeks, God spoke again and asked us how we were going to bring revival to our great city when we hadn't even brought it to our local church. We repented again, but now felt safe, and prayed enthusiastically for our own

assembly, realising that we had to start where we were and that we would never move mountains if we had problems with molehills.

Freeing ourselves

God, however, had not even started the process of training us for this great work, and he again told us what should have been obvious from the beginning. Until we had freed **ourselves** from all of this world's influence, how could we free anyone else, let alone our local church? For the next eighteen months God began to deal with our individual lives and characters. He began to humble us and change our attitudes. After those long months God told us that he would show us some wisdom. What he said surprised us. I am not at liberty to share what he told us, but the consequences were devastating, and are still affecting our lives. We were suddenly put into a spiritual battle that would have completely destroyed us without those months of training, even though I had been putting the Sermon on the Mount into practice for fifteen years.

I am convinced that the lifestyle of the Sermon on the Mount is the only preparation for a true ministry and the only preparation that can make us truly useful to God as intercessors. This book covers the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes that Jesus gave to his disciples. It is a study of the character we need to be disciples and the results that it will bring. At the end of the beatitudes Jesus told his disciples that God sees a Christian with the character of the beatitudes as Salt and Light.

I can well remember when my father in the 1980's began to teach on the beatitudes, and my life was impacted and irreversibly changed. I was writing many songs at this period of my life. Here is one of them which still challenges

me today whenever I hear my wife sing it.

I'll never know why you chose this wretched soul of mine
Can't understand what you saw in me
What kind of God are you who saw me in eternity
And yet chose me, knowing who I am?

For you O Lord, you truly know me
Not as my friends, my church or my family
You alone know my thoughts, my hidden desires
Passions and secret longings

Lord, I'm ashamed, for your love has claimed my soul
I would be better, serve you every day
With dedication, unswerving zeal and passion
A love like yours in every way

So Lord, through my trials, even through my weaknesses
Make me like you, change me completely
A reflection of your holiness, that I may please you
For you see me as I am, and how I can be

For you see me Lord, as no one sees me
As I can be in this life and throughout eternity
You have claimed me, I am not my own
Thy will be done in my life, every day and for ever
Amen

Part I

Chapter 1

Discipline – a means to an end

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

Discipleship implies discipline from a teacher — in our case Jesus himself. How then do we equate this discipline with the fact that Jesus came to set us free and deliver us from bondage? Doesn't discipline belong with dead religious practice, and not with freedom and life? Didn't Jesus come to abolish the law and set us free by grace?

Know the truth

I will answer these questions later, but first let us look at a well-known verse in John's gospel: *You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free* (John 8:32). Jesus does not say, *Believe the truth and it will make you free*. James 2:19 says that *the devils believe and tremble* but believing the truth certainly does not make them free. I am convinced that a person can believe the whole truth of the bible and still be an unbeliever in practice. Knowing the truth is more than believing. Knowing the truth is the outworking of the belief, and this is where work and

discipline come into play. To **know** anything in this life will take effort and energy.

The word “knowing” in the bible implies a relationship, and I believe that the quality of a relationship is proportional to the effort put into it. Genesis records that *Adam knew his wife and she bore a son*. This does not mean that Adam knew all about his wife, it means that Adam had a relationship that was so intimate that a child was the result of it. Paul says in Philippians 3:10 that his aim was *to know Christ*. Paul is talking about a relationship, not knowledge of a doctrine. Believing the truth will not free us; we must discipline ourselves to pursue truth by faith, and as the bible says, *faith without works is not faith* at all — it is only a passive belief that places a person no nearer to God than the devil. In fact it puts them further away, because the demons at least tremble at this knowledge (James 2:17).

Discipline is not the end

The principle that I want to share is that discipline is a necessary means to a Christian's freedom. However, discipline is not, and must never be, an end in itself. It is only the means to true freedom.

I would argue that no person can claim to be free if they have never been first restricted or bound — in this context by discipline.

As an international gymnast, capped for England, I had to discipline myself to rigorous training every day. My whole life at that time was dedicated to the goal of being on the England team. It took me two years of training to stand on my hands perfectly still at will, but now forty years later without training I still have the balance to be able to do what at first took me so much effort. I am free of the discipline,

but I can still do what two years of discipline enabled me to do. I could never have achieved this freedom without the restrictions of discipline.

Becoming a lifestyle

This is how our Christian life should be. Private prayers and fasting are hard disciplines to master, but if we persevere, after a period of time it becomes our lifestyle. It is then very easy to continue doing these things without the earlier traumas of self-discipline and self-denial. In fact, a person who practises the lifestyle that Jesus taught will feel a distinct lack if circumstances prevent them living it. We were all trained as children to clean our teeth every day (and probably complained at the discipline), yet now if we don't clean our teeth every day our mouth feels uncomfortable and unclean. It is no longer a discipline but a normal lifestyle.

Don't spiritualise the truth

Some Christians say that the Sermon on the Mount is not for the church today, it was only for the disciples of Jesus, or only for the Jews who were still under the law. They maintain that now we have grace we are free from some of the legalistic teaching of this discourse.

Many more admit that the Sermon on the Mount is applicable today, but because it is so contrary to our materialistic, self-centered lifestyle, they have taken the hard sayings of Jesus, and made them applicable only to non-Christians. If Jesus is obviously talking about Christians, then they feel the need to "spiritualise" the sayings. In so doing they water down or even contradict what Jesus actually meant. For example, in Matthew 7:13-

14 Jesus talks about *the broad way* and *the narrow way*. The context is clearly to the disciples, showing two paths we can take as Christians, but it is often preached as a gospel message. They would say that the broad way is the road to hell which non-Christians are on, and the strait and narrow way is the way of a Christian. But by transferring the application away from Christians to unbelievers, the challenge to the church is lost.

Rock or sand

The same mistake has been made with the final illustration in the Sermon on the Mount — the house built on rock or on sand. The correct interpretation is clear, because Jesus himself explains that both builders hear the words of the Sermon on the Mount (so obviously they are not non-Christians) and either **hear and obey** or **hear and disobey**, that is, refuse to do what Jesus asked of them. The rock or sand is obeying or disobeying. Amazingly this parable is also preached as a gospel message despite what Jesus plainly stated. It is the house that falls in Jesus' illustration, and not the house-builder. It is his works that have been destroyed, not him.¹ Of course any illustration from the bible or any other book can be taken and used in a gospel message. But the danger in using a bible illustration out of context is that we lose what the bible is plainly saying and change its real meaning for another one — often one that is not true.

Believe and do

So, if we look at the Sermon on the Mount and accept and believe it completely, but do not discipline ourselves to actually put it into practice, we are actually rejecting it

and building on the sand. Jesus said that the consequence of this is that all our **building** at the judgement seat of Christ will count for nothing. This series of books is not about doctrines; the whole point is to encourage Christians to understand and practice the Sermon on the Mount. The aim is to be built up in the most holy faith into a fit building, which Jesus will not be ashamed to present to his Father as a spotless bride.

Notes

1. Paul uses a similar illustration of a building in 1 Corinthians 3:9-15. *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.* Paul confirms that it is **the work** that is tried and destroyed. He says that both categories of people are built on the same foundation of Christ, but their work — the building

Chapter 2

Leaving the Crowds

Jesus said unto them, Come apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.

Mark 6:31

Before we look at the beatitudes, we should consider the circumstances and events which led up to Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount to his disciples.

The gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus' *fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with different diseases and torments, and those possessed with devils; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes from Galilee and Decapolis and from Jerusalem and from Judea and from beyond Jordan* (Matthew 4:24).

Jesus had attracted great crowds because of the miracles that he was doing, and the crowds were still coming from all the surrounding regions. The start of chapter five is therefore surprising because it says that *seeing the multitudes* (and this clearly included the lame and devil-possessed and needy), *he went up into a mountain, and when he was set his disciples came unto him*. In other words he left the crowd and their needs, and went up the mountain to talk to his disciples alone.

There is also a time to leave our church work and our evangelism so that we can come apart to sit at our master's feet and be taught of him personally. Jesus separated himself from the crowds and their needs, and there are times when we must do the same. After the Sermon on the Mount Jesus came down the mountain and continued his miraculous ministry. We must have a balance in our life and ministry.

Not for novices

What I am stressing is this: we will never understand the Sermon on the Mount unless we come apart and study it in a "mountain-top" type of environment.

Far too many Christians enter the ministry before they have been through the experience of discipline. Paul told Timothy that the ministry was *not for novices*. Paul understood this practically in his own life for he spent many years away from the church to seek God and gain a revelation of the risen Christ for himself.

The human character does not change quickly. It is *from glory to glory* — little by little, and habit is overcome by habit. Therefore, to change from the character of Adam to that of Christ is a slow, painful experience. When we are born again we begin a new life but we are spiritual babies, and as in the natural so in the spiritual — growth is a process of many years to attain maturity. It does not happen by chance, or by emotional and inspirational methods. Even genuine spiritual experiences are no substitute, and will not make up for a lack of discipline in our lives.

I must stress that this book is not about discipline, it is about freedom; but without the means of discipline there can be no real freedom. Western society has proved that

moral freedom only produces slavery — young people are more trapped by vices and drugs than ever before. They fall easy prey to the hype of fashion and music, and lack any real discernment concerning the consequences of these vices. The mentality of self-satisfaction is, at root, godless nihilism. Our nation's lack of discipline in our homes, schools, work and church have produced a confused generation ripe for God's judgement and a confused church rushing towards Babylon.¹

Notes

1. The word Babel means confusion. It was where God confounded the languages of the world. By Babylon I mean the **spiritual** state of confusion. Whenever the kingdom of God is infiltrated with any of this world's systems there is a confusion. Jesus said that his kingdom is not of this world, so this mixture must be described as the false kingdom of God, which is part of Babylon.

Part 2

Chapter 3

The Beatitudes

Blessed are they that keep judgement, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.

Ps 106:3

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

Ps

119:1-2

Before we look at the individual beatitudes I would like to share some general points that apply to them all.

There are three parts to each beatitude: **A.** The statement that we are blessed. **B.** The condition that will obtain that blessing. **C.** The promise or consequence if we fulfil the condition.

Let us look in more detail at each of these three parts.

PART A ~ THE BLESSING

When God says we are blessed it is not to do with our feelings, it is how God sees us. God sees us as a favoured and blessed people. We may not **feel** blessed, but we **are** blessed. It is God's perspective. We are favoured because God is pleased with us when we have the same character

that he has. The angel said to Mary, *Blessed are you among women*. She was highly favoured by God. Mourning definitely does not feel like a blessing, and neither does persecution, but Jesus tells us to rejoice when we are *persecuted for his name's sake* because God is pleased with us, and therefore we **are** blessed — favoured in his sight.

We should not seek blessing

In the bible we are not encouraged to seek blessing. This is for the simple reason that blessing is always a natural consequence of obedience. In the same way disobedience will bring the opposite of blessing: it will bring God's curse upon us. Therefore, we should not seek to be blessed but to be obedient to God's instructions and then we will automatically be blessed people. In the bible, promises of blessing are always accompanied by conditions. Claiming a promise of God without fulfilling the condition of obedience will result in failure and a misunderstanding of what God requires. We are blessed because we are obedient. Obedience always pleases God. Blessing is not a Christian's prerogative but is the natural consequence of obedience. When we meet the conditions, the promise will follow. It is as natural as the law of sowing and reaping.

The old covenant

In the Old Testament God said to the children of Israel that if they would diligently hearken, observe and keep his commandments, and practice them, then the blessings would follow. Moses says this in Deuteronomy 28:1 before he lists all the blessings, and again in verse 15. Then he lists all the curses that God will bring upon his people if they disobey his commandments [verses 16-68]. This passage

about the promised blessings is very popular because it appeals to the materialistic values of western society, but we must see that the opposite is also true — that if we disobey, then God will curse us.¹

The new covenant

The New Testament does not change all this, because God's principles do not change with the new covenant. God's character and principles **are** God, so in the Sermon on the Mount the promises and blessings still come about when we fulfil the conditions, and there are nine conditions. Inheriting the earth is conditional on us being meek. The kingdom is ours only when we are humble — the proud can not enter the kingdom of heaven, and they can not possess it. If we want the blessings, we should concentrate on the mourning, the meekness, the humility — and then the blessings will follow as a natural consequence.

I believe it is a serious mistake to believe that God's character is not consistent throughout the whole bible. To think that in the Old Testament God was a severe judge and showed his anger, and that in the New Testament God only showed his mercy and grace, is misguided. It is almost as though some Christians believe God had a change of heart between Malachi and Matthew. This thinking is dangerous and untrue. The Old Testament is full of God's mercy and grace towards his rebellious people, and the book of Revelation in the New Testament has more severe judgement in it than any book of the Old Testament.

Weightier matters

In Matthew 23:23 Jesus rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees and called them hypocrites because they had left the *weightier matters* out of the law which were *mercy*,

judgement and faith.

We will see in future studies of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus plainly said that he had not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it. Jesus and the apostles quoted from the Old Testament far more extensively than most Christians realise, and the beatitudes are a good example.

PART B - THE CONDITIONS

Nine times Jesus says that we are blessed — favoured in his sight — when we have an attribute of his character. The number nine is not mentioned frequently in the bible, but there are nine qualities of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, and a list of nine manifestations of the Holy Ghost in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. I do not believe it is by chance that these three lists all have nine qualities or manifestations. I believe this number nine is representative of the very essence and character of God. The nine gifts of the Holy Ghost are the fullness of God's power, and the list of nine attributes of the fruit are the fullness of God's character. The nine beatitudes are also to do with character. The beatitudes cover the whole of the character of Christ and therefore the whole of a Christian's character.

Attitudes

These nine conditions are not qualities that we possess; they are ways of thinking or attitudes. They are not **what we do** but **how we think**. Humility is nothing to do with action. It is an attitude. Meekness is an attitude that results in refusal to retaliate when we have the right and the power to do so. All holiness emanates from the heart and not from our actions. A humble or submissive action may actually make us proud if we are not careful. This will become more

apparent as we look closely at these qualities of the heart. We can never “have” mercy or purity of heart or meekness. They will never be ours. They are only God’s character manifested in us, and the measure that we walk in the Spirit is the measure that we have these attitudes. To the extent that we walk in the flesh, to that extent we will be unable to manifest the beatitudes in our daily life. We can, however, exhibit an outward action, but this will be hypocrisy if the attitude in our heart does not agree with it.²

Conditions are progressive

Jesus is the master teacher and did not just speak the beatitudes in a random order. The entrance to the kingdom is conditional on our humility (poverty of spirit). We can not come to God and say, “Well, God, I’m sure I would be an asset to your kingdom because ... I am quite a good person ... I used to be a salesperson so I could really influence others ... I am a natural leader so you really do need me in your kingdom ...” We come as children and say “I need you in my life, I am a sinner, I can’t redeem myself. Please forgive me.” These are all statements of contrition and poverty of spirit. This is the entrance to the kingdom. Christian life starts in this way. This is the first step in forming the character of God in our lives. Poverty of spirit is always the opposite of pride.

The next beatitude is mourning. This quality is dependent on humility. Only humble people have the capacity to mourn. Proud people never mourn. They are self-sufficient. When we mourn we are ready for the next attribute of God’s character — meekness, submission, being teachable. You can not teach a proud person, because they know it all. Only a person who sees themselves as God sees them, and will mourn their lack, is teachable, hungers and

thirsts for righteousness, has a pure heart, and so on.

Of course it is not so simplistic as this. It is not that we spend the first part of our Christian walk learning humility so that we qualify for the next characteristic. They are also cyclic, and in our walk we are always coming back to our roots and humbling ourselves before God because pride has entered our heart. Each time we humble ourselves we find in fact that we have grown in all aspects of character, because one part of God’s character is inseparable from the whole.

Consequence of a holy life

Jesus knew exactly the progression he was following because the last two blessings are about persecution. It is impossible to be like Jesus in character and not suffer persecution. It is the mark and proof of holiness. History has proved it, from the apostles, many of whom were martyred, to the Reformers and through to the present day saints who suffer persecution in many countries of the world. Paul tells Timothy, a young minister, in 2 Timothy 3:12 that *all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

PART C - THE PROMISES

I believe that the promises in the beatitudes can not be fully realised until Christ brings his physical earthly kingdom into being. They can all be fulfilled in part and I believe they are a foretaste of the kingdom to come, but none of them will truly be fulfilled until then. For example, *they that mourn will be comforted.* Of course many in this life have been comforted, but many died for Christ in terrible martyrdom and receive no comfort this side of death. God’s word is true so the only explanation is that they

will be comforted when Christ's kingdom comes to earth. The meek will inherit the earth — but when? Christians have tried unsuccessfully for two thousand years to bring the kingdom in — from Rome, through the pilgrim fathers who tried to start again in the “New World”, to the modern “Kingdom Now” teaching — but I believe this can not be fulfilled until Jesus sets up his kingdom on earth.

The apostate Church

The Church can not inherit the earth and reign as co-heirs before Jesus comes again with his kingdom. For the Church to gain financial and political power is to become the apostate church. This subject is outside our studies but history has many examples of this subversion.³

In Luke 19 Jesus says that he spoke a parable *because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because **they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear***. And he said therefore, *A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, **and to return ... and when he returned having received the kingdom ...*** (Luke 19:11-27). Most bible students agree that the nobleman is Jesus. Therefore, firstly, Jesus will come **with** his kingdom, not **to** it; and secondly, he will come with **his** kingdom and not the one that the Church has built — I believe, the counterfeit kingdom.⁴ Those who were left to occupy — Christ's servants — were on trial as to their fitness to rule in this coming kingdom.

One of the first questions the disciples asked Jesus after he had risen from the dead was, *Will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* (Acts 1:6-7). Jesus answered, *It is not for you to know the time or the season for it is in God's hands*. It was prophesied in the Old Testament that Jesus would *inherit all things, sit on the throne of his father*

David, and rule the nations with a rod of iron. This is not a spiritual allegory, but a physical promise, and as Jesus did not fulfil so many of the prophecies during his first time on earth, it is only reasonable to presume these will be fulfilled at his second coming. Christians are not meant to bring the physical kingdom on earth, for as Jesus said, *the kingdom of God is within us*.

Qualities not commandments

The law often says *Thou shalt not* and is negative in the sense that it tells us what not to do. The beatitudes are very different. They are positive, but something more — Jesus does not just say, “You shall be humble, you must be meek”, he says that **if** you are meek or humble, God is pleased and you will receive the promises. So discipleship is not a commandment, it is a willing response to the challenges of Jesus.

Let us now consider each beatitude and its practical application for an individual Christian.

Notes

1. It is outside our study but it is worth noting that curses in the bible do not come from the devil, they come from God — verses 15 to 28. We must of course accept that the devil may administer them on God's behalf, or with God's permission. Right from Genesis 3 God cursed the ground and the serpent, and in the verses mentioned in Deuteronomy the blessing and curses **both** come from God. The devil has never cursed anyone. He tempts man to disobey God and we then come under God's judgement and not the devil's.
2. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 compares outward actions with the heart and is very challenging. The consequences of wrong attitude are: verse 1, I am an irritation to God; verse 2, I am nothing; and

verse 3, my actions will profit me nothing.

3. Jacques Ellul's book *The Subversion of Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1986) gives much food for thought and many examples to support his claims.
4. Alex Robertson's book *Manifesto for a Revolution* (Barratt Ministries Publications, 2000) explains the two parallel kingdoms using the seven parables in Matthew chapter 13. Also recommended is Alex Robertson's booklet *The Three Kingdoms* (Barratt Ministries Publications, 2003), which I believe will leave no doubt on this subject to any open-minded person.

Chapter 4 - Beatitude 1

Humility

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

Matthew 5:3

Do you think that the scriptures say in vain, The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy? But he gives more grace. Wherefore he says, God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

James 4:5-10

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

1 Peter 5:6

Poverty of spirit — humility — is not a pleasant

condition. Poverty of any kind is abhorrent to our old nature, and is not palatable to our feelings and self life. Before we look any further at the quality we have to decide **which** spirit Jesus is referring to. Which spirit is it that needs to be poor? It cannot possibly mean God's Spirit, for we should be full of his Spirit at all times. We are blessed when we are **full** of God, and in grave danger when we are **empty** of God's Spirit. It must be our own spirit, the real us, our self that needs to be poor. God says we are favoured and, in His eyes, blessed when we are humble. It is therefore strange that much of our modern teaching declares that we need a better self-image and that we need to value ourselves more.

The entrance to the kingdom

We only come into the kingdom through humility. Our salvation cannot start without this quality. We have to confess our lack and great need of God, that we are poor lost sinners. Surely this is poverty of spirit? No one has ever come to salvation through pride, so I find it amazing that men should teach that we can now abandon this quality and grow in self-esteem. There is a tremendous freedom that comes from having our self exposed, painful though the process is. We should endeavour to continue in our walk as we started, always conscious of our weaknesses in the flesh, and as Paul says in Romans 12:3, *not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought*.

Wesley's definition

Maybe a definition of John Wesley will help us. He says that "the humble are those who know themselves"¹ — that is, those who have a true assessment of themselves. This

is not a comfortable thought, because although we have been forgiven and sin no longer has any condemning power over us, we are still not perfect concerning maturity in the character and actions of Christ.

The most painful experience for any human being is to know the truth about themselves. Jeremiah 17:9 says that *our heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, who can know it?* For self to be exposed is painful and uncomfortable in the extreme, but there can be no real change in character without this truth about ourselves being exposed. God can not deal with anything in our lives until we recognise and confess it, and we can not confess it until it is exposed and we see it for ourselves. Many Christians do not change even over a period of many years, for the simple reason that they are frightened of being exposed — even to themselves.

A choice

All the conditions of the beatitudes require a choice. They are part of the process of renewing our mind and changing our attitudes. They are simply **ways of thinking**. It is a mistake to think of the beatitudes as only actions. It is possible to act in a humble manner and be proud. For example, I can be at the front of a queue of old people waiting for a bus that only has a few places free. Realising that I should humble myself I go to the back of the queue. This surely is an **act** of humility, but my heart (subconscious thinking) can be proud of that action.

Humility is how I think and not necessarily how I act. Jesus was the very essence of humility at all times, and yet he acted aggressively in the temple when he made some cords into a whip, overturned the tables and threw out the moneychangers. I believe his heart never lost humility for

one second.

A problem

Does this then mean that we do not have to humble ourselves? On the contrary, we indeed have to do it, but we must realise that the act in itself will not be true humility unless the heart agrees. Our motives must match our actions. The Pharisees fell into this trap even though their outward actions were very good. They were hypocrites, not so much for their actions but for their hearts and motives. It was the motives of their heart that were wrong, but they were not conscious of it. This deceit is all too easy for Christians to fall into — to know what we think and what we do, but not to know our motives, the secret desires of the heart.

I'll allow it

Let us suppose that we accept the fact that we must be humble and say, “All right, if God wants to humble me, I'll not resist him. I'll allow God to humble me”. This may seem at first to be a good prayer until we look at the scriptures and find it could be an arrogant self-righteous statement. James 4:6-7 tells us to **humble ourselves** and not to wait for God to humble us. Philippians 2:1-8 will put my argument beyond doubt for Paul gives us the example of Jesus who humbled himself. Jesus did not “allow God to humble him”, but *he humbled himself, even to the death of the cross*. Neither the Pharisees nor the devil humbled Jesus on the cross, for he had power to lay his life down and to take it up. His humility was a decision in his will to humble himself.

Paul states in Philippians 2 verse 3, *Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but let everyone esteem others*

greater than themselves. Paul is not preaching **self**-esteem as so many modern ministers do, but “**others**-esteem”. Love, which is a word that embodies all the beatitudes, is a selfless quality. Love gives, it does not take. Love always thinks of others. Self only thinks of self. Verse 5 tells us to have the mind of Christ. Is this possible? Of course! It is gloriously possible for you and I to have the attitude of Christ, and to think the way of the Sermon on the Mount. It is a process, and our mind can not be renewed overnight. It will take more than an emotional decision to change many years of wrong thinking and for us to conform to the mind of Christ.

No reputation

Verse 7 of Philippians 2 says that Jesus *made himself of no reputation*. This does not mean that he made for himself a bad reputation, or for that matter a good reputation. It means that if people praised Jesus it had no effect on his heart, for *he knew what was in the heart of man*. It also meant that if he was criticised or maligned, that did not affect him either. Men’s opinions did not sway his heart. When we have this same attitude of allowing people their opinions of us, good or bad, and it having no effect on us, we are indeed humble people, and we safeguard ourselves against many proud thoughts and actions.

My wife is a professional singer, and she has come to an attitude that will be a useful illustration of this point. People have said that she sings like Barbra Streisand, which to her is a compliment, but she knows other people who strongly dislike Barbra Streisand’s voice, and so it could also be an insult. Her conclusion is that if someone thinks her voice is good, that is their opinion and not the truth. The same is true if someone thinks her voice is terrible. It is not the

truth but their opinion.

So a person’s criticism or praise no longer affects her. She now only sings to please God. The only thing that is important to her is what God thinks. This has freed her from fear of people’s opinions. In the same way Jesus was only interested in what his Father thought, and therefore the praise or criticism of people did not influence or affect him.

The opposite to pride

A proud man looks for, and is influenced by, the opinions of men. This means that he will fear their opinions and will solicit their praise. The problem is that when you fear and respect men you do not fear and respect God. To fear God’s opinion means that you do not fear men’s. A humble man fears God and therefore does not fear the criticism or need the acceptance of men.

The fear of God frees us from the fear of any living thing or any situation. A humble man is the most free person in the universe, for he has a true assessment of himself. He sees himself as he really is. A proud man has a wrong or distorted view of himself and his situation, and will never be free, because pride is the ultimate deceiver of mankind. A humble man is not worried when he is accused of being proud.

Proud people are already cursed

Satan is the personification of pride and is the most blind and deceived of all God’s creation. His antichrists also show his character. Megalomaniacs such as Hitler, Stalin and Saddam Hussein show arrogance and pride and are completely deceived and blinded by their own egos. They end their lives in tragedy and despair. Proud people will

never be blessed. They have already cursed themselves.

If becoming humble and gaining a true view of ourselves is always a painful experience, then why does Jesus say we are blessed when we are humble? The blessing, as with all the beatitudes, comes in the promise: *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. Jesus was asked who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He used a child as an illustration and said that those who humble themselves as little children are the greatest (Matthew 18:4). Unfortunately, churches read this at infant dedications and miss what Jesus was stating.

The context is clear: that to offend one of these little ones — meaning Christians who humble themselves as a child — was a very serious offence that merited the most severe punishment. Jesus was not talking about children, but about Christians who humble themselves.

Here are some of the blessings which God promises to those who humble themselves.

1. The kingdom is ours

Surely it is a blessing to inherit the kingdom of heaven. We have an inheritance in the future kingdom of God on earth. Jesus will one day reign on this earth. At this present time the kingdom of God is a hidden kingdom and is within a person. *It does not come with observation*, but the day is fast approaching when the kingdom will be physically manifested. The humble will reign with Christ. What a blessing this will be.

2. God will heal our land

If we humble ourselves when we are backslidden, then God will heal our land. The well-known scripture used in intercession circles from 2 Chronicles 7:14 says that if God's people will do four things: *humble themselves, pray,*

seek God's face and turn from their wicked ways, God will heal their land. If ever there was a time when we need God to heal the backslidden western nations it is this present age. The first of these conditions is to humble ourselves. Surely we are blessed if God heals our land?

I feel the western churches have forgotten this quality. I have been in intercession conventions where after a time of celebration, Christians begin to shout at the devil and demand that God brings revival in an almost arrogant way, as though revival is our prerogative. When we are backslidden it is judgement, and not revival that is our due. Success, ambition, prosperity and the world's methods have blinded us to the first cause of restoration — humility before almighty God. It would be a great blessing if **God** healed our land instead of **the Church** trying, in the flesh, to christianise the devil's system.²

3. We will be exalted

In Matthew 23:12 Jesus exposes the Pharisees for their spirit of pride and their love of the praise of men, and he concludes with the statement that *those who exalt themselves will be humbled but those who humble themselves will be exalted*. A tremendous reversal will take place when the kingdom comes. Those who were humble will reign over the proud. A humble person is truly blessed when God exalts them.

4. We will receive grace

1 Peter 5:5 says that *God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble*. For although we have received grace as Christians for our salvation we need to *grow in grace*. We need grace on a daily basis. The promise here is that if we are humble we will receive grace, and that is certainly

a blessing.

We can see from these examples that humility is a key to receiving so many of God's blessings.

Footnotes

1. John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions* (Epworth Press, 1944), p. 191
2. Ministers rarely quote the preceding verses from Chronicles 7. If they did, they would see that it was God who had cursed the land. In our present day the sexual perversion, violence, plagues and witchcraft are not the work of the devil. The devil is only administering God's justice. Romans 1:24-32 says that God will hand a person over to these very things when they do not want to retain God in their knowledge. Our western countries have not wanted to retain God in their knowledge, and God has handed them over to a reprobate mind. The same principle applies to a person, church or nation. The history of Israel and the Church sadly only prove that this is true.

Chapter 5 - Beatitude 2

Mourning

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

Matthew 5:4

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

Ecclesiastes 7:4

We have seen that poverty of spirit is not a pleasant condition and it is the same with mourning. Mourning is also a painful experience, and it would be wrong to try and make it a pleasant condition. There is no more a condition of “happy mourning” than there is a fruit of the spirit called “short suffering”! It is the single most painful of human emotions. There is no suffering in humanity that can be compared with grief. The most obvious example is bereavement. The finality of separation is a shock that can only be experienced to understand. It is a helpless, hopeless condition and must never be underestimated.

I must add that I find mourning has nothing in common with self-pity, which is a very negative, apathetic and proud condition that should never be attributed to a Christian. Grieving is a spiritual condition, but affects our

whole being. Appetite often disappears, and the outward environment seems unreal. The only reality for one who grieves is the inward emotional pain. Although we generally associate mourning with the death of loved ones, we can grieve over the passing of any possession that we love or hold dear, be it a car, house, or even our status.

Blessing in suffering

Again, we need to answer the question, how can we possibly be blessed when we have this painful and soul searching condition? Let us remind ourselves that the “blessed” is not how we see ourselves, it is God’s perspective. We grieve and feel terrible, but God rejoices and sees us as a favoured person because we are like him.

It is this contradiction that is so unpalatable to Christians, because they have not been taught to understand God’s way of thinking. For example, the slaughter of an animal, the smell of blood and the burning flesh is ugly and offensive to us, and yet the bible tells us that sacrifices (things that cost us dearly) are a *sweet-smelling savour* to God and he delights in them.

Identifying with God

When we grieve we are identifying with God, for he also grieves. It is part of his character. Judges 10:15-16 tells us that God was grieved for the misery of his people Israel. God is not a doctrine. He is a living being with feelings and passions. If God’s people suffer, then God suffers, just as a parent would if their child were to suffer. Long-suffering is a fruit of the spirit, because it is a part of God’s very character. God has suffered for a long time. In fact he has suffered for six thousand years — since man’s fall.

Hebrews 3:7 tells us that *God was grieved for forty years* whilst his children wandered in the wilderness just waiting to die. It was God's judgement, but it cost God to exercise that judgement, just as we all understand when a father says to his son, "This will hurt me more than it hurts you!" God suffers, grieves, mourns more than all his creation.

Did God not suffer Israel's continual backsliding? Has not God suffered watching his Church backslide, reviving them again, only for them to backslide again?

Jesus our example

Jesus is often portrayed as a miracle-working superhero, but the truth is that for much of his ministry [which only lasted three years], he was in hiding because the Jews sought to kill him. Isaiah in his famous prophecy in chapter 53 actually says that Jesus would be a man of sorrows and that grief would be his familiar friend.

How does this fit into our perception of a charismatic miracle-worker — "Jesus Christ Superstar"? Did Jesus fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah? Well, at the tomb of Lazarus as told in John's gospel chapter 11:32-35, *Jesus wept*. Was it for Lazarus? I do not think so, for Jesus knew that he was going to raise him from the dead and there would be great rejoicing in the family. He wept because he identified with the grief of Martha and Mary. They suffered, and he suffered with them. That was just part of his character.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26 that *when one member of the church suffers we all suffer*. If one grieves, we all grieve. Romans 12:15 says we should *rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep*.

Mark 14:32-35 records that Jesus was grieved in Gethsemane. He said, *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful*

unto death; and in Mark 3:5 he was *grieved for the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts*.

A forgotten quality

Again, I believe the western Church has forgotten this wonderful quality and attitude. Prosperity, self-sufficiency, entertainment (which is escapism) has blinded us into becoming the Laodicean church. We are *increased with goods and have need of nothing*. Everything we do must succeed, as though success brings God's glory. This is a great deception. Only people can truly show God's Spirit.

Buildings can not be humble, but the people in the building can be. A Rolls-Royce car can not be meek, but the driver can be. I believe that only the character of God can bring glory to God. In other words, God's glory is God in a person. It is still God's glory, for it never leaves him, but we can demonstrate the glory — character — in our weak vessels.

A fault of the media

The modern media has blinded and desensitised us to the agony and pain of others by constantly showing us violence in entertainment, and devastating conditions on the news and documentaries, without us actually being involved. It has, in reality, hardened us to the suffering of others. We see the blood, but it never touches our flesh. We see the dead bodies rotting, but we don't smell the stench. Each time we see these scenes and do nothing about it then we become hardened and lose the capacity to grieve.

Isaiah 22:12 is enlightening because God's dealings and principles don't change. He could say exactly the same to the backslidden church today. God called for fasting and

mourning (as in 2 Chronicles 7:14) but the people were celebrating. Celebrating in the bible is a sign of two things — either victory or backsliding. The children of Israel were having *a feast to the Lord* with burnt and peace offerings, but it was around a golden calf and they were backslidden — see Exodus 32:1-6.

The affliction of Joseph

A few years ago I was teaching in a group of churches in Holland. They were going through difficult times and the leader asked my wife and I to help them out for two years by staying with them in Holland. I had my own ministry and workers in the UK and felt that I couldn't help them for such a long period, but I did feel for them and asked God to show me if I could help in any other way. By some strange circumstances I was drawn to Amos 6:6, *You are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*. What impressed me was the word *Joseph* — why not Jacob or Israel? What was Joseph's affliction? It came as a revelation that Joseph's affliction was that he was rejected by his own brothers.

This was exactly the problem that the leadership had in Holland. Their own leaders and brothers had rejected and persecuted them. I was happy to go and teach, but I was not grieved for their affliction. That revelation cost me. I stayed with my wife and child for six months and put my own ministry at risk (if you could call leaving it to God a risk!), by neglecting it for that period.

Feelings are not enough. Grieving results in active compassion. Compassion will always move us into action as it did Jesus. Compassion that comes from grief is very costly and that is why I feel the church would rather not preach this quality.

Why Mourn?

I have heard Christians say, “We have the joy of the Lord, what have we to mourn for?” I can help people with that question:

1. Our land

The USA, Europe and prosperous countries are decadent. Witchcraft, homosexuality and violence are the things that will always bring God's judgement when they are rampant. God's judgement, not revival, is hanging over these lands. Revival is not our prerogative; we have to plead for it. We can never demand it as our right. We must plead and meet the conditions. Only grieving people can bring revival to these nations.

2. Our churches

As a substitute for holiness, many Christians have embraced entertainment and worldly methods dependent on talent, finances, success, ability, organisation, and we find even in evangelical and charismatic churches divorce, homosexuality, immorality, power-seeking, politics and lack of integrity. Is this not something to grieve over? Unless we do, things will not change.

3. Ourselves

Have we arrived yet? Is our secret life pure? Have we let God deal with our ambitions, lust, pride and selfishness? Are we living for the coming kingdom or are we building castles on earth? I have much to grieve for in my own life. I have not yet reached the mark and only a true assessment and mourning for my lack will allow God to finish what he has started. I think most honest Christians can say with

Paul, *O wretched man that I am*. We are not in any way condemned, but we see the truth about our own hearts and long — grieve — for the perfection which is Christian maturity.

The future promise

We must again concede that the promise of comfort has to be for the coming kingdom. If Jesus was saying that all Christians who suffer and grieve in this life will also be comforted in this life, then we have no answer to the continual sufferings of the persecuted church. We live in an age when more people have been martyred for their faith than all other periods of history combined. A Christian is killed every three minutes and millions are persecuted throughout the world.

The preachers who say that we should all enjoy material and physical blessings all the time in this life insult our brothers and sisters who now suffer for their faith. Surely they will be comforted when they reign with Christ and receive their reward. Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:12, *If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us*.

Of course, many Christians do receive comfort in this life, but it is not their right — it is God's goodness. One thing is sure and that is we will be comforted when we are resurrected or raptured. *They that suffer with Christ ... will also be glorified together with him* (Romans 8:11).

In our study of the character of Christ, mourning is clearly a progression from humility. A proud man cannot know himself and will not see anything in himself or his Christian lifestyle to grieve over. Only a humble man who sees the truth about himself can grieve and mourn for the lack of holiness in his own life, the church, or his country.

Chapter 6 ~ Beatitude 3

Submission

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

Matthew 5:5

Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, you shall diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Psalms 37:7-11

We can see from the above scripture that when Jesus said *Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*, he is not saying anything new, he is only quoting the Old Testament.

Let us now consider what meekness is. What does it mean to be meek? It is an important question, because our future depends on it. If the meek are going to *inherit the earth*, then to misunderstand meekness could mean that

we have a shock coming our way and fail to obtain our inheritance. Luke 6:24 says that *the rich in this life have received their consolation*, and that *those who laugh now will mourn and weep*. The tables will be turned for many Christians when Jesus comes as king to reign on this earth.

A meek person is one who is teachable or submissive. Isaiah 61:1 says that God would anoint Jesus and he would *bring good tidings to the meek* — the teachable. One of the signs of a Pharisee in Jesus' day, and in our present time, is that they are not teachable. Matthew 13:10-15 tells us that Jesus spoke in parables so that those who were hard of heart and had unteachable spirits would not understand. Jesus came to those who had *ears to hear*.

An attitude

Like the other beatitudes, meekness is an attitude, a choice, a disposition, and not some quality that **self** possesses.

Non-Christians with their limited understanding of Jesus' teaching believe that the beatitudes are wonderful qualities. A woman under stress with three children in a supermarket may look upwards and say, "Give me patience!". This woman is not looking for God; she is hoping for the **quality** of patience — something that she could possess and manifest in her daily life, and under **her** control. A Christian however, seeks not the quality but the person who **is** the quality — Jesus himself. We need more of Jesus. He is the fruit of the Spirit with all of the consequences of that character. Of course it is always favourable to our old nature to be in complete control of this characteristic. Then when we have done our duty we can retaliate, but when we are dead to self, and Christ rules in our life, then we find we

behave in a kind, forgiving and patient manner with even our enemies, and this is frightening — but it is the only real Christianity. **We** can not live the Christian life. We have to surrender our life to gain Christ's life and then it is *Christ in us the hope of glory*. The character is always God's, but it is manifested through our life.

Meekness is not weakness

Many people equate meekness with timidity or shyness, but it is one of the strongest qualities a person can manifest. It has nothing to do with personality. A person with a flamboyant personality and one with a quiet disposition can both be meek, because meekness is a decision to not retaliate or take revenge. It is not a decision made out of fear, but because of character and obedience to God's will.

Joseph in the Old Testament is a good example of this characteristic. There is no mention of his grumbling to God or man for the harsh treatment he received from his family, or the imprisonment he received from the false accusation of his master's wife. There is nothing in the bible to suggest that Joseph was weak in character. No one would ask Joseph to be ruler of a mighty empire if he was vacillating and weak. He was not weak, but he was meek.

It is not easy in this age of self-esteem to act like Joseph. He is a perfect type of Jesus, who went as a lamb to the slaughter. I often hear Christians say, "I may be a Christian, but I'm not a doormat, and I have my rights". This is true: a Christian has as many rights as anyone else, but true Christianity is about deciding **not** to exercise those rights. This is meekness. We are following a leader who was perfect and sinless and he had a perfect right not to be crucified. Thank God he did not exercise his right to *call a legion of angels* and be delivered from the

cross. His own desire was in his prayer, *Father take this cup from me*, but he submitted his desire to God, and by a decision of his will allowed the shame and humiliation of suffering naked on a cross. This is the highest expression of strength and meekness, and is sadly missing in the lives of many Christians. We have somehow assimilated all the pomp, self-love and pride of the world and produced an impoverished Christianity.

A costly affair

No one should think that this attitude of meekness is an easy one to practice, for it is extremely costly to our pride and reputation. I remember coming home from a bible study in my home church in Manchester. It was in the 1980's and I was driving an old Morris Minor GPO van. My wife and children were with me in the vehicle and I was giving one other lady a lift home. A police car flashed me and I stopped to see what was wrong. A policeman asked me to lower my window and began shouting and swearing loudly. His breath smelt strongly of alcohol. Even the lady in the back seat could smell it. He ordered me out of the van and said that the vehicle had a bald tyre and that he was going to book me. My protestations made no difference and my name was put in the book.

Hurt pride

After he had driven away I was furious, firstly because I felt I had been unjustly booked, secondly because of his swearing in front of the ladies, and thirdly because he had been drinking on duty. I took the ladies home and immediately drove around to the local police station to report the incident. When I told the Duty Sergeant that

I had been booked for a bald tyre and would he please inspect it for himself, he refused and said that as I had been booked I would have to defend myself in court. This was of course all he could say, but it angered me more as I knew that in court it would be my word against the officer's, and he would be believed by the magistrates. I then told him the officer had been drinking and I wanted to make a complaint. He said in a confident and menacing voice that his officers did not drink on duty, and he would not listen to my protests. I insisted that I make a formal complaint and he disappeared into the offices to get the necessary forms. He left me “roasting” for about fifteen minutes — but to me it seemed like hours.

Sanity at last

I was walking up and down the room, really fuming at the situation. Thank God the officer did leave me for a while because I began to cool down and think rationally for the first time since the incident. I realised that I had just been teaching the Sermon on the Mount, which tells us to *turn the other cheek*, and I realised that as a Christian I should support the police in their difficult job. I had informed the police of the officer's drinking and that should be enough. Anything else I did would be looking for revenge for the injustice that I felt I had just received. When the Sergeant came back with the papers I told him I had changed my mind and I no longer wanted to make a complaint. He smirked as if to let me know that his intimidation had worked, and as I walked away, feeling even smaller than my five foot two inches, I could feel his gloating eyes behind me. I imagined him saying to himself, “Another weak little man who was easy to intimidate”.

But I knew that what I had done was actually not weakness at all — it was an act of meekness. I was not intimidated at all by his manner; in fact his intimidation made me all the more determined to complain. It was a hard decision in my will to practice what I had been teaching. This is why meekness is so distasteful to our flesh. When we make a decision to be meek and not retaliate, no one except God knows if it is weakness or meekness, and we have to take the shame and reproach of men. I must say that I have failed many times since that incident, but it was the beginning of a change of attitude in my life that has continued to this present time. Jesus says we are blessed — God-favoured — when we don't exercise our rights, when we are submissive.

Here are some reasons why we are blessed when we are meek. They should encourage us to practice this attitude in our own circumstances.

1. God defends the meek

It is natural for our old nature to defend itself, but it is natural for the new nature of Christ to *forgive our enemies and do good to those who despitefully use us* (Matthew 5:44). All parents want to defend their children. It is one of the blessings of parenthood that our children, especially when they are young, are dependent on us and look to us for their protection and well-being.

God is our Father and he wants to defend us, but if we defend ourselves we deprive God of the opportunity to fulfil his role as a Father.

Moses, Miriam and Aaron

There is a wonderful incident in Numbers chapter 12. Because of the meekness of Moses, God defends him before

he even has time to defend himself. Miriam and Aaron, who were both older than Moses, found justification to criticise his leadership. He had married outside the community — an Ethiopian woman, which was against the law. We can not justify the actions of Moses in this incident, and yet it seems as if God is interested in a bigger issue — that of defending his friend Moses.

Verse 3 records that *the man Moses was the meekest man on the whole earth*. This is a wonderful accolade from almighty God. Verse 4 says that *God came suddenly* to Moses' defence, and Miriam was struck with leprosy and Moses had to pray to God for her healing.

2. Meekness is a godly woman's character

Peter, in his letter to the church, says that a good wife should have *the ornament of a meek spirit which is in the sight of God of great value* (1 Peter 3:1-4). This is not only applicable to women, for men also have to be meek because men are also a part of the bride of Christ. Christ is the man's head, and a man must also have a meek spirit towards his future husband — that is Christ. Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:2 says, *I am jealous over them with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*.

Christ will never be married to an obstinate, self-sufficient and rebellious bride. If Christians desire to be the bride of Christ then one of the prerequisites is to be meek in spirit.

3. Meekness is the character of Christ

In the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 meekness is one of the characteristics.¹ Jesus was always submissive to God, even to the death of the cross, and we

too should seek to be like Christ in all areas of our life.

4. Meekness is the way to find peace

Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-30, *Come unto me, all you 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 you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*. Self-vindication, an unteachable or rebellious spirit, will never bring about a peaceful disposition. Wrong attitudes will always bring unrest and agitation of spirit, so Jesus says *learn of me for my yoke is easy and my burden light*. Resisting the yoke brings stress. Jesus was always at peace because he did not fight the circumstances, but always *acknowledged God in all his ways*, knowing that his heavenly Father could and would *direct his paths*. Jesus didn't resist persecution and injustice against himself, and so he was never in conflict in his heart. This is the way to peace.

5. We are of use to God if we are meek

I had just finished teaching on this beatitude at a house group in Leyland, Lancashire, and we began a time of prayer. A lady saw a vision and shared it and I have never forgotten it as an illustration of meekness. She saw a table with a bunch of grapes on it. A large steel roller was at the other end of the table and it started to roll towards the grapes. The grapes realised that they would be crushed, and resented the fact, even though they could not stop the process; and as the roller began to crush them God's hand came with a cup in it and collected the juice. He sipped it and because it was bitter, threw the juice away, saying it was of no use to him.

Another bunch of grapes was placed on the table and the same process began, but although these grapes knew the process would be painful, they accepted it and did not rebel against it. Again the hand came and collected the juice and it was tasted. This time it was sweet and God put it to one side and said, "I can use this at a later time". What a perfect illustration of meekness this vision was for us all.

We will all go through trials because they are common to man, but our attitude in the trial determines whether or not we will be of use to God.

Wisdom from above

To end this chapter let me quote James 3:13-18. James tells us that the wisdom from above has the beatitudes as its foundation. He contrasts it with the Adamic thinking that is from below and devilish.

*Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with **meekness of wisdom**. But if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descends not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

Notes

1. Sadly the new versions of the bible corrupt the sense of this word

and substitute "gentleness" for "meekness". Gentleness does not imply submission or being teachable. The same point applies to 1 Peter 3:4. For more understanding of modern versions of the bible and their corruption read *New Age Versions of the Bible* by G.A. Riplinger (AV Publications, 1993).

Chapter 7 - Beatitude 4

Doing Right

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

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments. I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments. I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.

Psalms 119:1-8

It is stating the obvious to say that only a person who is empty seeks to be filled and only a dry person seeks to have his thirst quenched. However, it is important that I emphasise this fact, because unless we measure our lifestyle against the perfection of God, we will never hunger or thirst to be more like him, and we will be like the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:14-17. They claimed that they were

rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. This was their assessment of their condition. Sadly, Jesus had a completely different view. He declared that they were blind, naked and poverty-stricken.

What a delusion they were under! The greatest hindrance in seeking holiness is to believe that we are already holy. Self-satisfaction was the sin of the Laodicean church, and I believe it is the plague of the materialistic churches in western society.

Sin starts in the heart

The sin of Sodom was not primarily homosexuality. The lifestyles of the Sodomites were the consequences of sins in the heart. All sin starts in the heart. Sexual sins are never the roots, they are the outward and physical consequences of something in the heart. Murder is only an outward manifestation of anger. Adultery and theft are only manifestations of covetousness in the heart. Ezekiel 16:49 tells us that the roots of Sodom's sin were *pride, fullness of bread, self-importance and haughtiness*. History bears witness that prosperity and self-sufficiency in the world and in the church always lead to pride, indulgence, decadence and sexual immorality. History also confirms the fact that persecution and trials always lead to an increase in Christ-likeness amongst Christians.

Again we see that in this characteristic of a disciple, there is a progression. Only when we humble ourselves and accept our sinful state can we be reconciled to God. Then, as a Christian, if we mourn and are teachable and submissive, we will desire to be righteous, that is to say, we will desire to do what is right.

Before we look in depth at this beatitude we need to

establish what righteousness means. It really explains itself. It means being and doing right, in right standing. Lawful, vindicated, justified are all words that are similar in meaning to righteous.

A stumbling block

This beatitude has been a stumbling block to many Christians. Others have ignored it because they consider it confusing at first glance. They would ask, “How can Jesus tell us to seek what we already have obtained by faith? Surely a Christian has the righteousness of Christ — which is 100% righteousness? Isn’t righteousness *by faith and not by works*?” These statements are all true and I believe them with my whole heart. A Christian can never be more righteous than he is by faith in Christ, and neither can he be any less righteous than his present state, for it is the cross and not our own efforts that make us righteous before God.

Gifts don’t grow

I am fully convinced that our salvation — God’s righteousness — is a free gift, but the key to this beatitude is that Jesus is not talking to unforgiven sinners who need this free gift, he is talking to disciples. So if we already have this gift he can only be talking about a completely different type of righteousness.

I believe it is the **fruit** of righteousness that Jesus is talking about here. The bible talks much about the **fruit** of righteousness as well as the **gift** of righteousness. Just as there are **gifts** of the Spirit, there is also **fruit** of the Spirit. The beatitudes are the same as the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 in that they are both to do with the character of God.

A gift can not grow or be diminished, but it can be developed and exercised. Fruit grows, but it can also wither and fade. It is this fruit that we should hunger and thirst after. It has nothing to do with righteousness by faith. This righteousness is **doing what is right** and it takes effort. It has everything to do with works. It is the righteousness that Jesus mentions further on in the Sermon the Mount (Matthew 6:33): *Seek first the kingdom of God and **his righteousness***. Seeking takes effort. It will not happen by faith, only by work.

The fruit of righteousness

Let us now look at some scriptures, clearly directed at believers, which talk about the fruit of righteousness. The epistles are full of instruction on how to live righteously in our home, workplace and church. Christianity is not to do with church services or theology, but twenty-four hours a day righteous lifestyle.

2 Timothy 2:22

*Flee also youthful lusts: but **follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart***. Paul exhorts a young minister to “follow righteousness”. Timothy already had righteousness by faith, so Paul can only be asking him to follow that which is right — to do what is right.

James 3:17-18

*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the **fruit of righteousness** is sown in peace of them*

that make peace.

Here James is listing some of the beatitudes and saying that it is the wisdom from above, and the list includes the **fruit** of righteousness. This hunger for doing what is right is often missing from the Church, and I am sad to say that I have found it missing in many ministers I have met around the world. They often please men instead of doing the right thing. Of course I accept it is not always easy and often there is a cost involved, but this is no excuse for a man set apart by God as an example to his Church. It is a recipe for disaster to stop hungering and thirsting for that which is right. The consequences are grave, because when we do not strive for that which is right we compromise, and compromise is always the beginning of a weak and corrupt Christianity.

Philippians 1:9-11

*And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that you may approve things that are excellent; that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the **fruits of righteousness**, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.*

Paul is exhorting these Christians to right living. This is “being filled with the **fruits** of righteousness”. We need to be hungry in order to have a desire to be filled. Unless a Christian has a burning desire to live righteously, his life will always end in lukewarmness which is an abomination to God. Hot or cold are the only acceptable alternatives to him (see Revelation 3:15-16).

Matthew 5:20

*For I say unto you, that except **your righteousness** shall*

*exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. This can only be the fruit of righteousness, for Jesus said of the Pharisees that *they say and **do not***. They believed God, but refused to **do** the things that God required. The fruit is saying **and doing**.*

As Christians we must not only say what is right, but we must also practice what is right. Fruit, then, is the demonstration of this right living. If we say we abide in the vine then we should produce the fruit of the vine, the character of Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit, the beatitudes.

2 Corinthians 9:7 -10

Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

*As it is written, He has dispersed abroad; he has given to the poor: his righteousness remains for ever. Now he that ministers seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the **fruits of your righteousness**.*

Paul in these verses is talking about good works. What he says has nothing to do with the free gift of grace, but the fruit of right doing — in this case of giving generously.

2 Timothy 3:16

*All scripture is ... profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for **instruction in righteousness**.*

Here is another scripture about righteousness, which has nothing to do with the righteousness by faith. We need

instruction on how to live in a right and pleasing manner before God.

1 John 2:29, 3:7-10

*If you know that he is righteous, you know that every one that **does righteousness** is born of him.*

*Little children, let no man deceive you: he that **does righteousness** is righteous, even as he is righteous ... In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: **whosoever does not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother.***

These words from John are some of the most convincing scriptures that I can bring, because John is saying that if we are righteous, that is, if we have accepted the righteousness of Christ by faith, then we can only prove this by **doing** righteousness. The doing does not make us acceptable or right with God, but it is a proof that we have already received the gift of grace. John actually says that if we use righteousness by faith as an excuse not to do righteous works, we prove we are not born of God. I would say rather that we are born of a doctrine called “salvation by faith”, a mere belief with no practical consequences.

Works or faith?

I have used all these scriptures to demonstrate that the bible consistently makes a distinction between the fruit of righteousness by works and the gift of righteousness by faith. It is imperative that Christians understand both or they will fall on one side or the other: they will either say that righteousness is not by works, and hide behind grace as an excuse to not do good works, or they will think that good works will earn them salvation. I hope I have proved from the scriptures that both these positions are wrong.

The cost

We have seen with each of the beatitudes that the condition is the costly part, and this one is no exception. There is a cost to doing what is right. It could be a financial cost in running our business in a right and godly manner, for it is not enough as Christians to say that we keep within the law. Many things are legal in today’s business community, but they are not moral. As Christians we are not meant to find ways around the law or loopholes in the law: we must *render to Caesar* with a good heart and be right before God, not just before our ever-changing legal system.

There are other sorts of cost, for right living could lose us friends and popularity. When we obey the lifestyle of the Sermon on the Mount it may bring criticism even from those within the Church. Turning the other cheek and going the extra mile are not instructions that many Christians want to follow. Living righteously will bring many trials and persecutions, and in fact the last two beatitudes, as we will discover, prove that misunderstanding and persecution are the only conclusion to a holy life.

Discipleship is not for fair-weather sailors, and the Church has often failed to honestly face up to the fact that we are called to take up our cross in order to follow Christ.

The glorious promise

The promise, as always with our God, far outweighs the cost. If we hunger for this righteousness, we will be filled. There is no greater peace and contentment in this life than to do God’s revealed will and to be like him. As with all the beatitudes, the fruit of righteousness can only come to fulfillment when the kingdom of God comes on earth and Jesus reigns in righteousness. *Behold, a king shall **reign in***

righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment (Isaiah 32:1).

Those who reign with Christ will have the resurrected body, for *flesh and blood can not inherit the kingdom of God*, and then we will always do right, all of the time, for *when we see him we shall be like him*. We will only be fully righteous in our deeds after the return of Jesus. Until that day comes, let us hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Chapter 8 ~ Beatitude 5

Mercy

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Matthew 5:7

The merciful man does good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubles his own flesh.

Proverbs 11:17

And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us ... he that shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Romans

12:6-8

Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, in that he abhorred his own inheritance. And he gave them into the hand of the heathen ... Nevertheless, he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry: And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies.

Psalms

106:40-45

We are blessed — God-favoured people — if we are

merciful. Let us remember that these beatitudes are how God sees us, and not how we feel. It is not always easy to be merciful, especially if we truly understand what it means. Mercy is a choice to not punish what deserves to be punished. In that sense it is a negative quality.¹ Broken promises and broken laws have consequences, and justice requires that a price be paid.

If we administer just punishment to our children, that does not make us evil. The same applies when we administer discipline in our business or church. It often fights against our sense of justice to not administer punishment when we know it is due and correct. Justice is an important part, or one side, of God's character, but mercy is another integral part of his perfect character.

Mercy is not grace

As in all the beatitudes, mercy is an attitude or disposition of the heart, it is not some quality we possess. I have realised over many years of ministry that a surprising number of Christians do not understand the difference between mercy and grace, and so they often confuse the two.

Mercy and grace are both undeserved, but whereas mercy is simply the setting aside of judgement (and therefore essentially a negative thing), grace is a very positive quality because we receive something tangible — Christ's strength, his power, his character.

As Christians we have already received the mercy of God. It was accomplished on the cross. A Christian who has obtained mercy by faith in the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ never again needs to plead for more mercy. For a Christian to ask God for mercy shows that they do not

understand the perfect work of Jesus on the cross. Jesus *took away the sin of the world* and removed our *conscience of sin* (Hebrews 10:2). However, we do need to ask God for more grace to live the Christian life, We all need his grace to be sufficient in our trials, and to give us the power to live a holy life.

Growth in grace

2 Peter 3:18 tells us that we can *grow in grace*, it is a process, but there are no scriptures that tell us we can grow in mercy, because mercy is not a process, it is a decision not to punish. Justice is very important to God and punishment is an integral part of justice, so why are we blessed when we show mercy instead of administering justice? The answer is that mercy and justice are both part of God's character. A person can not claim to have God in their life if they do not show his character in their actions and not just in their beliefs and words.

Mercy is as much a part of God's character as is judgement, and not just in the New Testament. God's character is consistent throughout the whole bible. The very basic law of God, as revealed in the Ten Commandments, shows the two sides of God's character.

Exodus 20:5-6 reads, *You shall not bow down yourself to graven images, nor serve them: for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And **showing mercy unto thousands** of them that love me, and keep my commandments.* Jesus said in Matthew 23:23 that *the weightier matters of the law are mercy judgement and faith.*

Show me your glory

When Moses asked God to reveal himself and show his glory, we read in Exodus 34: 5-7 that God declared the two opposite sides to his character — mercy and judgement.

*And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, **merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.***

From the very moment that man sinned, God's integrity demanded that man be judged and punished; but because mercy is also God's character, he wanted to cover our sin and to forgive man. God has always wanted to cover sin, and there is a wonderful example in the tabernacle.

*And you shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you. And you shall make a **mercy seat** of pure gold ...*

*And you shall make two cherubim of gold, of beaten work you shall make them, in the two ends of the **mercy seat** ... You shall put the **mercy seat** above upon the ark; and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you and I will commune with you from above the **mercy seat**, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony (Exodus 25:16-22).*

The mercy seat

The ark was a wooden rectangular box overlaid inside and out with pure gold, and God told Moses to put the law in the box. Paul says the law was perfect, but that sin used it to condemn us and bring us under God's judgement. It is

surprising then that God told Moses to make a lid for the box and called it a mercy seat. Here the mercy seat covered the means to condemn us, and God said that he would meet the children of Israel, not in the box — through the law — but between the cherubim above the mercy seat. Mercy covered the means to condemn us — sin, using the law.²

I have used Old Testament examples to show that God's character has always been to show mercy to his people. We must not make the mistake of thinking that in the Old Testament it was all law and judgement and in the New Testament all grace. The cross of Jesus was only the final solution to man's sin, *the sin of the whole world*, and not the beginning of mercy.

A divine principle

It is a divine principle of God that we must, as Christians, practice what we have experienced. Here is a fearful illustration that Jesus gives in Matthew's gospel.

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents [£2.8 billion today].

But because he had nothing to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.

Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence [£2500 today]: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay

me what you owe.

And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay you all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt, because you desired me: Should not you also have had compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him (Matthew 18:21-35).

The moral of the story

I think that everyone who hears the story will despise the unforgiving man, consider that his actions were inexcusable, and agree that the punishment administered was justly deserved. The frightening verse is 35:

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Jesus is using the illustration to talk about mercy. It is in answer to a question Peter asked about forgiveness. It is clear that as Christians we are in the position of this man. We have been forgiven *ten thousand talents* worth of sin. Every wrong thought, all the sins of omission and ignorance as well as our conscious faults have been forgiven. All sins from the past and all the sins we will commit in the future have been forgiven through the atoning blood of the cross.

How dare we as Christians have the effrontery to forget

this and not forgive our brother his faults? How dare we not forgive our enemies, when Christ has already forgiven us when we were enemies and outside the kingdom of God? As Christians we accept the moral of the story, yet still find it so hard to forgive and show mercy to those we despise and call our enemies.

Rebellion is not a weakness

The reason that we as Christians have no excuse is that unforgiveness is not weakness, it is rebellion. To find it hard to forgive is weakness. To forgive and then to feel hurt and bitter is no problem so long as we confess it and forgive again, but to say “I will not forgive” is rebellion.

We will examine this in greater depth when we look at the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:14-15, the only part of the prayer that Jesus makes a comment on; *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

There is clear evidence that we must administer what we have received, and that forgiveness from God is conditional on us doing the same. *With the merciful you will show yourself merciful; with an upright man you will show yourself upright; with the pure you will show yourself pure; and with the froward you will show yourself froward* (Psalm 18:25-26).

The promise

The promise of this beatitude is that we *will obtain mercy*. We will *all have to stand at the judgement seat of Christ to account for the deeds done in our body, whether good or bad*. If we have shown mercy to others, we will

also have mercy shown to us at the judgement seat of Christ.

As Christians we have already received mercy from God, so let us endeavour to show mercy to others whenever we can. But let us also remember that we can only show mercy when it is not deserved, and mercy means that we have to set aside justice. Mercy seems like such a “nice” quality, but as with all the beatitudes, the quality that is needed to obtain the promise is a painful one to our flesh.

Notes

1. Of course mercy is a very positive thing for the person who receives it, but to the person who administers it, mercy is essentially negative because it is the decision to not do something.
2. Paul in Romans 7 shows us that the law is perfect, but that sin uses it to condemn us — for without the law we can not be condemned. The cross covered the law with mercy and stopped the devil — the accuser of the brethren — having access to use the law against us, so *freeing us from the curse of the law* — the penalty for breaking it.

Chapter 9 - Beatitude 6

Purity of Heart

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

Matthew 5:8

With the pure you will show yourself pure: and with the froward you will show yourself unsavoury.

2 Samuel

22:27

Unto the pure all things are pure, but to them which are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

Titus 1:15

This sixth beatitude is not one that is easily achieved. Our minds — our conscious thinking — can change as we develop as Christians, but only God can change our hearts — our subconscious motives and secret desires — and make them pure. Only as we become humble and teachable and hunger for what is right can God deal with the roots.

Jesus said that we are blessed when our hearts are pure, so we should establish what “purity” means. There is no ambiguity with this word. It simply means uncontaminated or undiluted. A millionth part of any other substance added to something pure makes the substance impure.

God hates any kind of mixture, which is often referred to in the bible as an abomination. I think that the word “abomination” is the strongest that God uses to show his abhorrence and anger.

Some examples

The sacrifices of God’s people had to be pure (always a young unblemished animal). *You shall not sacrifice unto the Lord your God any bullock or sheep, wherein is blemish, or impediment: for that is an abomination unto the Lord your God* (Deuteronomy 17:1).

In our Western society where the concept of “unisex” is so prevalent, Christians would be wise to note what God says in Deuteronomy 22:5, that to mix the sexes is an abomination to the Lord, and that they must stay pure. *The woman shall not wear that which pertains to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are an **abomination** unto the Lord.*

In the book of Revelation John describes the holy city that descends from heaven to the new earth, and the conclusion in the last verse of chapter 21 is that, *there shall in no wise enter into it **anything that defiles**, neither whatsoever works an abomination, or makes a lie.*

The bride is pure

The new Jerusalem — the bride of Christ — will be absolutely pure, without spot or blemish. In the new heaven and earth described in the last chapter of Revelation all mixture and abominations will cease, for there will be a final separation between pure and impure. *He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and*

he that is holy, let him be holy still (Revelation 22:11).

To a holy God, a minute bit of impurity makes the whole impure. *A little leaven leavens the whole lump* (1 Corinthians 5:6, Galatians 5:9).

We expose ourselves

Paul says to Titus that *to the pure all things are pure and to the impure all things are defiled and impure* (Titus 1:15).

We all know from experience that when someone makes an innocent comment, there is always someone else who will think of a double meaning in it and so defile what was said. A cunning man will trust no-one for he will judge everyone else from his own cunning — impure — heart.

James 3:8-18 says that our tongue often reveals what is in our heart. The beatitude we are looking at is about purity of heart — purity in the inward parts, the secret man — that is, our motives, secret pride and ambitions.

Perhaps a simple illustration will help us to see the practical implications. Let us suppose that a fellow Christian passing through my town happens to see me entering a brothel. He will judge me out of his heart, pure or impure. He may go home to his wife and say, “I can hardly believe what I have just seen. I always believed that Maurice Barratt was a man of God. If someone else had told me that he went to brothels I would not have believed them, but I saw him with my own eyes.”

Being exposed

He has exposed his own heart because he could have also said to his wife, “I really admire my brother Maurice, he is certainly a much stronger man than I am. I saw him going into a brothel yesterday. He must have been going to share

the love of Jesus with the girls. I would be too embarrassed or weak to do that.” This man has judged me out of his own heart. This does not mean that he is naïve for thinking good of me, but why should he think badly of me when he does not know, without talking to me or to the girls in the brothel, why I would enter such a place? Jesus said that it is the pure in heart who are blessed — not the suspicious.

Heart not mind

I have explained what I think is the biblical difference between the mind and the heart in the first book in this series, but briefly let me state that when the bible talks about the mind it means our conscious thinking. I know what I think and can adjust it to come in line with what God requires. As Paul says in Romans 12:1-2, we must renew our mind to conform to the will of God. This beatitude does not say “Blessed are the pure in body” or “Blessed are the pure in mind”. It says pure in **heart**. It is our heart that God always wants to deal with, and the heart is our subconscious thinking. It is our “holiest of holies”. I believe our body is the “outer court”, and we must present it to God. The mind is our “inner court” and has to be cleansed and renewed, but our heart is the place where God wants to dwell.

The bible tells us in Jeremiah 17:9 that we do not know our own heart. It is *deceitful and desperately wicked*. It is the very root and centre of our spirit. It is where the hidden things in our spirit reside. *Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life* (Proverbs 4:23).

Esau hated in his heart

In Genesis, after Jacob had cheated his brother Esau out of the blessing, we read that *Esau hated Jacob because of*

the blessing his father blessed him with: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I kill my brother (Genesis 27:41). Esau did not say this audibly, it was his heart talking — his secret thoughts. Often our secret thoughts are hidden from ourselves. It is amazing how lust and deceit and anger can be in our hearts and yet consciously we are unaware and would protest strongly if challenged. Our hearts are able to deceive us that they are pure and this is extremely dangerous. When we study chapter 6 of Matthew we will understand why Jesus teaches another secret life as an antidote to the secrets of our deceitful hearts.

God has already destroyed the earth once because men's hearts were totally depraved. *And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thought of his heart was only evil continually* (Genesis 6:5). I believe that we are very close to the time when the wickedness of men's hearts is again becoming totally depraved and God's judgement will not spare the earth, but this time it will be destroyed by fire. It is worth looking at the next verse in Genesis for it shows us that it grieves God's pure heart when this situation occurs. *And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart* (verse 6).

The promise

The promise in this beatitude is a wonderful one. It is the promise that we shall see God, our Father. We know that one day in our resurrected perfect spiritual bodies we shall see God, but it is not good enough for Christians to wait for the glorified sinless body to have a pure heart. We must ask God to expose and change our hearts at this present time.

Paul said to the Corinthian church, *For I am jealous*

over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). Jesus is returning for a bride with a pure heart, and the onus is on us to ask God to expose our heart so that we can then ask him to change us. God can not deal with anything in our hearts unless we accept that it is in our hearts and then confess it.

David - a man after God's heart

When Nathan said to David, "You are the man", David's heart was exposed. He had justified his sin in his heart. His sin had been covered, not by God but by his own deceitful heart. I can imagine how devastated he must have felt when he was exposed as an adulterer and murderer after many years of freedom of conscience. David loved God and immediately he realised that if adultery and murder had been hidden in his heart, then other things could be lurking in its dark recesses. His prayer in Psalm 139:23 shows us why God loved and chose him. *Search me O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: And see if there is any wicked way in me.* Our appeal must be to God, for we can not change our own heart. We must ask God to expose us as he did with David, and then we can pray a prayer like David's and be a person after God's own heart.

It is the heart that God looks at, but my observation is that the Church seems to be more interested in the outward appearance of numbers and buildings, achievements and outward morality than in purifying their hearts. Paul says in Romans 2:28, *For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose*

praise is not of men, but of God.

As with all the promises of the beatitudes, the fulfilment will only be complete when Christ reigns on earth, but we do have a measure of all of the promises in this present age. Let me share three areas in which the pure in heart can see God in a practical way while they are waiting for the kingdom to come.

1. We can see God in our circumstances

I am surprised how many Christians divide their circumstances into two categories. They believe the good circumstances come from God, and the bad circumstances come from the devil. But as Christians we should have given our whole lives to God, so God is our master, not the devil, and therefore all circumstances come from God's hand. The pure in heart only see God in all circumstances.

When a Christian is learning this mindset, it is often only after the bad circumstances that they realise God was guiding everything and they really had nothing to fear; but as we mature we can learn to rejoice in good or bad circumstances, because *all things, good and bad, work together for our good, and nothing can separate us from the love of God, even angels or devils, life or death* (see Romans 8:28-39).

This is what Paul meant when he said that we are *more than conquerors* — not that we only experience good circumstances, but that we have victory in all circumstances because we see God in them — not people or the devil.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In **all** of your ways **acknowledge him**, and he shall direct your paths* (Proverbs 3:5-6). *In **every thing** give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ*

Jesus concerning you (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

2. We can see God in people

Here is a simple illustration. Suppose I am walking through my town with my son Nathan. It is midday and we see a man come out of a pub absolutely drunk. He vomits all over the pavement in front of us and then falls over into his own vomit. These can seem bad circumstances and it would be easy for me as a father to be angry and say, "Fancy being drunk at midday in a public place and in front of children. Why doesn't he have more self-control?"

If I had a pure heart I would see God in the circumstance and have a completely different attitude. Perhaps I would say, "Do you know Nathan, this man was made in the image of God, and God can make a great Christian out of him. He has been deceived. He never intended to become a drunkard. I bet he wanted to be a musician like you or maybe a train driver or astronaut when he was your age. Let's go home and pray that God will help him to fulfil his potential and be part of God's family and ours." Our hearts will always determine how we judge and react to circumstances and people.

3. We can see God in his creation

If you want to know a person well, there is no better way than to go to their home and see them in their own environment. Our homes are a reflection of our characters. Many people appear smart and efficient in public, but their own home may be a shambles. The way they decorate their house and keep their garden will tell you much about the true character of a person, and so it is in God's creation. It is a reflection of his character, and all his principles are

revealed in it. God's character is in all of creation, so if we have a pure heart we will always see God in his creation.

Greener grass

I recently met a man who told me that when he became a Christian he suddenly became interested in birds. He went out and bought a bird book. He had never had any interest in birds before his conversion, but now God's creation interested him. Many people testify that when God found them the sky seemed bluer and the grass greener — testimony to the fact that when God changes our hearts then we see God in every area and circumstance of our lives.

I will finish this chapter with the words of Paul to Timothy:

*Now the end of the commandment is compassion out of a **pure heart**, and of genuine faith (1 Timothy 1:5).* I believe that compassion can only come out of a pure heart. Pity or sympathy can come with ulterior motives and secret ambitions. The key to compassion is not our feelings — that is, our emotions — but our hearts, and when our hearts are pure God sees us as a favoured and blessed people. We will receive the promise of this beatitude now, in part, and in completeness when we see him, when *we shall be like him* (1 John 3:2).

Chapter 10 - Beatitude 7

Peacemaking

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

Matthew 5:9

What man is he that desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

**Psalms
34:12-14**

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.

**Psalms
37:37**

Let me again emphasise that there is a progression to the beatitudes. The last one was purity of heart. A man with a deceitful, impure heart will never have peace, because true peace is a condition of the heart and not dependant on the circumstances. It is important to realise that Jesus said that it is the **peacemakers** who are blessed. He did not say “blessed are the **peaceful**”. A dead man is at peace, and

we often put on the gravestone ‘R.I.P.’ — rest in peace. Jesus is not talking about peacefulness, which is passive and inactive. To **make** peace infers action and motivation. Neither did Jesus say “Blessed are the **peacekeepers**”, because this is another way of saying “Blessed are those who compromise to keep the peace”. “Peacekeeping” is always at enmity with God and his character. God always confronts our errors, sin and apathy in order to bring about true peace. I believe therefore that peacemaking is actually a positive and active quality.

No peace with the world

If we are blessed when we **make peace**, then who do we make peace with? Are we to make peace with this world? The angels sang at the birth of Jesus, *Peace on earth and good will to men* (Luke 2:14). Didn't Jesus come to bring peace on the earth? Well, if that was his intention at his first coming then he failed because the world has not been at peace since the fall of man, and nothing changed in this respect when Jesus was born, or after he died.

There will never be a way for a Christian to make peace with this world because the god of this world is Satan, and while ever he is in power, the world will always be the enemy of the true Church. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him* (1 John 2:15). This present world is run by wickedness. *There is no peace says my God to the wicked* (Isaiah 57:21).¹

The great commission

In Matthew chapter 10 we read that Jesus sent the twelve disciples out into the world to preach the gospel, not to

make peace with the world. The two are opposites and can not exist together. If we preach the true gospel it will bring opposition, and if we preach peace with this world we are preaching another gospel. Verse 16 records, *Behold I send you forth as sheep amongst wolves*, which doesn't sound very peaceful at all. John Wesley would begin to worry when the world did not oppose him. He would say "has the offence of the cross ceased?" Verse 34 of this same chapter says, *Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword*. The word of God preached in truth is always a sword that divides. We must never be antagonistic, and we must do all we can to live at peace, but it is a fact that the world and a true Christian will always be at odds. Paul says in Romans 12:18, ***If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live at peace with all men***. Sometimes it is not possible.

I believe there are three areas where we can and must make peace, and where the blessing of being *called the children of God* will follow.

1. We can make peace with God

Paul reminds us in Colossians 1:20-22, *And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they are things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now has he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy, unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight*.

This is the whole basis of the Christian life, that we are now no longer at enmity with God, but are actually adopted into his family and have a close and personal relationship

through the blood of Christ. We have now **made peace** with God. Romans 5:1 says, *Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*.

All Christians have been reconciled at the beginning of their relationship with God, but, as in any relationship, it is easy to lose that peace, and so we must constantly search our hearts to see if anything has come between us and God. If we have lost that peace with God then we must **make peace** again by confessing our faults.

As Christians we are accountable for what we have received, and it is now our duty to share this ministry of reconciliation. Paul tells the Corinthian Christians that *all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation* (2 Corinthians 5:18).

2. We can make peace with Christians

The true body of Christ is not divided. It always has peace with the other members. It has never been divided and never will be, for Christ is not divided. However, the visible outward Church is often divided and in disunity with other parts of the body, but this only proves that the outward church is not necessarily the true church. Jesus said, *By this will all men know that you are my disciples — his true body — if you love one another*. Love will always bring peace between true Christians, but selfishness, which is the opposite of love, will always bring division and disunity.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared unto me of you, my brethren,

by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you says, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. **Is Christ divided?** was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

Be peacemakers

Paul encouraged the Church at Rome to *follow after the things which **make for peace**, and things wherewith we may edify one another* (Romans 14:19); and in 1 Corinthians 14:33 Paul says that *God is not the author of confusion, **but of peace**, as in all the churches of the saints*. As Christians we have no excuse for disunity within the Body of Christ. Of course there are many who claim to be the Body and are not, and we must discern the tares from the wheat. We can never have peace or make peace with these people because they actually belong to the counterfeit church. Jesus said to the Pharisees, who claimed that God was their father, that actually their father was the devil (John 8:44).

Chapters 6 and 7 of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew clearly show us how to discern hypocrisy, self-righteousness and false prophets, and I will cover this subject in subsequent books in this series.

3. We can have peace with the Jews

Before Jesus died the Gentile nations were outside the family of God, and there was a God-created division between the Jews and the Gentiles. Chapter 2 of Ephesians shows clearly that this was so and that now, Jew and Gentile are reconciled and make one new man, and the *middle wall of partition* has been removed.

*At that time you were without Christ, being **aliens from***

***the commonwealth of Israel**, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our **peace**, who **has made both one**, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of two one new man, **so making peace**; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached **peace to you which were afar off** (Gentiles), **and to them that were nigh** (Jews). For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God* (Ephesians 2:11-19).

Those who are Jews by nationality and have received Jesus as their personal saviour become his bride, and those Gentiles who accept Jesus as saviour become true children of Abraham. Both come by faith and are justified by God and are now one in Christ. To call oneself a “Messianic Jew” is really a misnomer and misleading, for a converted Gentile would not call themselves a “Messianic Gentile”. Both become the bride of Christ, and nationality, whether French, English or Jewish is of no bearing to our salvation. *We know no man after the flesh.*

Peace through conflict

I have stated earlier that **peacemaking** is an active and positive act. I would now go further and say that it is actually an aggressive attitude. Let me explain that statement. Peace can only come through conflict. Compromise brings a pseudo-peace, but it can not last. That is why politics can

not bring about world peace, because politics **is** the art of compromise. Anything that disturbs our peace with God or with a fellow believer has to be confronted and defeated in order for peace to reign in our hearts.

Our peace with God was only brought about by great conflict and bloodshed — the death of the Son of God. There is always a cost to peace. Compromise is the art of bringing peace without this conflict, but it will never work. Compromise is a form of mixture and is an abomination and an offence to a holy God.

Peace on earth

One day in the future Jesus will come again to earth and bring peace at last, after man has tried and failed for 6000 years. How will he accomplish this? By war; he will come with the armies of heaven and there will be a military coup, a bloodbath. Only this conflict will bring peace to the earth. Only when *the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ*, by war, will this be accomplished.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treads the winepress of the fierceness

and wrath of Almighty God.

War to bring peace

*And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And **the beast was taken**, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. **These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.***

*And the remnant were **slain with the sword** of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh ... And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And **he laid hold on the dragon**, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and **bound him a thousand years.** (from Revelation 19:11-20:2).*

Prince of peace

There is a scripture from Isaiah that is often read at Christmas time when Christians remember the first coming of Jesus, but in actual fact these verses all refer to his second coming as a king and warrior to make war.

For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end,

upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:2-7).

This does not sound like “gentle Jesus meek and mild”, but it is the same Jesus who is coming to make peace on the earth the only way possible — *binding the strong man* and confronting and destroying his enemies. This will bring about the millennial reign of peace. Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker.

Peace throughout eternity

In the new heaven and earth we will have everlasting peace, because the god of this world, Satan, will not just be bound, but cast into the lake of fire from which there is no return. *And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Revelation 20:10).*

To conclude, we can say that we are blessed when we make peace with God, with our true brothers and sisters in Christ, and with the Jews, but we must not make peace with the world. The world is the enemy of God and one day Jesus will take it over with a bloody revolution.

Let me encourage you to make peace in these areas. Why don't you determine in your mind that you will be the first to start the peace process in your church or your home? I have decided to practice this and to always be first to say sorry to my wife or pastor. This has to be despite my feelings, or my opinion as to being in the right. Please do the same with God. If you lose your peace, don't wait for God to humble you by circumstances and trials to bring you to your knees.

Make the first move and humble yourself and repent. It really is the quickest way to **make peace** with God.

Notes

1. As we will see in Part 3, what the bible calls “the world” is not the people of the earth but the system which is presently run by the devil.

Chapter 11 - Beatitude 8

Persecution Because of Envy

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

**Matthew
5:10**

For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.

**Mark
15:10**

And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him.

Acts 7:9

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy.

**I Peter
4:12-13**

We have now come to a significant turning point in the beatitudes. We have looked at seven up to now and these seven represent the whole character of God. The number seven is generally accepted amongst bible scholars as a number of completion. Jesus, however, had not finished because he said "blessed" another two times. These last two beatitudes are the consequence or conclusion to the first seven. We are blessed people, in God's eyes, when we have the first seven, the character of God, and we are also blessed when we reap the consequences of having Christ's character — the persecution.

Inevitable consequences

The inevitable consequence of living a holy life is persecution. Paul reminded Timothy, a young minister at Ephesus, that *all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution* (2 Timothy 3:10-12). The world is in darkness, so when Christians walk in the light, they will always meet with conflict.

However, the conflict will also come from God's people. When God's people claim to *walk in the light as Christ is in the light* and yet walk in darkness, then true disciples will find powerful opposition and persecution from the deceived Church. We have seen that a holy life can not contain compromise because God hates any mixture. Read what Jesus said to his disciples at the communion meal just before his crucifixion.

These things I command you, that you love one another. If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have

chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also (John 15:16-20).

For righteousness' sake

This beatitude is about *persecution for righteousness sake*, that is, because we are righteous, because we are chosen out of the world. When God chooses and calls a man there is always a separation from the world, and this causes persecution. This persecution is not about false accusation or scandal, it is because people see that you are different, chosen and special, and the root of this persecution is always **envy** from God's people. This may seem surprising, but I think that the following examples should be enough to convince anyone.

1. Joseph

Joseph was the second youngest of twelve brothers and not in line for the birthright or the blessing, but his father Jacob favoured him and gave him special treatment. *Now Jacob loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours (Genesis 37:3).* God also blessed Joseph, for he gave him the gift of seeing and interpreting dreams, and this set him apart from his brothers.

And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all of them, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. And Joseph had a dream and told his brothers: and they hated him even more ... And his brothers envied him: but his father observed the sayings (Genesis

37:4,5,11).

Joseph's brothers didn't accuse him of being evil. It was just a reaction to the favouritism of his father that made them throw him in a pit and sell him into Egypt. Notice that the persecution came from his own family.

2. David

David was **chosen** by God in preference to his older brothers. This caused David problems in his early life. When David took up the challenge to kill Goliath, his elder brother Eliab sarcastically belittled him and accused him. After David killed Goliath, King Saul, realising that God's hand was upon him, made him captain of his army and gave him his daughter for a wife. But when the common people started singing *Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands (I Sam 18:7)*, Saul began to persecute David, even though David was now his son-in-law.

It is strange how envy can blind people into persecuting even their own families — physical or spiritual. Saul knew that God had chosen David to be king one day, and that David was more righteous than he was. *And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. And he said to David, You are more righteous than I: for you have rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded you evil. And you have showed this day how that you have dealt well with me: for when the LORD had delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me ... And now, behold, I know well that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand (1 Samuel 29:17-21).*

However, this acknowledgement did not stop Saul from persecuting David. Envy drives its own chariot, and can not be controlled when it holds the reins in a person's life — be

they saint or sinner. This is persecution for righteousness sake — persecution of a person simply because they are righteous.

3. Jesus

If ever there was a man on this earth who should have been free from any persecution it was Jesus. He never did anything wrong or underhanded. He fed the poor, had compassion on sinners and was always truthful, even to the Pharisees. Why then was he always persecuted? The answer is the same as for Joseph and David — envy.

The common people loved Jesus and came in their multitudes to hear him. They were not envious that God had chosen him, in fact, they were glad that God had sent them a prophet to teach and do miracles. However, the Scribes, Pharisees and chief priests who were in positions of authority were very envious, because they boasted that they *sat in Moses' seat* and they didn't want to relinquish this position — not even for God himself when he came in the flesh.

The gospels clearly state that envy was the root of their persecution. *For Pilate knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy* (Mark 15:10).

Early in ministry

I believe that this sort of persecution occurs when people begin to see that a person's life is favoured by God. We shall see that the next beatitude is a progression from this, and that if we come through this *persecution for righteousness' sake* then we go through the next stage, but this comes later in our ministry. Let us look at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry when he declared that he was now anointed:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has

anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

*And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? ... And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were **filled with wrath**, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong (Luke 4:18-28).*

These synagogue members did not accuse Jesus of any crime. In fact they were amazed at his gracious words. This was a spontaneous act from their hearts — an act of envious anger that Jesus should have the audacity to claim that he was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah as the Anointed One.

4. The early Church

If they persecuted Jesus, and Jesus said that they would persecute his followers also, then the Acts of the Apostles should confirm this. We do indeed have many examples of the same principle, of God's people persecuting the righteous because of envy.

When Paul and Barnabas started to preach to the Gentiles at Antioch the Jews were envious, and started to persecute them. *And the next Sabbath day came almost the*

*whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were **filled with envy**, and spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming ... the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and **raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas**, and expelled them out of their coasts (Acts 13:45-50).*

Thessalonica

The same thing happened at Thessalonica. Paul preached the truth and it caused a division. Some of them believed, but the others were envious and persecuted Paul and his company. This is persecution for righteousness sake — persecution for telling the truth.

*And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the **Jews which believed not, moved with envy**, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people (Acts 17:5-6).*

Envy is the root

All these examples have shown that envy was the prime motive for the persecution, and it was always persecution because the Christians were speaking the truth or doing what was right.

The promise

When we look at the promise for this beatitude we find that it is the very same as the first one, *yours is the kingdom of heaven*. The kingdom of heaven belongs to

these persecuted Christians. We have come full cycle, for we started with the entrance to the kingdom, which is humility, and we have now reached the consequence of having the true character of Christ, which is persecution. We are reminded that these people will inherit the kingdom when Christ returns.

Persecution is not pleasant and we may wonder why Jesus said that we are blessed when we are persecuted. Many preachers say that persecution only shows we lack faith or that there is some leeway in our life that gives Satan a foothold. They say we should always be victorious, and that to be persecuted is almost like a curse. I believe they have twisted the scriptures to fit their own doctrines. Here, to encourage you, are five reasons why we are blessed when we are persecuted, remembering that this blessing is not to do with how we feel, but how God sees us.

1. It is our calling and commission

Jesus' commission to his disciples in Matthew chapter 10 clearly shows us that persecution for preaching righteousness is part of the calling of a disciple and that we are to expect it. Read it carefully, for many preachers are happy to preach according to the great commission in Mark 16:15 where *signs follow those that believe*, but they do not tell their congregations the conditions or the consequences of that commission.

Jesus told his disciples: *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: therefore be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And you shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against*

them and the Gentiles ... And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death ... The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. ... If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? ... And a man's foes shall be they of his own household (Matthew 10:16-36).

Persecution is the *offence of the cross* that Paul talked about to the Galatian Christians. *And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased* (Galatians 5:11).

It is a very blessed thing to follow in the steps of Jesus, to *deny self, take up our own cross and follow him*.

2. We shall reign with Christ

The promise of this beatitude already says that we will inherit the kingdom, but Paul also gives encouragement to the young minister Timothy:

*Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: **Wherein I suffer trouble**, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore, I endure all things for the elect's sakes ... It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: **If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us** (2 Timothy 2:8-12).*

Treasures in heaven

If Christians really believed that they would reign on this present earth and inherit all things when Jesus returns, then they would do as Jesus says later in the Sermon on

the Mount and *lay up treasures in heaven*. They would no longer live for this world, but would be able to *glory in their infirmities* like Paul who said that *our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* (2 Corinthians 4:17).

The reason that many Christians are afraid of persecution is because they have too much to lose in this world. All their securities and values are on earth and not in heaven. If Jesus came tonight he would spoil most Christians' plans. *The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches* (Matthew 13:22) have blinded them to reality.

3. Persecution fashions our character

Peter gives a benediction at the end of his first epistle that I have yet to hear from any pulpit. The reason, I suspect, is because it includes the word "suffer" and so does not seem compatible with a blessing. This is because the Church in the West has forgotten the fruits of suffering. The persecuted Church however has learned that a character that is formed in the furnace is of gold, and not the tinsel that comes from taking *ease in Zion*. Here is the benediction of Peter. *But the God of all grace, who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, **after that you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you**. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen* (1 Peter 5:10).

The letter to the Hebrews also tells us the benefits of suffering for our character. *Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless **afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby***. (Hebrews 12:11).

4. God can make a statement to Satan

The book of Job is a fascinating one because it lets

us take a look into heaven and to observe God and Satan having a conversation about a person on earth. For me the whole episode is not really about Job at all. The real issue is: whose statement will stand, God's or Satan's? God's statement to Satan was "Job loves me and hates you." Satan's statement to God was, "If Job suffers he will curse you and, by default, love me."

It is important to note that **God** started the conversation and not Satan, and that God provoked Satan by using Job's righteousness. I believe God wanted to make this statement to Satan for God believed Job would prove that his statement was correct.

When we go through trials and suffering then God can boast to Satan about us, and when we stand and come through those trials and sufferings, God's statement is vindicated. It is really very sad when so many Christians only prove that they are "fair weather sailors" and will not go through the storms of life that are common to man.

The next time you are "in the furnace", remember that both God and Satan have a vested interest in your attitude and let it give you courage to resolve to follow your master who *endured the cross*. (Hebrews 12:2).

5. It proves whose seed we are

There is an unchanging principle in the bible that the seed of Cain will always persecute the seed of Abel. It is simply that those who are in the flesh, which means those who follow their carnal nature, whether Christian or not, will always persecute those who walk in the Spirit.

There are illustrations of this throughout the bible, but Paul in Galatians explains this principle very clearly. *Abraham had two sons, the one by a bond maid, [Ishmael]*

*the other by a free woman [Isaac]. But he who was of the bond woman was born after the flesh; but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory ... Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then **he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now** (Galatians 4:22-29).*

This scripture shows again that it is often God's people who are walking in the flesh who persecute those walking in the Spirit, and that the root of this persecution is envy. Both sons were of the same seed, Abraham's, and Ishmael was circumcised before Isaac was even born, but one was of the flesh and one was of the spirit.

Nothing ever changes

The same principle can be seen in Revelation where the false church Babylon — the whore — persecutes the true church — the bride. *And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, **he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child** (Revelation 12:13).*

The antichrist (Satan in the flesh) is the King of Babylon and throughout history antichrists have tried to destroy those amongst God's people who will not compromise. We are blessed people indeed when we walk in the Spirit and prove that we are the children of promise. We shall reign victoriously and, with our Saviour and Husband, rule all the nations for a thousand years. This should excite and motivate us to *lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us and strive for the mastery; to lift up the feeble knees* because in the West we have *not yet resisted unto blood*.

Always persecuted ~ always victorious

Let me finish with the words of Paul to the Corinthians. It is fighting talk, but then we are in a spiritual battle and we need to understand these biblical principles if we are to *stand in this evil day*.

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are **troubled on every side**, yet not distressed; **we are perplexed**, but not in despair; **Persecuted**, but not forsaken; **cast down**, but not destroyed; **Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus**, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are **always delivered unto death** for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh ... For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:7-18).*

Chapter 12 - Beatitude 9

Rejoicing in Reviling

Blessed are you, 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

But as for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save many people alive.

Genesis 50:20

This is the last beatitude and the ultimate consequence of a holy life — that is, a life displaying the fruit of the spirit, the character of God. It is a progression from the persecution that comes because **God has chosen** and called us. This is persecution because **we have chosen** God's way and it is something we actively do. It is taking up our cross and a voluntary acceptance of all that the cross implies in our daily lives.

This beatitude is different from all the others in that it is

not addressed generally but in a personal manner. All the others say *Blessed are **they** ... for **theirs** is the kingdom*, but now Jesus is saying. *Blessed are **you** when people revile **you** and persecute **you***. In the end we will have to stand on our own. If we value our *mothers or fathers, brothers or sisters, wives or friends, houses or lands and even our own lives, more than Christ, then we can not be his disciples* (Luke 14:26). It has to be only Jesus and us, and we may have to stand and be persecuted alone as Jesus was when everyone left him in his hour of need.

A progression

This persecution is much more difficult to accept than the previous beatitude. It is easier to suffer because we are chosen and separated than to be persecuted when we are wrongly accused and reviled for things we haven't done. It takes more faith to suffer in silence when we are innocent. It is lunacy to a carnal mind, but that is what our master did, and this is pleasing to God. *Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that **falsely accuse** your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, **that you suffer for well doing** than for evil doing. For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God* (1 Peter 3:16-18).

A willing sacrifice

For those who willingly accept these persecutions, when they could escape them by protesting their own innocence, the rewards are great. Hebrews chapter 11 is a famous chapter on faith and lists the heroes who did mighty exploits for God, but towards the end of the chapter the tenor changes dramatically, and instead of boasting

that faith can **achieve** great things for God, it shows that greater faith can **suffer** great things for God, and the reward is *a better resurrection*. The world is not worthy of these martyrs and neither is the lukewarm, compromising, self-satisfied church.

... *And others were tortured, **not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection**: And others had trial of cruel mocking and scourging, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented ... they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.* (Hebrews 11:35-38).

The extra mile

This beatitude is where Jesus begins to introduce what I call “the extra mile philosophy”. By that I mean the kind of instructions that Jesus gives which only a fool — or a real Christian — will accept and practice. I will cover this in detail in the next book in this series, but here is one of many examples of scripture that the church will not accept at face value. So often they look instead for a so-called alternative “spiritual meaning”.

But I say unto you, Do not resist evil: but whosoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also (Matthew 5:39).

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Matthew 5:44).

To justify their refusal to practice what Jesus said, Christians often say things such as, “I may be a Christian

but I’m not stupid. God expects us to use common sense”. This type of statement only proves that they want their own brand of Christianity and do not realise that the only thing required is simple obedience.

Instructions

Another thing that sets this last beatitude apart from the others is that it is the only one with any instruction. After telling us that we are blessed when we suffer wrongful persecution, verse 12 tells us to do something:

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad. These are strange instructions indeed. Why on earth would we rejoice and be extremely glad when falsely accused? The rest of the verse makes the answer quite clear ... **for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you** (Matthew 5:12).

Luke shows us the other side of the coin when he quotes Jesus as saying, **Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets** (Luke 6:26).

When Jesus comes to reign on this earth, *we will all have to stand before the judgement seat of Christ to be judged for the deeds done in our flesh* (2 Corinthians 5:10), and there will be no rewards for merely doing our duty. To do your duty as a Christian is to be an *unprofitable servant*, Christ is looking for fruit, and that means an increase.¹

The first beatitude about persecution is to do with God’s call on our lives, and so it is **his** reputation that is at stake, but this beatitude progresses to false accusation, not about God but about **us** personally, and this is much harder to take. We should always defend the reputation of other Christians and the name of our Saviour, but we must not

defend our own name and reputation.

I hear so many Christians say that they have given their lives to Christ, but they are deceived if they have not given one hundred per cent in every area of their life. Have they given even all their **spare** time? Have they given **all** their money to God, or have they given God **all** of their family — knowing that God may allow them to lose their families? How many have given God their reputation for him to do with it as he pleases? He may allow it to be dragged through the mud. It is a wonderful way of humbling us and giving us the character of Jesus. Have we thought about giving God our self-esteem?

When we have really given God all, and we are dead to self, then self can not be insulted and maligned and we are truly free.

Let us now look at some examples of this second type of persecution from the bible.

Joseph

We have looked at the early life of Joseph and his persecution because of his father's favouritism. Now let us look at his life a few years later and see the next beatitude working in his circumstances. Joseph is now accused of something of which he was innocent — the attempted rape of his employer's wife (Genesis 39:7-20). This was a very serious complaint, and yet there is no mention of Joseph ever claiming his innocence. He allowed God's plan to be fulfilled in God's own time, knowing that God could vindicate him at any time he desired. Joseph had the faith that God would bring about the fulfilment of the dreams God gave him as a young man, and this faith enabled him to patiently endure the persecution. *But as for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it for good, to*

bring it to pass, as it is this day, to save many people alive (Genesis 50:20).

Jesus

We also looked at the early life of Jesus and saw the persecution of envious Jews when he claimed he was the chosen one of Israel. But later at the cross he was reviled as a blasphemer. This was of course false accusation. He was called a drunkard and a glutton, and he was neither. But Jesus silently endured all these accusations.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

The cost of the consequences

These beatitudes are about God's character, and there is a cost to obtain them. It is painful to be humble, to be meek, and to mourn. There is also a great cost when we begin to manifest that character. It is the cost of the consequences. We would imagine that when we have paid the price to obtain the character of God then everything would be easy, but we also suffer the **consequences** of being like Christ.

*For this is worthy of thanks, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, **suffering wrongfully**. For what glory is it, if, when you be buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently? But **if, when you do well, and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God**. For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered,*

he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously (1 Peter 2:18-23).

Notes

1. When Christians pray, fast, attend church, feed the poor, they are only obeying the instructions of Jesus, and hypocrites can do this and receive the reward of men, but there is no reward from God for doing our duty. Only going the *extra mile*, turning the *other cheek*, brings profit. *So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do* (Luke 17:10).

It is the same in 1 Corinthians 13. All the correct works and gifts without the fruit — in this case compassion — avail nothing and we become a *clanging gong* (verse 1), *nothing* in God's estimation (verse 2) and it will *profit us nothing* (verse 3).

Part 3

Chapter 13

God's Perspective

Jesus said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

Luke 8:10

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:15

I have tried to show that the beatitudes are the character of Christ, the perfect character of God. I believe the aim of a Christian is not only to **follow** Christ but to **become like** Christ in very nature. At the end of the beatitudes Jesus makes two statements:

- 1. You are the salt of the earth**
- 2. You are the light of the world**

I believe that these statements reflect God's perspective and not ours. They are how God sees a person who has his character. When a Christian has the beatitudes working in his life then God sees him as salt in his creation and light

in this dark world. It is important that we understand that it is only God who sees us as salt and light.

The world, or worldly Christians, will never see us as salt and light, they will never recognise it. Jesus says in verse 16 that we are to *let our light so shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven*. This implies that they do not see our light (our character), but our works. They do not know our true motives, for it is easy to do good works with a wrong motive. They do not understand humility or meekness. The world have their own beatitudes, such as "Blessed are the pushers, for they will succeed in life", or "Blessed are the self-centered, for great is their satisfaction".

A lonely walk

I can also say that carnal Christians will never see us as salt and light. I have shown in previous chapters that often God's people are in darkness, and persecute those who are in the light. Jesus was crucified because of the accusations of the very people who were chosen of God, who claimed to be in that light. Jesus says later in the Sermon on the Mount that *if the light in you is darkness then how great is that darkness*. This was the position of many of the Pharisees in Jesus' day.

A holy walk with God is a lonely walk. To find a Christian who is justified by faith is easy. To find a Christian demonstrating the power of God is not difficult. But Christians who are a blinding light and full of the character of God are, in my experience, rare. They stand apart not only from the world but from the run-of-the-mill Christians. These are people who bring revival and change whole nations, not only by their talk, but by their lives.

A fatal mistake

These two statements about salt in the earth and light in the world are not saying the same thing in two different ways. I do not believe this is ever the case with the teachings of Jesus. He does not waste one single statement. If there are seven parables about the kingdom in Matthew 13, then you can be sure there is a different application for every one.

The world and the earth do not mean the same thing in the bible. Salt and light are completely different in their purpose and application. Many Christians have been deceived into thinking that these two statements are interchangeable, but mixing the two metaphors to say that we should be “**salt in society**”, where by “society” they mean “**the world**”, results in the very opposite of what Jesus meant. They say this despite all that the New Testament tells us about separation from the world and the things that are in it. I will explain this in more detail in the next two chapters as we look at the two statements in their true context.

Chapter 14

Salt in Creation

You are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost its 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

For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

Mark
9:49-50

In his statement about the salt of the earth Jesus does not say that we **must** be salt or that we must **become** salt. We **are** salt — we may have power to savour, or we may have lost it, but we **are** salt. Salt is not something we do, it is what we are. We are the only salt God has, and the amount of power to savour is directly proportional to the amount of the character of Christ that we have in our lives. We are the only people that God has on this earth. We are

chosen and bought by God as his representatives — his salt — and he has no other way or plan. Therefore, because we are salt we must do what salt does — flavour and preserve. The power to do this is the beatitudes working in our lives, and nothing except the character of God in a disciple can bring glory to God.

A peculiar people

True Christians are the called-out ones. The New Testament talks about Moses and the *church in the wilderness*. They were also God's salt in the world: *a peculiar people, a royal priesthood* whom God *called out of darkness into his most marvellous light* (1 Peter 2:9-10).

The earth is physical

In the last chapter I said that “the earth” and “the world” in these statements of Jesus do not mean the same thing. The earth in the bible always refers to God's physical creation. This includes of course our human race. New Age thinking encourages us to worship “Mother Earth”, but as Christians we worship the Creator of the earth. The earth only exists by the power of God; it is living. Science has shown us that even things that we call solid are actually millions of tiny atoms separated by space and all moving and vibrating. They are alive by God's Spirit.

If God took his Spirit out of the universe, I am convinced that the universe would no longer exist. It would be *without form and void*. “Without form and void” is a description of nothingness, just like “a bottomless bucket without any sides”. Every physical part of God's creation is only a manifestation of his Spirit. This may seem a dangerous statement, but because God is a personality and not a force

then it is the very opposite of New Age thought.

The earth is God's

Because God created the earth it belongs to him, and will be his until he destroys it again by fire. Man's sin did not release this earth to Satan. Satan did not own it after the fall, he does not own it now, and he never will own it. It will always be God's creation.

*For your Maker is your husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and your Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; **The God of the whole earth shall he be called** (Isaiah 54:5).*

*And Moses said unto him, As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto the LORD; and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that **you may know how that the earth is the LORD'S** (Exodus 9:29).*

***The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof** (Psalm 24:1).*

When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, he was taken to a high mountain and shown the **kingdoms of the world**, not the earth, and Satan offered them to Jesus if he would fall down and worship him (Matthew 4:8). This was a legitimate offer that the devil had the power to fulfil, for the world belongs to him (Luke 4:5-7). I will look more at what "the world" constitutes in the next chapter.

The earth is corrupt

However, although the earth belongs to God, it is far from perfect because of the fall of man, and has been cursed by God. *And unto Adam he said, Because you have hearkened unto the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not*

*eat of it: **cursed is the ground for your sake** (Genesis 3:17).*

I find it hard to believe that preachers have taught that God's curses in Genesis to Adam, Eve and Satan, were cancelled after the cross. Christ's death on the cross took away the sin of the **world**, but it did not have any effect on God's physical creation — the **earth**. God's creation, including our bodies, is still under the curse of physical death, and — unless Jesus returns while we are alive — our physical bodies will end up as the dust of the earth. The very people who teach perfect health and pain-free childbirth still expect to go back to dust themselves, proving that these curses still have power over us.

Salt stops the rot

The bible also says that man has corrupted the earth still further and this is why Jesus links "salt" with "the earth", for salt has an effect on corruption. Salt permeates and stops rot. It is a preserving agent. We shall see in the next chapter that the world is in darkness, and salt has no effect whatsoever on darkness. Darkness needs something else — light.

Read now what God thought about the earth just before he destroyed it the first time:

***The earth also was corrupt** before God, and the earth was filled with violence.*

*And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was **corrupt**; for all flesh had **corrupted his way upon the earth**.*

And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth (Genesis 6:12).

It is the blood from this violence that corrupted the

earth in Noah's day, and blood is still being shed daily by the wars, abortions and violence of men. The earth is still being corrupted.

God's covenant with the earth

After God destroyed the earth with a flood, he made a covenant, not just with Noah and his seed, but with the earth itself.

*And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of **the covenant** which I make **between me and you and every living creature** that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of **a covenant between me and the earth.** (Genesis 9:11-13).*

We can see from these verses that God's covenant is not just with man, for although man is made in the image of God, his plan is for all flesh, *every living creature.*

Redemption for all flesh

Paul in the New Testament clearly shows us that the plan of redemption is not yet finished. The cross did a perfect work so that we are reconciled to God, and this work is complete and lacks nothing. Despite this, the scripture below clearly shows us that our physical bodies, and all flesh, are still awaiting *the redemption of the body* — waiting for *corruption to put on incorruption, for mortality to become immortal.*

*The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ ... **For the earnest***

expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God.** For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope, **Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Creation is groaning

*For we know that **the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.** And not only they, but ourselves also, which have **the first fruits of the Spirit,** even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, **the redemption of our body** (Romans 8:16-23).*

The redemption of the body is the *blessed hope* that is mentioned in the epistles. Because of the above statements I can only believe that the animal kingdom have more hope of the redemption of the body than many Christians, and if this is true, then what an indictment against us!

Salt - the preserver

We should now be able to see clearly what Jesus meant when he said that we are the salt of the earth. This statement follows the beatitudes and they are the character of Christ, so when God sees a Christian with this character, it is salt to him, and it stops the rot of his corrupt creation filling his nostrils. The only reason God has not destroyed the earth before now is that he still finds salt in it. There is always the remnant that has this preserving effect. The earth can not become perfect again. Salt has no **restoring** power, only **preserving** power. It will only delay the rotting process. The bible tells us that the earth is already reserved to be destroyed by fire. God will have to destroy it and create a

new one — another perfect one: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, **the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up** ... Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for **new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwell righteousness** (2 Peter 3:10:13).*

I fear the *end of all flesh* is close at hand for the second time for destruction by fire. When God has removed the salt from the earth — the rapture of the church — then the earth will be ready for destruction. There will be nothing left to preserve it.

Salt without savour

We must now look at the second part of the verse, for Jesus continues: *But if the salt has lost its savour, how shall it be salted? It is now good for nothing but to be trodden under the foot of men* (Matthew 5:13).

If salt is the commodity that we use to flavour everything else, with what do we season salt if it loses this power to preserve and flavour? Obviously nothing, there are no substitutes — a very frightening proposition.

Trodden under foot of men

When an individual Christian, or a church, loses the holy character of Jesus Christ then they lose the respect of the world. They become an object of ridicule. Holy characters receive respect even from their enemies outside the church.¹

Notice how Christians are depicted on television now that we have lost this character in our society. A minister is often shown as being hopelessly out of touch with the world, still riding a bike, naive, and probably a closet homosexual. Comedians can now blaspheme the name of

Jesus and make crude jokes about the characters in the bible and Almighty God without any fear of retribution from the licensing authorities. This could not have happened even fifty years ago, when the BBC was an institution founded on Christian principles.

The evangelical church has been so busy seeking the gifts that they have forgotten the character of the Giver of the gifts, and we are reaping the results of this lack of salt. There is no substitute for the beatitudes, and yet individual Christians and the Church throughout history have tried everything to restore what is missing, instead of becoming salt again. There is simply no other way. Only *righteousness exalts a nation*. Here are a few of the things that the Church throughout history has been substituting for salt.

1. Politics

A church without salt always brings political systems into the church structure to govern itself, be it a dictatorship, communism, or democracy. By dictatorship I mean a church whose leader is unapproachable, bombastic and above criticism. By communism I mean everyone in the church being equal in authority. By democracy I mean people in a church voting for their own leaders. These, and any other of the world's systems, will always produce Babylon, the counterfeit Church, the whore. The book of Revelation clearly shows that this counterfeit system is ruled by politics and commerce.²

2. Finance

When a person or a Christian body starts to collect finance as a means of security and power, then I believe that nothing except the drastic measures prescribed in Sermon

on the Mount will stop the rot and cause it to be salt again. *The love of money is the root of all evil.* Money in itself is neutral; it is the love — inordinate affection — that is wrong.

The Pentecostal denomination in which I was brought up in have now become official bankers and invite Christians to invest with them. They in turn charge interest to the churches to whom they lend money. In the Old Testament, the Jews were not allowed to extract usury from their brethren. I find it very disturbing that under grace, instead of *exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees* we don't even come up to their standard.

How far have we fallen when churches become landowners and bankers, and invest in stock markets? They lose everything to do with the true kingdom of God and have lost the convicting power of salt.

3. Entertainment

In this pleasure-seeking society, where the Church has a chance to be different, we have become identical to the world and so lost our savour. We have dressed up in the world's clothes in order to convert the world, but all that has happened is that the world has converted the church into a place of entertainment, fashion, music and culture. May God forgive us.

*In that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the LORD of hosts, **Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die, says the Lord GOD***

of hosts (Isaiah 22:12).

Entertainment will never deal with our characters, in fact it will lull us into deadness towards God, for the essence of entertainment is escapism — the flight from reality to fantasy.

4. Power to the people

Holiness is an individual thing. A church can not be holy unless the individuals in that body are holy. To think that it is God's way to gather enough Christians so that we have "people power" to lobby a government and cause it to change an ungodly law, is, I believe, to be deceived. It is a form of political power and the Church were never meant to have it.

When the Church gains political power it can only make people "holy" by legality and punish them if they refuse to conform. The end of this road is when Christians burn people at the stake and put bounties on their heads in an attempt to force conformity. This is a substitute for what the Holy Ghost can accomplish, to *convict men of sin, righteousness and judgement.*

5. Doctrines and Dogmas

Character is to do with our hearts and is not to do with our doctrines or beliefs, and when a church backslides in heart, then doctrines are introduced to correct and protect from error. I believe Christianity is not about Church doctrines, it is about a relationship with a person — the living God — who is not a doctrine, but a living personality. Doctrines do not become angry or have compassion, but God does. Our relationship must be with a living God.

Christianity is not about what we believe, it is about how we live. I could believe all the correct doctrines in my

head, but if my heart is not pure I will not live **the life** as described in the Sermon on the Mount. I know many sincere people and their whole security is in their doctrines. They have no real living relationship with God and they do not hear his voice personally, and yet the scripture plainly says, *My sheep hear my voice.*

Salt a flavouring stimulant

David said that the offerings and sacrifices that God requires are a broken spirit and a contrite heart. The horrible smell, to us, of burning flesh and blood is a *sweet-smelling savour* to God. The suffering Church with its blood spilling to the earth is an embarrassment to many Christians, but to God it produces the salt that is preserving his earth from present destruction.

I believe that this is how God will purge the bride for his Son in the days before he comes again. We must *not be surprised at the fiery trials* for they will purify, cleanse and bring salt into our lives.

Purged by fire

This earth has been reserved for fire, because one of the ways to deal with rottenness and corruption is to purge by fire. John the Baptist said that Jesus would come *with his fan in his hand to thoroughly purge and separate the wheat from the chaff*, and that the chaff would be *burned with unquenchable fire*. We should not wait for Christ's return for this to happen; we should allow God to humble us now and produce the salt before he comes to judge his Church and reign on this earth. We want to hear the words *Well done good and faithful*, rather than *You wicked and slothful servant*.

Let us strive to have the character, disposition and mind of Christ, so that God will see us as salt with savour, and with the power to bring a sweet smell to his nostrils amidst the corruption that is all around us.

Notes

1. Read some of Richard Wurmbrand's books and his amazing experiences regarding his torturers. Jesus was loved by the common people. Thieves and prostitutes loved him, and even the Romans could "find no fault in him". It was the religious people who despised, hated and crucified him.
2. See the description of the fall of Babylon in Revelation chapter 18. When God destroys Babylon and her pomp and pride are cast down for the final time, then all cultures, commerce and politics go down with her.

Chapter 15

Light in Society

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light unto all that are in the house.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

**Matthew
5:14-16**

My kingdom is not of this world.

John 18:36

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:15

You are the light of the world is a completely different application from *You are the salt of the earth*, but the statements are similar in that Jesus says you **are** salt and you **are** light. He does not say you **must become** light. I believe the statements are also similar in the respect that salt and light are both God's views of Christians with his character. The difference then is in the application: **salt**

preserves the earth — God's physical creation, and **light exposes darkness in the world** — the system of politics, culture, and religion.

Who is the light of the world?

Because Jesus puts the onus on a Christian to **be light**, many think that it is enough to witness with their words that **Jesus is the light** of the world, but I believe that this is a great deception. Jesus is no longer the light of the world unless that light is shining through a Christian. When he was in the world he was the light and plainly said so: *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world* (John 9:5). John also said that *the light shined in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not* (John 1:5). They killed Jesus and so effectively removed the only light that was in the world.

Now Jesus is in heaven with his Father, and we are now the only witnesses that God has on this earth to challenge the darkness of the world. In God's eyes, a Christian with God's character as shown in the beatitudes is the light of the world. If we look first at "light" and then "the world" it will become obvious to us what Jesus meant by his statements.

LIGHT

What is light? Although Jesus was talking about spiritual light, natural and spiritual light have many parallels. I am only concerned with two for the purpose of our study:

1. Both dispel darkness and reveal things unseen without the light.

2. Darkness can not extinguish light. Darkness is the absence of light, and darkness has no power of itself. More darkness does not make a light diminish; in fact it has the

opposite effect, that of seeming to make the light brighter. Stars remain the same brightness day or night, but the darkness reveals their light.

Spiritual light can simply be described as revelation. Light is revelation, and people with the character of Christ are the only light that this world has. Indeed, they are the only means to bring this world a revelation of God as a living being with feelings and character — someone with whom we can have a relationship and not as a doctrine or code of conduct.

Life and light

It is very interesting to study the connection both scientifically and biblically between light and life. Of course, this is outside the scope of this book, but a short look will be sufficient to see that they are inseparable and important to our study of light. Life on earth is supported by light. The process of photosynthesis is necessary for life on earth. John opens his gospel with an explanation of this connection in a spiritual sense.

In him [the Word] was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shined in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not (John 1:4-5).

Light brings life

True light will always bring life — **the** life, the life that Jesus talked about when he said *is not the life more than meat and the body more than raiment*. He was talking about the life that comes from the revelation of Jesus Christ, not the revelation that comes from doctrine or religion, but of Christ. It is the Sermon on the Mount life.

Compare these words of John with the first words in Genesis about the creation. God brought light from

darkness:

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and **darkness was upon the face of the deep**. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

*And God said, **Let there be light**: and there was light.*

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness (Genesis 1:1-4). In the verses following we find that God created life.

THE WORLD

We have seen that the **earth needs salt**, but Jesus said that the **world needs light**. What then is the world if different from the earth? The word in the Greek, used in the text, is *kosmos* which simply means organisation, or order of things, government or adornment. In this sense I believe it does not mean anything physical as does the earth. It is spiritual, a way of thinking, of ruling, or organising, a mind-set, culture, ideology, wisdom. All these words constitute the world — which I now want to show from scripture: **1. belongs to the devil 2. is evil 3. is in darkness and needs light.**

1. This world is the devil's

I have shown from scripture that **the earth is God's**, but the bible also tells us that **the world is not God's** at this present time, it actually belongs to the devil. He rules it and he is *the god of this world*. This did not change after Jesus' death and resurrection as many would have us believe. It will stay the devil's system right up to the time when Jesus comes again to set up his government:

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great

voices in heaven, saying, *The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever* (Revelation 11:15). This is at the return of Jesus to this earth, and for the Church to try and set up the kingdom before this is folly and futile. History has shown that it can not be done until Jesus comes. For the Church to gain power and influence in this world before Jesus comes is to become part of Babylon — the whore — instead of the new Jerusalem — the virgin bride. It can only bring confusion. It is the mixture of the spirit of the world and the spirit of God which produces lukewarmness and is an abomination to God (see Revelation 3:16-18).

Not of this world

*Jesus answered, **My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence*** (John 18:36). Jesus will **bring his kingdom with him** when he returns. This is because until Jesus returns to earth, his kingdom is not a physical kingdom, it is the order and wisdom of God, and, as Jesus explained, until he returns, *the kingdom does not come with observation. Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.* (Luke 17:20-21).

*And as they heard these things, he added and spoke a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that **the kingdom of God should immediately appear.***

*He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country **to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.***

Bible students accept that this parable is about stewardship of the Church and that Jesus is the nobleman.

So Jesus has returned to heaven to receive the kingdom and will come to earth with it. We can not establish it before he returns.

The devil's offer

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness he was offered the kingdoms of this world. He did not contest Satan's statement that they were his to give.

*And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give you and the glory of them: **for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it*** (Luke 4:6).

Christians are not to try and change the world's system by any other means except **to be light**. The world is in darkness and light is the only answer. The following passage confirms that the devil is the god of this world and that it is in darkness

*But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom **the god of this world** has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest **the light** of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

2. The world is evil

Paul told the Galatians that *this world is evil* (Galatians 1:4). When Jesus came the first time, it was to redeem people, not systems. You can not change a system until you change the person who has power over it. The world's system will easily change when Jesus comes the second time to *sit on the throne of his father David* in Jerusalem and all power and dominion is given to him. Although all power and authority have already been given to Jesus, he is still waiting at the right hand of God to exercise that

authority. Talking about Jesus, Hebrews 1:13 says, *Sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.*

Protection from God

The blood of Jesus is to cleanse us from our sin, but it has no power to cleanse or redeem the systems of this world. Paul believed that the world after the cross was still evil ... *our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this **present evil world**, according to the will of God and our Father* (Galatians 1:3-4). That is why we can not be part of the world even though we are in it.

To be involved in this world's fashion, culture, politics and wisdom is to be part of this world. John said, *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For **all that is in the world**, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.* (1 John 2:15-16)

Spiritual adultery

James calls love of the world spiritual adultery — which is a very serious accusation indeed. *You adulterers and adulteresses, don't you know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be **a friend of the world is the enemy of God*** (James 4:4). How can Christians be so blind as to embrace the world's systems and values with scriptures like these?

3. This dark world needs light

The following scriptures will speak for themselves and show that the world is indeed in darkness and that only

light, and not salt, will dispel it.

*And this is the condemnation, that **light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.** For every one that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God* (John 3:19-21).

*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, **against the rulers of the darkness of this world**, against spiritual wickedness in high places* (Ephesians 6:12).

The wrong tree

This present world will never comprehend the light, because its values are all based on morality. This is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — conscience.¹ Morals are to do with culture, politics and religion, and can change to suit the environment. Christians should now be in the position that Adam was before his sin, which means that they no longer feed from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They now live in simple obedience to God's word and are feeding from the tree of life. This is entirely different from following a moral code, good though it may be.

For me the one phrase that sums up *kosmos* the best is “this world's wisdom” — the thinking of the god of this world, which is always contrary to the wisdom from above — God's thinking. The wisdom of God allows the meek to inherit the earth, not the powerful, and the weak to expose the mighty. We must actually decrease if we want him to increase in our lives. This thinking is opposite to our natural

Adamic, fleshly thinking, and all too easily invades and permeates all our Church thinking.

A new mindset

Read carefully what Paul says to the Corinthian Christians. *For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: **not with wisdom of words**, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? **has God not made foolish the wisdom of this world?** ... **the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men** ... But God has chosen the **foolish things of the world** to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty (1 Corinthians 1:17-27).*

James also gives us a clear picture of the two wisdoms — God's and this world's. Notice how James lists the qualities of the beatitudes to describe the wisdom from above:

*Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with **meekness of wisdom**. But if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. **This wisdom descends not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish** ... But **the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality,***

*and **without hypocrisy**. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that **make peace** (James 3:13-18).*

Mixed metaphors

It should be now abundantly clear why we can not mix and match the two statements of Jesus. Darkness needs light not salt. Salt sprinkled in a dark room has no effect at all. Salt is to preserve rottenness, and we have seen that the **earth** needs this salt because it has been corrupted. So the Christians can never flavour the **world** or season it. **We can not be salt in society**. We can only be light.

Why has the modern Church been deceived into believing this lie? Can I suggest that they are frightened by the offence of the cross! Light confronts darkness and there is no compromise at all. Light dispels darkness. If you want to keep the darkness, the light has to be removed — as happened with Jesus.

The modern Church has made the gospel, not a rock of offence or a stumbling block, but a marketable commodity — appealing and attractive. It is not. To deny self, take up our cross and follow Jesus is the costliest thing a human being can do.

Only death to self can obtain the kingdom of Christ within a person — but death by crucifixion is slow and painful and the cost needs to be counted before that person commits himself to this death. An emotional decision to follow Christ will not survive. This is not for fainthearted, fair-weather sailors. This is for disciples for *we enter the kingdom through much tribulation* (Acts 14:22).

Being light

We now can say that a Christian must not talk about

light, but they must **be** light, and that Jesus is saying that people with his character **are** that light. To become light we must walk in the light. John's epistles talk much about this walking in the light. Read the following slowly and carefully in view of what you have just read:

This then is the message that we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).

John is not just talking about attitude, he is talking about the way we live our lives in this world's system. *He that says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and doesn't know where he goes, because that darkness has blinded his eyes (1 John 2:9-11).*

Let your light shine

The world, which is in darkness, can only be challenged by our light — the character of Christ — shining through us. Doctrine and church programmes, entertainment and culture will never change darkness. All things are neutral in God's creation, but the spirit behind them is not and we can not compromise our light. Everything we do must bring glory to God and not our self. If we are not absolutely separate in our lifestyle, attitudes and motives we are playing with fire and are in danger of compromising the light. Jesus says later in the sermon, *If the light in you becomes darkness,*

how great is that darkness (Matthew 6:23).²

The light is not the revelation of Christ as revealed in the bible. We have to be the living light, the living revelation of Christ incarnate in an ungodly world. This is the costly challenge behind the statements of Christ: that we actually become the salt of the earth, and the light of the world by our lifestyle.

Notes

1. It may seem a strange contradictory statement to say that the world's views are all based on morality, when we have modern philosophy saying that we have no absolutes and we decide our own truths. Let me explain what I believe. The statement that there are no absolutes is actually an absolute statement and very deceptive. What the New Age teachers are doing is not destroying morality, but changing it. No one can escape morality because it involves choice and choice is fundamental to life. Morals are only judgements from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. All mankind is forced to eat of this tree daily because of Adam's transgression. The only alternative for any person is to eat of the tree of life. Just as the bible says you **have to** serve one of two masters, you also **have to** eat from one of two trees — conscience or obedience.
2. I believe this deception is rife in the body of Christ. It occurs when Christians live their lifestyle by worldly wisdom and methods, and yet believe they have the mind and wisdom of Christ. This is the ultimate deception, and the one that will, I believe, seduce the apostate Church in these last days.

Chapter 16

Unassuming Righteousness

Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.

Matthew 6:3

In the first statement that Jesus made about salt there is no instruction. It is God's perspective of a Christian with his character, and the salt is not meant to change the earth for good. It does what salt does, preserve and stop the stench of rottenness ascending to God's nostrils. Jesus' second statement is entirely different. Light does not slowly work by pervading the darkness. It travels at the tremendous speed of 176,000 miles per second, and immediately dispels darkness.

This second statement has instructions. Jesus said that we must *let our light so shine that people see our good works* (Matthew 5:16).

Fear of works

For some strange reason the mention of "works" strikes fear into many Christians who are convinced of salvation by grace. This is despite the fact that the teachings of Jesus and the apostles are full of teachings about works. These good works, however, are not a substitute for faith; they are

the proof that we have received grace through faith. The definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1 is that it is the **evidence** of things not seen. **Evidence** can not be in our minds, it can only be made evident — manifest — by our actions. The scripture also says that faith is the **substance** of things. Again substance is not to do with thought, it is to do with material things — matter.

As Christians we must prove that we have received grace and that this grace has given us power to become a son of God, that is, to show our Father's character — to let our light shine.

Like our Father

This is only a parallel of what happens in the natural realm. If I do some action or deed, people will often say, "Wow, you're just like your father". This has nothing to do with me copying or trying to emulate him for I am acting without any conscious deliberation. The fact is that it is just impossible for me to do otherwise even if I try.

So it is with real disciples. They do not consciously try to be holy. They are holy because they have their Father's character and will always manifest it. True holiness is the unassuming righteousness that we will find throughout the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. The only righteousness that is acceptable to God is the right living that is hidden from ourselves but causes people to glorify God in heaven, not to praise us for our good life.

The next book

Jesus tells us clearly how to manifest this unassuming holy life later in his sermon, and I will reveal it in later books in this series. However, before we can learn this

secret it is important that we understand Jesus' next statement, which has been a stumbling block to so many Christians.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matthew 5:17-18).

I believe the reason that many Christians stumble at these verses is they do not really understand what grace is and what it does, or why the law was implemented. This will be the subject of the next book in this series on the Sermon on the Mount, "Fulfilling the Law".

Maurice Barratt

Maurice Barratt was brought up under the dynamic Pentecostal ministry of his father Bill Barratt, part of the Barratt and Williams healing ministry in the 1950s and 60s.

He became a Christian at the age of six, and from his youth lived a conventional charismatic Christian lifestyle. But at the age of 30 he was deeply affected by his father's teaching from the Sermon on the Mount on the principles of real Christian discipleship — what it really means to follow Jesus. From that time on he began to change from a conventional, "normal" Christian to a man convinced that what is lacking in Christians today is not supernatural power or gifts but the fruit, the character of Christ.

For the last thirty years Maurice has been committed to his call — to teach the church the practical principles of discipleship. He has taught in churches, housegroups, prisons, schools, camp meetings and bible colleges, throughout Europe, USA, Canada, India and Africa.

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Barratt Ministries is a multi-media ministry, involved in the publication of books and literature, the recording of music albums, teaching CD's and DVD's, production of videos and programmes for Christian radio and TV.

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