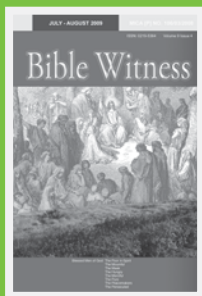


Bible Witness



Blessed Men of God: The Poor in Spirit
The Mournful
The Meek
The Hungry
The Merciful
The Pure
The Peacemakers
The Persecuted



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BLESSED MEN OF GOD

The Lord Jesus Christ gives a clear description of those who are the truly blessed of God in Matthew 5:3-12. In this passage, He names eight major characteristics of those blessed individuals whereby the reader is presented with an admonition to examine himself by taking heed to the Lord's call to be a truly blessed man of God. True blessedness belongs only to men who fit the descriptions given in this passage.

The nature of true blessedness cannot be defined according to human ideas. It must be determined by the blessed God Himself. It is His idea of blessedness that we should desire for ourselves, if we are to be truly blessed. This perfect idea of blessedness is what Jesus talks about in Matthew 5:3-12.

Since our Lord has revealed the essential characteristics of the blessed men of God, it is our duty to know these and prayerfully yield ourselves to be moulded according to them. For this purpose, we shall study these characteristics that, as we apply the lessons therein, we may be a truly blessed people here on earth for His glory.

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

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

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

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

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

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

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

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

*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,
and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*

*Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:
for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

(Matthew 3:5-12)

THE POOR IN SPIRIT

The word "poor" has so many negative connotations. Poor grades can get a student into trouble with his parents. Salesmen with poor sales records may soon find themselves out of work. Poor people are being looked down upon and even oppressed by the high and mighty of society. If a question were to be put to an audience, "Who wants to be poor?", the response will be an expected silence. Conversely, ask, "Who wants to be a millionaire?" and what do you have? A pandemonium, most likely. So it may be quite stupefying to some when they come across the verse: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

Yet, being "poor in spirit" is the first characteristic of blessed men that Jesus mentions in the Beatitudes. Being poor in spirit is not altogether the same as simply being poor in material things. So what is it like then to be poor in spirit?

It's not about material poverty, but spiritual

Firstly, to be poor in spirit means to acknowledge one's spiritual bankruptcy of being totally lost in sin. In other words, we admit that we do not have any resources within us to save ourselves from sin and, therefore, we have to look to God for help and to depend upon Him.

Acknowledging sincerely that all our personal goodness cannot measure up to God's holiness is the first step to be blessed of the Lord. Indeed, we must recognise that our own goodness can never be good enough to please God even if we can prove that we are

many times better than the best person alive today. "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).



Christians know that they are not saved by their own goodness and hard work. They admit that even if they were to reform themselves every day till the end of their lives, they could never ever measure up to God's righteous standards. If anyone were to be saved, it can only be by grace through the goodness of Jesus Christ credited to his or her account. The Apostle Paul puts it in his letter to the Ephesians, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

It's not about outward piety, but inward

Secondly, to be poor in spirit means the mortification of all spiritual pride. Through the story of the publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14), Jesus taught us the necessity of getting rid of spiritual pride to be blessed of God. According to this story, both men came to the temple to pray. The Pharisee

prayed thus: "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." Like so many respectable religious people, he stood before God, thanking Him that he was not as vile a sinner as the publican who stood at a distance from him.

The publican, on the other hand, stood with his head down because of his awareness of sins in his life. Then beating his chest, he cried out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He was poor in spirit; he recognised who he was before God and so, according to Jesus, he was the one who went away justified. He was the one who received forgiveness because he acknowledged his guilt and stood begging for God's mercy. He came not to claim his deserved blessings, for there were none, but to beg for God's mercy and gracious blessings.

The Pharisee, on the other hand, received no forgiveness. In fact, he did not even ask for any. His problem was his pride. He was righteous in his own eyes as he stood before God. Instead of seeing himself in the light of God's holiness, he stood comparing himself with the publican. He counted himself to be deserving of God's blessings because he considered himself to be better than the one beside him. He made himself appear rich in righteousness, and thus failed to plead for God's mercy. So he went away unforgiven and accursed. To be poor in spirit, however, means the deprivation of all spiritual pride.

In his hymn "Rock of Ages", Augustus Toplady, expresses what it means to be poor in spirit before the Lord.

Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law's demands

Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

It's not about spiritual independency, but obedient faith

Thirdly, to be poor in spirit means to acknowledge one's need to depend on God entirely to live a life pleasing to Him. Trying to live a Christian life without prayerful dependence on God is like a self-willed child pushing away the stretched-out hand of his father, who attempted to hold and guide him. Such independence is unlike the behaviour of the poor in spirit.

Jesus' illustration of the vine and the branches was given to teach one's need of total



dependence on Him. He said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:5-8).

Jesus was simply saying there can be no genuine progress in a Christian's life without constant dependence on Him. He wants us to abide in Him in order to bear fruit, even much fruit. He wants us to pray that we might have His blessings. But that can only happen if we remain in Him, believing and

obeying His Word. Otherwise, just like a fruitless branch, we will be good for nothing except the fire.

Conclusion

What would our lives be like if we begin to be truly poor in spirit? They would be humble in the presence of God, always seeking His forgiveness and cleansing, always depending on Him through unceasing prayer, always yielding to obey His perfect Word with joy.

Jesus said concerning the poor in spirit, "for theirs is the kingdom of God." In other words, those who come to God acknowledging their spiritual bankruptcy and seek His salvation with humility, repentance and obedient faith shall be assured of His kingdom. They will be blessed with all the blessings of His kingdom.



"Are our desires after Christ permanent or only a sudden fit of emotion, fear and impulse? If our hearts and our longing for union with Him are a work of grace, we will only be satisfied when we awake with His likeness. Nothing that this world affords can possibly take us from this goal.

Do our desires after Christ spring from a deep sense of our need of Christ? Has conviction opened our eyes to see our misery, to feel our burden of sin, to understand our inability and to make us sensible that the remedy lies only in the Lord Jesus Christ? Bread and wine are made necessary by hunger and thirst. Christ becomes precious to those who need Him."

John Flavel



THE MOURNFUL

The pursuit of happiness seems to dominate the thoughts of people today. They always want to make decisions that will ultimately make them happy. Be it in choosing a job or a life partner, people want to make choices that will put a smile on their faces. No matter how careful people may be in their search for happiness, it is always like an elusive dream. Today, a vast industry whose sole purpose is to amuse and entertain has grown to gigantic proportions pervading even our everyday lives. Hollywood is fascinating the world with their movies and music in the hope of giving that elusive happiness people are looking for.

While the world is still in frantic search for true and lasting happiness, Jesus had already taught us how to receive it. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

Happy mourners?

Jesus shows us a way that is quite contrary to the world's pursuit of happiness. Jesus' statement literally reads, "Happy are those who mourn." Is not mourning the antithesis of happiness? Now what exactly does it mean to mourn? Who are those mourners that are said to be blessed?

Jesus is not teaching us to be pessimistic people. Neither is He encouraging us to be a self-pitying people.

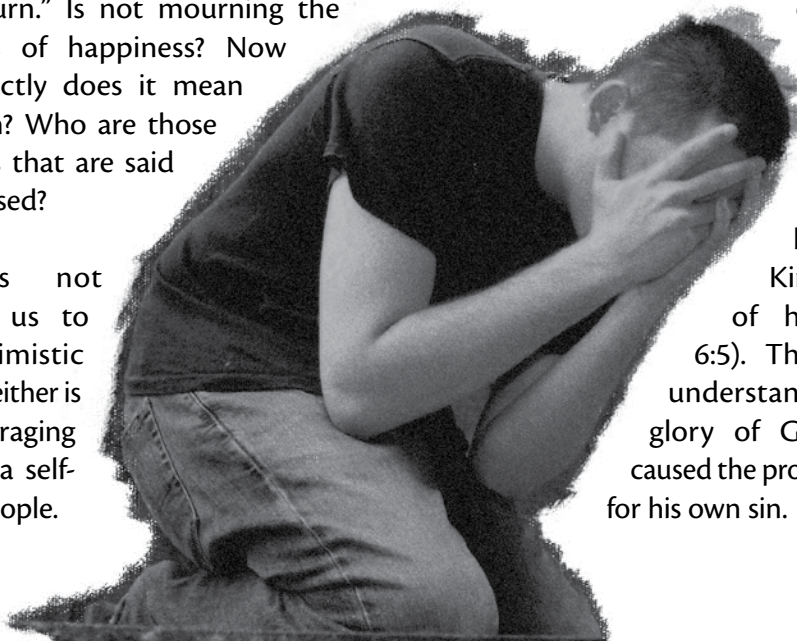
But is He teaching us to shed tears or wail when we pray? Certainly not. He is not advocating, as some have been doing, an emotionally charged worship service that causes the worshippers to cry. He has no intention to teach us a 'crying religion'!

In the Beatitudes, Jesus is calling us away from everything external and superfluous to the inner spiritual realities. He is talking about those who are poor in spirit, not those who are materially poor. He goes on to address those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, not those who are simply hungry and thirsty for food and drink. So the mourning He is talking about is not one that results from an emotional outburst but one that is spiritual.

What constitutes spiritual mourning?

Firstly, spiritual mourning is mourning over our own sin. When God granted Isaiah the prophet a vision of His holy throne in heaven, he started to bewail his sins. "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man

of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). The vision and understanding of the glory of God's holiness caused the prophet to mourn for his own sin.



A contrite heart is bitter about the vileness of its sin. Mourning over our own sin is not something that we should neglect once we become a Christian. The Christian never says, "Well, now I've been forgiven, so it doesn't matter how I live my life." Every day of their lives, Christians should search their hearts and repent of every appearance of sin. As they grow in their faith and knowledge of His holy Word, they will become more and more aware of how deeply sin touches every area of their lives, and they will mourn even more for their sin. They will come to realize that they are far more sinful than they ever thought.

As it is an all-out rebellion against their loving heavenly Father, they would weep over the thought that they have grieved Him and how it has caused the suffering and death of His dear Son. It is for such a mourning over sin that we often sing the following lines of the hymn:

"Alas! and did my Saviour bleed?
And did my Sov'reign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?
Was it for crimes that I have done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!
Well might the sun in darkness hide
And shut his glories in,
When Christ, the mighty Maker, died
For man the creature's sin.
Thus might I hide my blushing face
While His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt mine eyes to tears.
But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give myself away
'Tis all that I can do!"

But, as we mourn over our sins, we must never plunge into despair by the persisting presence of sins. We must mourn but not as those who have no hope. We must cry for deliverance from all besetting sins and embrace dearly the redemption of the cross. The Lord said, "Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12).

Secondly, Christians are to mourn over the sins of others. Most people, when faced with the sins of others, either treat sinners cruelly, or excuse them. In these days of rising tide of sin in our society, how should we respond?

Jesus' attitude is the one that we should take note. He weiled over the rebellious people of Jerusalem, saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37). On another occasion, Jesus said to the women who cried at the sight of the violence He suffered, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children" (Luke 23:28). He called them to weep over their own sins and that of their children. In the same spirit of Jesus, the Psalmist said, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law" (Psalm 119:136). Do we weep for the fact that God's law has been broken and God's honour has been affronted?

We are quick to lament when we are hurt by the sin of another, or when someone we care about is devastated because of sin. Yet, how slow we are to lament and mourn over the wickedness done against God that does not affect us personally! We are ready to judge the offender or to excuse his actions,

depending on our temperament, but not to mourn for their repentance and salvation.

Charles Spurgeon puts it across with graphic power in these terms: "If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms around their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for."



Conclusion

Let Christians take heart that this mourning will not go on forever. Indeed, Jesus specifically tells us that we will not be mourning eternally: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

Tears of true mourning are like showers of blessing. The sinner's mourning leads him to the comfort of God as the consolation of the Gospel drives away all fears of sin.

We will experience the full blessings of His kingdom, and then all our mourning will be taken away. On that day, we will be comforted. Therefore, we mourn in the present, but not as those who have no hope. We mourn rather because we have hope in Christ. One day our mourning for sin will be taken away, for we will sin no more. Is not that one of the great things to look forward to in heaven? "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). No more sin and thus no more sorrow!



"How shall we know that we love the reproofs of the Word?

- (1) When we desire to sit under a heart-searching ministry. Who cares for medicines that will not work? A godly man does not choose to sit under a ministry that will not work upon his conscience.*
- (2) When we pray that the Word may meet with our sins. If there is any traitorous lust in our heart, we would have it found out and executed. We do not want sin covered, but cured. We can open our breast to the bullet of the Word and say, 'Lord, smite this sin.'*

Thomas Watson



THE MEEK

We live in a society that renounces meekness as weakness and pronounces might as right. This society is very likely to laugh at Jesus who said, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). There is an old joke to revise the saying, "The meek will inherit the earth - if that's okay with the rest of you." This joke came about as a result of the general belief that meekness is weakness and the weak will always be dispossessed by the strong.

We should not doubt the veracity of the Lord's saying because it is belittled by the world. We must believe and practise the sayings of our Lord to be truly blessed. As Christians, we should not allow ourselves to be shaped by what everyone else thinks in this world. We are to be moulded by the truth that Jesus teaches us. He wants us to understand the true strengths and blessedness of life. So let us consider the words of Christ: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

What does it mean to be meek? Meekness has been defined as "a humble and gentle attitude towards God and man". Knowing that we, as Christians, are poor in spirit, we humble ourselves to trust the Lord for the divine redemption and resources to live the Christian life. Christians mourn over their sins

and the sins of others. So they should not be self-assuming and proud, but self-denying and meek.

A humble admission

Meekness is a virtue that humbly admits the shortcomings and sins in one's life, believing that God will deliver him from them all. When he is wrong and is corrected, he will not become defensive and aggressive.

Admitting one's sins meekly is a spiritual blessedness, for it opens the way to truth and righteousness. "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" (Psalm 25:9).

Becoming defensive and critical of the person who corrects our sins is

never a meek behaviour. To say to the one who corrects us, "Well, you're neither perfect, so what's the big deal?" - is pure arrogance and rudeness.

Meekness will not permit us to be bitter and vengeful to others, even when we are chided for our mistakes. The meek will humbly receive reproof without getting defensive. The meek person is able to say, "You're right. That's an aspect of my life where I need to change. Would you help me improve in this area?" Covering up our sins is not meekness, but pride.



A humble devotion

Meekness is a virtue that humbly devotes itself to God always. Meekness moves a person to be totally preoccupied with serving God. However the world may perceive his commitment to God, the meek person remains resolved to fulfil the good will of the Lord.

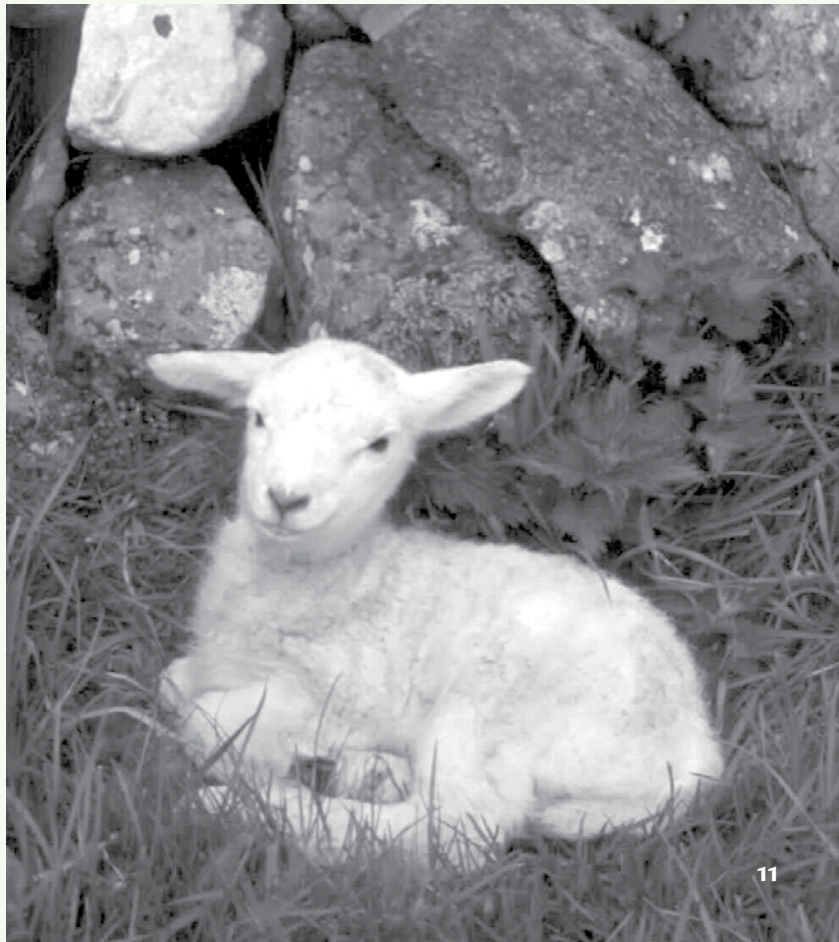
Moses is a fine example of this aspect of meekness. Miriam and Aaron, his elder siblings, began to challenge his leadership ostensibly because he had married a Ethiopian woman. They were envious that the Lord has been speaking through him to the people of Israel. Yet Moses was not troubled, neither was he vengeful. The Word of God records, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). The Lord then intervened and rebuked the dissenting Aaron and Miriam. He also told them, "My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house" (Numbers 12:7). The meekness of Moses was truly a reflection of his faithfulness to God's calling.

Zephaniah the prophet proclaimed: "Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness" (Zephaniah 2:3). Seeking the Lord's righteousness is the chief business of all who are truly meek. For this, we must humbly receive the Word of God - "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with

meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

A humble disposition

The meek, having boldness and humility, are willing to take on any opposition for the sake of God, while at the same time being equally willing to put up with any insult or indignity aimed at themselves. Meekness is a quiet and calm disposition that results from absolute trust in and submission to God's will and power. Even when we are persecuted and rejected, the meek, trusting in God's sovereignty, will boldly stand for Him. When intimidating and threatening words and actions are directed to meek persons, they will quietly rest in God's providence, instead of being stirred up to behave violently. Our previous example of Moses in Numbers 12 proved this case. The reason they are able to do so is because they have committed their cause to God. This is the real secret of



being meek. They are not agitated by what others think or say about them. They are only concerned about what God has to say about them.

The life of the Lord Jesus was an epitome of meekness. Isaiah's prophecy affirms this. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). Christ our Master was as meek as a lamb. It would be tragic for His followers to be seen as fierce wild beasts, avenging or retaliating those who have hurt them.

Conclusion

The blessing of the meek, according to Jesus, is that the meek will inherit the earth. This saying of Jesus resembles the words of Psalm 37:11: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

God is not looking for superstars or celebrities to preach the Gospel all over the earth. The true soldiers of the cross whom He sent to win His elect from every part of the world are the meek. With meekness, they preach the meek and lowly Christ who promised rest to those who would come to Him (cf. Matthew 11:28-30).



There is a twofold meekness — towards God and towards man.

Towards God implies two things.

I. SUBMISSION to His will.

1. Carrying ourselves calmly, without murmuring, under the dispensations of Providence.
2. Let God do what He will with me, I will submit.

II. FLEXIBILITY to His Word.

1. He is spiritually meek who conforms himself to the mind of God, and doth not quarrel with the instructions of the Word, but the corruptions of his heart.
2. How happy it is when the Word which comes with majesty is received with meekness.

Meekness towards man consists in three things.

- I. Bearing of injuries.
- II. Forgiving of injuries.
- III. Recompensing good for evil.

Thomas Watson



THE HUNGRY

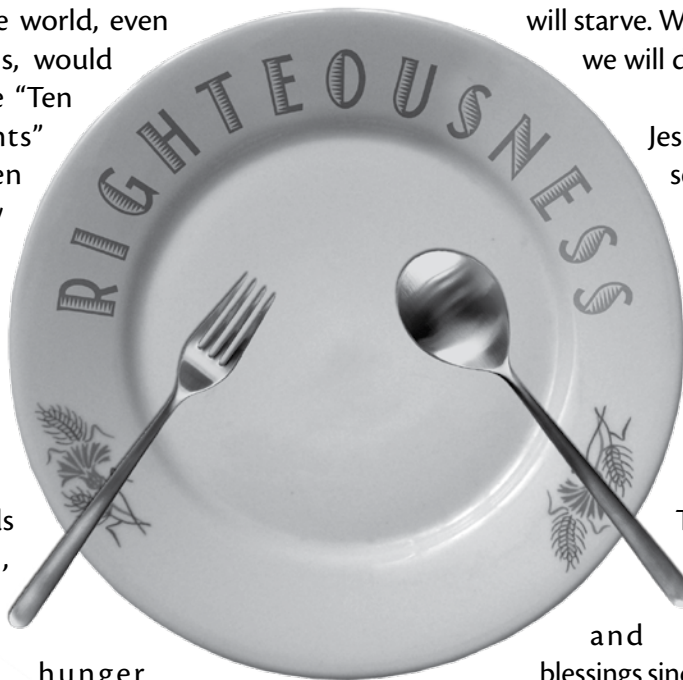
Desiring for moral uprightness hardly seems to be the norm these days. Even in churches, there is so much apathy towards insisting and promoting the righteousness of God. People everywhere reject God's Word as the standard of righteousness. Whatever pleases the hearts of men is considered to be the right thing to do. The prevailing philosophy of what is right is - "It is right when it feels good." The world, even many Christians, would rather have the "Ten Commandments" as just "Ten Proposals!" They just do not want to walk in obedience to God's holy law.

Contrary to the general attitude towards righteousness, Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). It is an accursed thing to neglect the righteousness that God has revealed in His Word. Conversely, it is a blessed thing to hunger and thirst after it.

An essential hunger

Jesus is saying that Christians must acknowledge that righteousness is essential, just as essential as our physical need for food and drink. There is no room for negotiation or rethinking when it comes to righteousness.

There can be no argument whether one should eat when he is hungry or whether one should drink when he is thirsty. We do not complain about our constant need to eat. Three times a day, or even more often, we get that gnawing urge to eat something. We do something about it: we feed ourselves. Everyone knows that if we do not eat, hunger will lead to death. We need food or we will starve. We need to drink or we will die of thirst.



Jesus is calling us to see that just as our physical needs are real, so are our spiritual needs. The basic spiritual need to which Jesus alerts us is righteousness. Therefore, we must hunger for righteousness and all its resultant

and blessings since we are devoid of it on our own. But what exactly is this righteousness that Jesus is telling us about?

Paucity of righteousness

We must acknowledge our need for righteousness. For the Scripture says, "There is none righteous, no, not one: . . . They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Romans 3:10-12). Our natural inclinations are towards sin rather than righteousness. "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great

in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5; cf. Jeremiah 17:9). This dearth of righteousness detaches us from having a proper relationship with God. Hebrews 12:14 reminds us, "Follow . . . holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

Everyone who acknowledges the reality of his propensity towards sin will know how desperately he needs God's help to be righteous. He will then hunger and thirst after righteousness as it is not found in himself.

Peril of self-righteousness

We must reject every notion of self-righteousness. Many people are proud of their morality, for they appear to be living remarkably upright lives in the eyes of fellowmen. However, outward morality is not what the Bible calls righteousness because the impetus behind it is not the glory and praise of God.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day thought that their remarkably legalistic and disciplined life was very upright. They fasted regularly, gave money to the poor and prayed several times a day. But all that good behaviour was not enough. Indeed, Jesus told His disciples later in His Sermon on the Mount that "except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

One reason why the righteousness of the Pharisees was not up to God's standard was because it was often performed for public view. When they gave to the needy, it was to the accompaniment of trumpets so that no one could miss their generosity (Matthew

6:1-4). When they prayed, they did so on the street corners in order that all could hear their pious words (Matthew 6:5-6). When they fasted, they made sure it showed on their faces, so that all could admire their devotion (Matthew 6:16-18). They were not hungry for genuine righteousness because they were already satisfied with their own self-righteousness. Yet, since their acts of righteousness were done for the wrong reasons - to build up themselves and their own reputation - they were thereby disqualified from being righteous at all.

If we examine our hearts, we will find that we also have the tendency to do our "righteous" deeds when others are observing us! Surely, if these man-pleasing, self-gratifying actions settle deep within at the expense of a genuine desire for righteousness, we will not hunger for true righteousness that God provides. When we attempt to be righteous for our own glory and just to please man, we become disqualified as surely as the Pharisees were.

The prophet Isaiah sums up our condition, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isaiah 64:6). Even our best efforts do not qualify as righteousness; let alone the many occasions when we did not even try to do what we know we ought to. What is the solution then? Is there no hope for us? Will we ever be relieved of our famine of righteousness? Who will save those who are starving for want of righteousness?

Provider of righteousness

God has provided for us a righteousness that is not the result of our own efforts. All of our righteousness is worthless. It can never please God. But God has provided a vast feast of righteousness from which we are

invited to eat. As Paul says, "For he [God] hath made him [Jesus Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Through what Jesus Christ has done on the cross, bearing our sin and punishment and eventually dying for us, we can receive righteousness - perfect righteousness - as a free gift.

We can now possess this perfect righteousness that Christ has attained for us by putting our faith in Him. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10). Through that gift of perfect righteousness, we are exculpated from our guilt as our sins are being forgiven. Then is our relationship with God restored and no longer at enmity with Him as we become His children. The sinner's hunger and thirst for righteousness must lead him to God's righteousness in Christ. Only Christ's righteousness can satisfy that hunger and thirst.

Pursuit of righteousness


Finally, we ought to know that God's work with us is not finished when we become Christians as He imputes Christ's righteousness upon us. It is the beginning of our pursuit of righteousness. God then

teaches us by His Holy Spirit to live a holy life according to His Word. Thus God nurtures the real righteousness within our hearts. We then start to do things that please Him. We also start praying earnestly that God would help us to live a life pleasing unto Him, because we hunger and thirst after His righteousness.

The more we grow in righteousness, the more we become aware of thoughts, ideas, attitudes and deeds in our lives that are not according to God's holy law. The more we become aware of these things, the more we long for a life of righteousness that would please Him.

Conclusion

Jesus says that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. As soon as we become Christians, the righteousness of Jesus Christ becomes ours to cherish and rejoice in. As we continue to hunger and thirst for that righteousness to be more completely expressed in our daily life, He will lead us by His Spirit and Word. The good news is that one day, when we reach heaven, God's righteousness will be fully expressed in us! There will be no more sin. May we look forward eagerly for that sinless land beyond!



*"With my soul have I desired thee in the night;
yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early:
for when thy judgments are in the earth,
the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."*

Isaiah 26:9



THE MERCIFUL

"Fight for your rights!" "Take revenge!" These are not only themes we see in the movies; they are actually played out right before our eyes in everyday life. People can no longer take any wrong without fighting back; and those that are exploited demand payback. Even our children have learnt that having a forceful and self-assertive attitude is a positive virtue. The world teaches men and women to speak and act with an air of superiority towards others. This naturally brings about much intolerance and provocation. Yet, amidst all this arrogance and aggression, Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). Jesus is here challenging the worldly mindset, especially among Christians.

So what exactly does it mean to be merciful? What are the distinctive characteristics of the merciful?

The merciful promotes truth

A prevailing notion in our modern society is that "Mercy means not being judgmental. What people want to believe, teach and do is their own business; it has nothing to do with me. So I will never condemn anyone." This is a counterfeit idea of mercy. That is simply

being disinterested in truth and goodness. Being merciful does not mean condoning falsehood and sin.

For instance, some people say about criminals, "You've just got to understand the awful background they came from. You have to feel their pain. It's not their fault." This they say about homosexuals too. Such an attitude is being irresponsible, unjust and unbiblical rather than being merciful.

Christians are taught to be merciful but not to defend and permit sin. The Scripture never teaches us to advocate falsehood or sin. Instead, it teaches us to recognise false doctrines and sins and to avoid them. The biblical teaching is that in order to be merciful, we must expose the dangers of falsehood and sin so that those who have erred may repent and turn away from God's wrath. In other words, true mercy recognises the reality of sin and its dire consequences, and insists that sinners must repent and go to God for forgiveness. The Apostle James emphasises this truth when he wrote, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

The merciful pardons trespassers

Another trait that characterises the merciful is being ready to forgive those who offend



us. In Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant, this truth is established. Jesus said, "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. But forasmuch as he had not 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 thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt" (Matthew 18:23-27).

Like the man in the parable, we too can never repay God the debt we owe. We deserve the wages of our sins, which is death (Romans 6:23). God certainly does not minimise the seriousness of sins we have committed. He does not say, "Oh well, it's not your fault. You really couldn't help it. It doesn't matter." That would not be true. Sin is our fault and it does matter. But at a great cost to Himself, God showed mercy to us through Christ Jesus, and forgave our sins. Likewise, we must also show mercy to others by forgiving those who beg for our mercy. When we forgive one another, we are more like our Master.

Not to forgive those who plead for forgiveness is a sign of rebellion and sin. The rest of Jesus' parable proves this truth. He said, "But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants 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 thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:28-35).

Just as God forgives all our sins, even the worst deed we have committed against Him, we must also be willing to forgive every grievous offence committed against us by others. His forgiving grace is not limited to "small" or infrequent sins. So no matter how great the sin is against us, or how frequently it has occurred before, we must still forgive just as God has forgiven us.

Remember Peter's question that prompted Jesus to tell the parable of the unmerciful servant? Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (Matthew 18:21). Jesus replied, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." As many as seventy times seven times! In other words, Christians are committed to forgive without limit, without keeping score.

The merciful portrays tender-heartedness

Lastly, being merciful means being helpful and compassionate to those in need. Christians who remember the mercy of God towards them must be eager to respond to the needs of those who are facing trials in life. Responding mercifully to people's needs will often be a costly business, in terms of both

money and time. But however great the cost, mercy would drive us to be tender-hearted and sacrificial to help the needy.

Genuine mercy does not permit us to withhold our hands from helping the needy. Neither does it permit excuses out of a selfish and unwilling heart. It also would not deny help even to the ungrateful and undeserving. In fact, we too were ungrateful and undeserving. Nevertheless, God sent Jesus to die for us.

On the other hand, mercy does not mean that we will go all the way to come to the aid of just about anyone. We must approach every case with caution, evaluation and much discernment. There are some people who ask for help that they may indulge in their vices and continue in their sinful ways. If our help will be misused, then we need to withhold our hand and say “no”. This will help them to become more aware of their mistakes. Helping the wrongdoers and lazy people is like condoning their sinful attitude and activities. Such people must be left to their folly and be taught by the consequences of their sin. The Apostle Paul said, “If any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. . . And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, 14).

Furthermore, we need to say “no” sometimes because it is necessary for us to meet our obligations to our own families and friends. This truth is reflected in Paul's exhortation

in Galatians 6:9-10, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” There are times when we need to carefully balance our commitment to various God-given responsibilities. It is not so merciful of us to neglect one at the expense of the other. However, Christians must be delighted to help the needy to the best of their ability.

Just as God has been merciful to bless us with good things, we must also be merciful to help those who are genuinely in need of those things we possess. 1 Timothy 6:17-18 records, “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.”

Conclusion

Jesus promised the merciful that they too will receive mercy. Does He mean that by showing mercy to others, we thereby earn mercy for ourselves? That cannot be the case. Mercy can never be earned. After all, mercy, by its very nature, is an undeserving gift and not a reward!

So what is Jesus really trying to say? The merciful know that their own need for mercy never ends. So when they show mercy to others, they are acknowledging that they need God's mercy as well, and at the same time expressing the assurance that God will continue to be merciful to them. Our acts of mercy will praise God's everlasting mercy. This will strengthen us in His mercy too.

THE PURE

Jesus said in Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

According to the statement above, purity of heart distinguishes a blessed man. Yet, it is also another quality that is found wanting in the heart of every man. Keeping the purity of our thoughts and desires has become more difficult now than ever before. Lewdness and perversities abound everywhere. Wherever we turn, we are exposed to graphic images of impurity. People with sensual and materialistic appearance provoke viewers to sinful fantasies.

This society has surrounded our children and youths daily with sensual fashions, vulgar language and songs, and filthy pictures. Speaking up against these things can make us extremely unpopular - even in churches!

However, before we say any more about the world's impurity, we ourselves must admit that our own hearts are "desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). By nature, we lack the purity of heart that God looks for. Proverbs 20:9 says, "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" The genuine answer is, of course, "No one". No one is without sin. No one has a pure heart. In fact, the opposite is true.

So Jesus says in Mark 7:20-23, "That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these

evil things come from within, and defile the man."



The real problem of impurity does not lie outside us but within. If we are naturally pure in heart, then external temptations will have little or no power to influence us.

We all have defiled hearts by nature. As I look into my own heart, I find the seeds of all those sins in my heart. What about you? What do you think about when you let your mind run free in fantasy? Would you not wish that people will never know those thoughts? Could we stand the shame if our thoughts were to be flashed across a screen in public?

We are desperately in need of purity in our hearts because we lack it, for our hearts are naturally inclined to sin. Realising this deficiency, how then can we meet its fulfilment?

Be cleansed by His blood

Purity of heart is possible only through Christ's atoning blood shed on the cross. The book of Hebrews says that Jesus the High Priest, the perfect one without sin, can help to cleanse our hearts of all impurities. As the perfect High Priest, He has offered a perfect sacrifice by His own death, as the perfect Lamb of God, that the sins of our hearts may be thoroughly removed. What is more, now He stands at the Father's right hand interceding for us.

Hebrews 9:14 records, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Likewise, Hebrews 10:21-22 says, "And having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

In Jesus, we have been given the purity of heart we need. That is what the Christian message is all about: finding our purity, our righteousness, in what Jesus did, not in what we have done.

Be controlled by His Word

Christians can grow in purity of heart by disciplining their thoughts and desires according to God's Word. The Psalmist explains this truth in Psalm 119:9, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." A heart that is devoted to God's Word will be able to bear the fruits of holiness.

In God's Word, we learn of God's perfect holiness. His holy commandments in the

Bible teach us how to live a holy life before God.

Reading the Scriptures for information alone will not help. When Christians read God's Word, they must regard it as an encounter with the Most Holy God. It is a time when we hear His voice, instructing us His holy and perfect will. In the Scriptures, we learn of Him and what He expects of us.

Meditating on the nature of God, as He is revealed in the Scriptures, and studying the promises of God frequently and passionately, will drive us to desire a continually growing measure of present purity in our lives. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). As we surrender to the authority of the Almighty God and His Word, we will be able to have our thoughts and wishes sanctified, and our actions become holy.

Be conformed to His holiness

Maintaining purity within our hearts also require that we must abstain or disassociate ourselves from every form of evil. In 2 Timothy 2:22, Paul says, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." We should not "stick around" anything that may corrupt our minds. When we stay long where sin is abundant, our minds can be corrupted very easily. "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

If we want to have a clean and pure mind, we should avoid corrupt literature, filthy films and TV shows, and even unwholesome songs.

We must also be careful with our choice of friends and communication. So Paul exhorts us, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God” (1 Corinthians 15:33-34).

Be charitable to His people

Our hearts can be cultivated towards purity by loving one another. In 1 Timothy 1:5, the Apostle Paul said, “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” True love for others will prevent us from committing offences against them. In Paul’s words, love is the fulfilment of God’s righteous commandments.

He said in Romans 13, “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (vv. 8-10).

If we do all things out of love, then our thoughts towards others will be pure. If there is godly love in our heart, purity will flourish from within.

Be consumed by His goodness

Finally, to enhance purity within our hearts, we must fill our hearts with pure and good thoughts and desires. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest,

whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (4:8).

As Christians, we must find great delight in things that are pure and good. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says, “Hold fast that which is good.” As we fill our hearts and cherish noble and solemn things as well as good and beneficial things, surely there will be no room left for things that are impure.

Conclusion

Jesus promised those who are pure in heart nothing less than that they will “see God”. Therefore, we must take heed to “Follow . . . holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

God has no business with unholy people. He has no dealings with those who live in sin. Only when we grow in holiness, God will engage with us that we may see Him as He is. Only when we are holy, we will be filled with His power to do great things.

The Scripture also clearly warns us “that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Ephesians 5:5). Religion without holiness is false. If you use religiosity to hide your corrupt and filthy heart, you will be unceremoniously sent to hell.

If your life is entrapped in sin, you must come to Christ right away for cleansing. Then follow His Word in adoration of the Most Holy. Let your heart’s pleasures always be that of pure and virtuous things.

THE PEACEMAKERS

Peace is God's blessing to those who trust Him. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26:3). When the peace of God fills the hearts of the believers, they in turn become peacemakers.

It is necessary for us to have the right understanding of what peace is all about in the light of what Jesus said in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

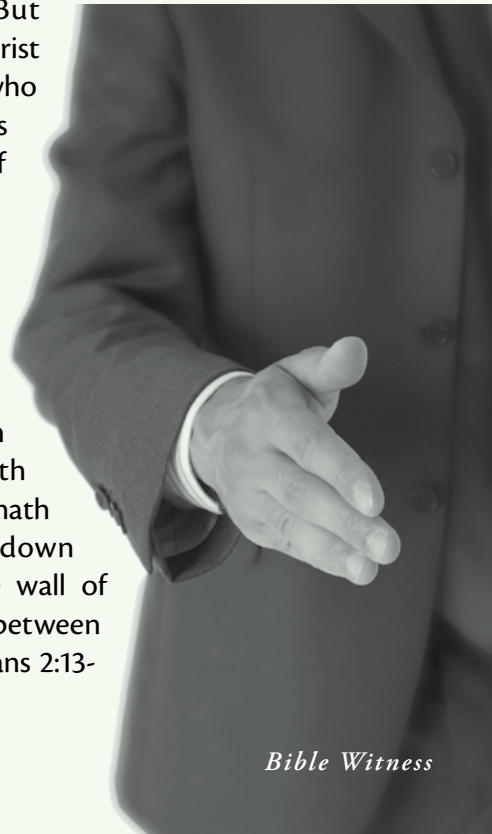
In the Bible, peace does not mean the absence of conflict in our lives. Peace does not exclude the presence of troubles. It does not mean that others will agree to live in peace with us. In fact, many will take offence at Christian beliefs and practices, and will choose to live in antagonism to such teachings. With such a reality, we may never be able to enjoy a peaceful environment even though we long for it. Often our uncompromising defence of God's truth has caused us to be falsely charged as troublemakers so that they might find justification for their hatred for the truth and its proponents.

God's peace is not the result of compromise with or acceptance of sin and falsehood. James, explaining the nature of divine peace, wrote: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable" (James 3:17). The biblical way to peace is through purity. The Psalmist declares, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10). Biblically, there can be no true peace where truth and righteousness are compromised.

True peace is only possible through the Prince of Peace, Christ the Saviour. If we follow the Lord and His truth, whatever may be the problems surrounding us, we will have the peace of God. In the Bible, peace involves a right relationship with God and a righteous relationship with those around us.

We can be peacemakers only because God has made peace with us through Christ Jesus. In Colossians 1:19-20, Paul explains this truth, "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself." Through His death, Christ appeased God's wrath against us, and thus making peace between God and us. It is only because our sins are dealt with on the cross, and Christ's righteousness was imputed on us that we can experience the peace of

God. "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Ephesians 2:13-14).



God first made peace with us; in so doing, He turns us into peacemakers and sends us out to make peace with others. How do we go about accomplishing this?

By spreading out the Gospel of peace from God

We act as peacemakers when we preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are messengers of the Gospel peace. Only Christians can be true peacemakers. Without the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no true peace. When we preach the Gospel, we are exhorting people to trust Jesus, to be reconciled to God or to be at peace with God. Gospel preaching is then peacemaking.

Paul says, “God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). To preach Christ is to promote peace. Bringing a person to Christ is the greatest peacemaking act that one can do here on earth. It is a greater job than that of the diplomats and politicians who are trying to avert war.

It means that it is our responsibility to bring the Gospel to our friends at school, our neighbours and our workmates. We need to tell them about the peace we have found with God. We need to tell them their need to be reconciled to God. We need to invite them to visit the church or to come to a Bible study or Gospel rally. We must pray for them that God would work in their hearts and bring them to salvation and peace with Him.

By living out the Gospel of reconciliation with all men

We act as peacemakers when we try to live peaceably with all men. The Apostle Paul exhorts us in Romans 12:18 that “if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live

peaceably with all men.” In other words, we must not be quarrelsome. When offences or troubles occur, we must try our best to resolve the problems and be at peace with everyone. Christians should not be indifferent to let troubles continue. If efforts are made to bring peace, and they are rejected, then we are not at fault.

We must always try our best to make peace in accordance with God’s truth and righteousness. Jesus said, “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matthew 5:23-24). As peacemakers, we must be quick to forgive others who hurt us, or seek forgiveness from those whom we have hurt that we may be quickly reconciled. It is not at all God’s desire that we become embittered against one another when offences come. The Lord wants us to be a peace-loving people and peacemakers, wherever possible. So He exhorts us to be reconciled as soon as any conflict arises. The Apostle Paul wrote to exhort the Thessalonians, “And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thessalonians 5:13). He also wrote to the Ephesians that they might be “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3).

Another passage is Hebrews 12:14-15 which exhorts us to “follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.”

In like manner, James wrote, “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them

that make peace” (3:18). When we encourage and help others by our exhortation and example to live peaceably, we also promote righteousness. Where there is peace, there is righteous living. Where there is righteous living, there is peace. We must always be promoters of peace.

By voicing out the Gospel of repentance

In seeking to be at peace with one another, especially with those who offend us, we must first of all call such to repentance that they might be restored to God and us. Jesus said, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Matthew 18:15-17). If we know there is falsehood and sin, we are not to keep silence. But when we deal with sin and error in this manner, it might stir up controversy and unhappiness. No matter how difficult a task it may be, we must deal with sin, if we are to bring true peace. This is the way that the Lord shows us to maintain true peace. If we reject this pattern, instead of promoting the peace of God, we would end up calling a truce with sin.

It is also important that we have the right attitude if we are to be peacemakers. We must not be proud and self-assertive, but loving, kind and godly. Even though we have all these virtues, true peacemakers may still

be branded as quarrelsome people because of their firmness in the truth and righteousness. Let us not forget that the Prince of Peace Himself was accused of causing trouble and disharmony!

Conclusion

The Lord said that peacemakers “shall be called the children of God”. Peacemaking is the hallmark of God’s children. Those who are not peacemakers are either unbelievers or disobedient children of God. Anyone who is schismatic, disruptive and quarrelsome against the truth and righteousness of God has a good reason to worry about his relationship with God.

But those who have experienced God’s peace, and live to spread that peace in the world shall be embraced by the Father as His dear children. They may be hated and persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for this world will reject them (cf. Matthew 5:10-12). However, the love of God for them shall never diminish.

This world may spurn every sincere peacemaking attempt of God’s children and persecute them. But God shall honour them even through all eternity as “they shall be called the children of God”. They shall be known as children of God not only in this world but also in eternity.

Have you come to receive the peace of God in Christ Jesus? If not, trust in Jesus now that you may be at peace with God. Then go on to preach that peace to others that they may also receive His peace. Finally, live in peace ... and be at peace!

THE PERSECUTED

Towards the end of the Beatitudes, Jesus said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12).

Here, we probably have the most astonishing of all the Beatitudes. Jesus says that a life that suffers persecution for righteousness' sake is a blessed life. Jesus repeated this truth in the text for added emphasis. Yet, it is contrary to people's general notion concerning a blessed life.

Just like all other virtues which Jesus mentioned in the Beatitudes, suffering persecution is also an integral experience of a blessed man. Every child of God's kingdom shall experience some form of suffering while he is on earth.

Jesus has affirmed again and again that Christians are going to suffer hatred and persecution. In John 15:18-19, He said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye

were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." In Matthew 10:22, Jesus said, "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."

Likewise, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). When we live in the righteousness of Christ, the world will find us strange and offensive because our lives have been a rebuke to their unholy lives. To live for Christ is to live in opposition to

the world and Satan. Righteousness is confrontational, whether it be preached or practised; and it provokes those who love sin.

The righteous, no matter how humble, meek and peaceful he may be, will find himself being hated by the world. Thus, persecution in turn becomes the sure evidence of his salvation and godliness. The Apostle Paul wrote,

"And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God" (Philippians 1:28).



Suffering persecution is a normal experience for a Christian. Persecution marks out men who have been blessed by God to live an uncompromising, courageous life for Him. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Philippians 1:29). If we do not face any ridicule, criticism, or rejection because of our faith and holy living, we have reason to examine the genuineness of our faith.

Even though we live in a tolerant society, the Christ-haters will find ways to trouble us. There are three kinds of persecution which Christ's righteous ones may face.

Abusive actions

Firstly, persecution can come as verbal insults. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you." The Greek word translated "revile" means "upbraiding, insulting, or abusing with words". Our Lord Jesus was insulted by the Jews who took Him to Pilate. They spat upon Him and taunted Him with their words. We read in Matthew 26:67-68, "Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?"

Your faithfulness to Christ may cause even your own parents, siblings and friends to say things that cut and hurt deeply. They may ridicule your commitment to live a holy life. They will also try to provoke you with unkind and cruel words.

Jesus told the followers how the Jews reviled John the Baptist - "For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil" (Luke 7:33). Then He reminded them how the Jews insulted Him, "The Son of man is come eating and

drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" (Luke 7:34).

If the world dared to revile John the Baptist and Jesus, how much more will it dare to revile us. So Jesus told the followers, "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" (Matthew 10:25).

Atrocious assaults

Secondly, persecution can come upon us as physical violence. Three times the word "persecute" appears in the text. This word is indicative of both verbal and physical attacks unleashed against God's saints.

Let us see how the apostles and the early Christians were physically abused.

Acts 5:40 records, "When they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go."

Acts 8:1 reports, "And Saul was consenting unto his (Stephen's) death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles." Because of the prevailing violence, Christians had to give up their homes and lands, and travel to new locations to avoid persecution and death. In his letter to the Corinthians describing the great pains that the apostles had suffered to spread the Gospel, Paul wrote: "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We

are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day" (1 Corinthians 4:9-13).

Paul related more of his experience of persecution and affliction in 2 Corinthians 4:8-12: "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. So then death worketh in us, but life in you."

Today, most Christians seem to be preoccupied with seeking more comfort and pleasure of this world. In these days, churches and Christians are sacrificing truth and righteousness for their acceptance by the world. They seem to be in a determinate mood to please the world. When the world is pleased with the church and does not persecute the Christians, especially because of its compromise with worldliness, we can be sure God is not pleased with the church at all. To be at peace with the world by sacrificing truth and righteousness is not at all a blessed life.

Arbitrary allegations

Thirdly, persecution also means being falsely accused. Jesus said, "Blessed are ye, when men . . . shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16).



Jesus forewarned us in Mark 13:9, "But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them." Luke, the evangelist, also reported Jesus as saying, "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake" (Luke 6:22).

Slander behind our backs is another form of violence. There is nothing more hurting to a righteous child of God than a bad reputation. But he can take comfort that accusations

against him that are false will not affect his righteousness before God.

Conclusion

Persecution is a blessing because it confirms our salvation, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". It grants us the joy of greater eternal rewards: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." It joins us to the godly prophets of old - "for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

When this world hates us, we know we are not of this world. When this world persecutes us, we know that we are following our Master whom they have crucified. Truly, blessed are the persecuted!



"Methinks a believer would be ashamed to be so utterly unlike his Lord. What! the master always a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief, and the servant always happy and full of comfort! Jesus despised, reproached, neglected, opposed, and betrayed, and His people admired and caressed; He living in the want of all things, and they filled with abundance; He sweating blood for anguish, and they strangers to distress! How unsuitable would these things be! How much better to be called to the honour of experiencing a measure of His sufferings! A cup was put into His hand on our account, and His love engaged Him to drink it for us. The wrath which it contained He drank wholly Himself; but He left us a little affliction to taste, that we might pledge Him, and remember how He loved us, and how much more He endured for us than He will ever call us to endure for Him."

John Newton



BIBLE TRIVIA - GENESIS 44 & 45

Sarah Yong

READ THE BIBLE PASSAGE THEN CIRCLE THE CORRECT ANSWER IN EACH BRACKET.

Joseph commanded his steward to fill his brothers' (sacks , bags) with food as well as to put every man's (money , jewels) in his sack's mouth. He also instructed that his silver (cup , plate) be placed in the sack's mouth of the (youngest , eldest) brother.

After they had left the city, Joseph's (soldier , steward) overtook them. He searched their sacks and found the (gold , silver) cup in Benjamin's sack. The brothers returned to the (city , country), came to Joseph's house and (fell , stood) before him. Joseph ordered that the person, in whose (bag , hand) the cup was found, become his servant. Judah entreated Joseph that their (mother , father) would be grieved and full of (sorrow , pity) if Benjamin did not return. He offered himself as a (bondman , ransom) and requested that the lad be freed.

Then (Jacob, Joseph) could not refrain himself, so he ordered all his servants to leave then he (laughed , wept) aloud and made himself known. He believed that God had sent him (before , after) them to preserve their (lives , property). He instructed his brothers to tell their father of all they had (seen , heard), and to make haste and come with their families and cattle to the land of (Egypt , Canaan).

At first, Jacob's heart (fainted , rejoiced) when he heard of all that had happened. But when he saw the (wagons, chariots) that Joseph had sent his spirit revived and he decided to go to see him.

Answers to Vol. 9, Issue 1 - Bible Trivia - Genesis 43

p. 21 - famine, corn, surety, present, honey, mercy, money, Benjamin, ruler, afraid, Peace, fear, treasure, Simeon, water, asses, bowed, welfare, health, obeisance, gracious, wept, marvelled, firstborn, youngest, five.

Giving to Missions

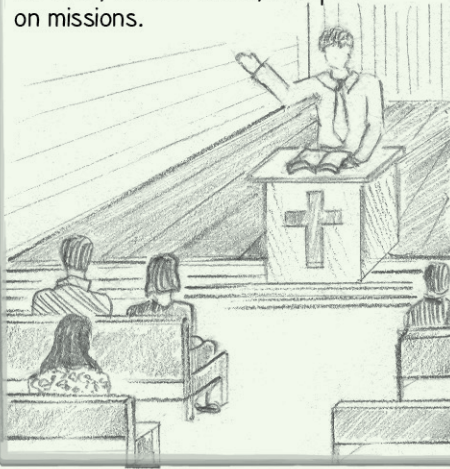
A real incident from the life of
Jonathan Goforth,
a Canadian missionary to China.

Bibliography: "Goforth of China" by Rosalind Goforth.
The stories are retold by Sis Ruth Low.
Illustrations by Sis Meilanie.

Jonathan Goforth was a man who was very enthusiastic about foreign missions. He had a heart to share the Gospel with people from other countries.



One Sunday, Goforth preached a sermon, and as usual, he spoke on missions.



The next morning, while Goforth was on a train, a man asked if he could share his seat. Goforth agreed...



The man said, 'Sir, I heard your sermon yesterday. When I knew you were coming to speak on missions, I prepared 5 cents to give to the mission fund. I usually only give coppers for the weekly offering. Once you started speaking I wanted to give 10 cents. A while later, 25 cents. Before you were halfway through, I wished I had a dollar, and by the time you ended, I would have gladly given 5 dollars!'



A few months later, Goforth received a letter from this man's pastor.



The pastor said, "I believe you remember talking to one of my church members on the train the other time. That man has since sold a piece of property and given several hundred dollars to the foreign mission fund."

Goforth's preaching had indeed motivated the man to give more and more to missions. From 5 cents to several hundred dollars!

Children, do you have a passion for missions? Do you give to missions and influence others to do likewise?

If you have been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, he wants you to share His love and good news with those outside God's kingdom. We should also encourage others to do the same.



We must be fishers of men - to bring people to know Christ as their personal Saviour.

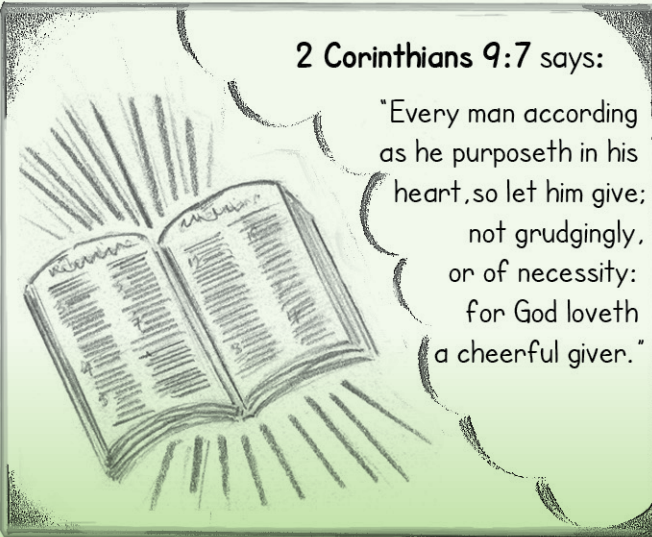


We can participate in missions by being missionaries ourselves, praying for missions, or giving money and gifts to missionaries.



2 Corinthians 9:7 says:

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."



Please pray for Bible Witness Media Ministry

Glory to the Lord

Prabhudas Koshy

Prabhudas Koshy

E^b E^b B^b F

1. The - Hol - y One of Is - ra - el, Our Re - deem -
 2. The - Cre - a - tor of e - v'ry thing, Our Bles - sed

B^b E^b E^b B^b F

er! The - Migh - ty God, Im - ma - nu - el, Our De - li
 Lord! The - Sov - 'reign God, the El - sha - ddai, Our 'ter - nal

B^b C^m G^m A^b E^b B^b7

vrer! We, Thy peo - ple come, with the songs of praise, Un - to Thy name
 God We, Thy chil - dren come, to ex - alt Thy name, A - bove all names,

B^b7 F^m B^b E^b E^b A^b F^m A^b

- full of truth and grace. Glo - ry to the Lord who for gives o - ur sin!
 - we Thy name pro - claim. Glo - ry to the Lord, who made us from the dust!

B^b7 G^m E^b F^m B^b E^b E^b F^m B^b E^b

Glo - ry to the Lord, who saves us from ru - in. saves us from ru - in.
 Glo - ry to the Lord, whose name we e - ver trust! name we e - ver trust!