

PREPARATION FOR THE ENDTIMES

THE KEYS TO

Living In

THE KINGDOM

Revealed in the Beatitudes

JOHN CORIN



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PREFACE

Writing this book has not been easy; shaping the text into a readable if somewhat prosaic treatise has taken more than ten years. Yet the main difficulty has been elsewhere; I have not been allowed to write without the subject becoming ‘flesh’ in my life and this has meant several ‘time-outs’ to wrestle with the issues brought to my attention. Even long recesses to apply the precepts it highlights.

‘Wisdom has built her house...hewn out seven pillars’ (Prov 9:1). Several options for what these seven pillars could be have been proposed. I, however, identify them with the pillars of wisdom the Beatitudes (seven of the eight ‘fit the bill’) provide to form the important foundation for the Sermon on the Mount’. The fundamental truths highlighted in the Beatitudes are what the tenets in this discourse all rest upon.

Now, I left the Beatitudes alone for many years, like others, afraid to tackle what these seven plus one ‘blessings’ could mean for believers today. I dismissed them either as too enigmatic, radical, or dangerous, certainly too difficult to apply in practice. (Some even teach the sermon was for the Jews and not for new covenant believers!) However, some ten years ago these Beatitudes were forcefully brought to my attention. I could not get them out of my mind (even if I wanted to) and

made not only to grapple with their meaning for today but also with the consequences of failing to embrace them.

By delivering this ‘Sermon on the Mount’, scholars point to it as an opportunity for Jesus to portray Himself as the new Moses—the promised prophet (Deut 18.15)—and give advance notice of the ‘laws’ to govern the soon-to-be-inaugurated Kingdom of God. The Beatitudes are the important preamble to the tenets of this new realm. That is, as the ‘Ten Commandments’ provide the prologue to the Mosaic Law, the ‘laws’ of this new spiritual Kingdom rest upon the precepts in these seven (plus one) ‘blessings’. Believers failing to embrace these fundamental principles disqualify themselves from enjoying the Kingdom’s life. By contrast, each Beatitude promises much to those willing to fulfill the conditions.

Though seemingly random, each ‘blessing’ inter-connects with the others to build the edifice of repentance; each a building block with the insight to walk in this biblical discipline. Together, offering sorely needed truth for the millions of believers today with only a vague idea about repentance after it went out of fashion as a sermon topic. But even when seen as still in force, it is mostly regarded as an easy stroll, and then, not very relevant. The Beatitudes prove otherwise to reveal it requires more than a simple understanding of repentance to enjoy the life of the Kingdom. Now, if you have difficulty accepting this link between repentance and the Beatitudes, please read through my book before making a final judgment. By then, I believe you will be persuaded the tenets in the Beatitudes are critical to enjoying Kingdom life. Walking in repentance is the key to enjoying its, *‘righteousness, peace and*

joy' (Rom 14.17). In the final chapter I point to why the last Beatitude is much different from the rest.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward...The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, There is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores.

Isa 1:4-6

Christendom, much as Israel is described in this text, in this twenty-first century is in trouble. Don't take my word for it; many insightful 'watchmen on the walls' and commentators have noticed this disturbing state of affairs. This includes ministers like Jack Hayford who spoke of it in alarming terms. If pastors are not going to jail for serious crimes such as pedastroy, embezzlement, murder, adultery, or some other egregious crime, those still in the pulpit are often overbearing and abusive. One preacher I saw was kicking people in the stomach to impart a (false) anointing, but have observed equally outrageous behavior, e.g., promoting offerings from people who are dismissed at the current feeble spiritual health within local churches and their members, yet there are commentators with other concerns. Some are more alarmed by the worldly strategies employed by local churches to attract and keep adherents; either the loud rhythmic and percussive music, the amusing skit, dance routine, or some other performance. Others

point to the danger of ministers becoming celebrities with large followings with some even attracting hero worship. Many now ‘perform’ to vast audiences addicted to extravagant and dramatic ‘ear-tickling’ preaching, ecstatic prophesying, or healing and deliverance by ‘miracle workers’. Add to this the numerous believers committing sins dishonoring God’s Name and bringing shame to His cause and it all points to a church in deep decline.

To witness the moral scandals and decline in the ‘camp’ where I belong—the charismatic or Pentecostal—has been especially disheartening. Especially when these novel changes in doctrine and practice are often ‘modernizations’ undermining the ‘*decency and order*’ (1Cor 14.40) ordained for the church. Some of them, seriously damaging its calling to be the ‘*pillar and ground of truth*’ (1Tim 3.15). The adulteration of values and beliefs has certainly left in its wake numerous believers now with spiritual ‘maladies’, some with ‘cancers’ threatening their eternal destiny. I sometimes wonder if the church will ever recover from this; indeed, if it does, I suspect it will necessitate a severe pruning of the ‘*true vine*’ (Jhn 15.1ff). A radical but necessary solution if the Lord is to have the ‘*assemblies on Mt Zion*’ (Is 4.5) overseen by shepherds with, ‘*integrity and skill*’ (Ps 78.72).

Some of this debasement of the faith ‘*once delivered to the saints*’ (Jude 3) has been observed from a distance and some at close quarters. The unhealthy, even pathological ‘discipleship shepherding’ movement of the ’60s was one I observed firsthand after a group subscribing to this heresy joined the church where I fellowshiped for a short period. Now, the

worst excesses of this teaching could not be blamed on the ‘five’ ministries, yet it spawned numerous examples of non-biblical control over the ‘sheep’. I also witnessed close up the ‘hyper-faith’ movement with its radical teaching on ‘confession’ and ‘standing on the word’ (‘blab it and grab it’ in colloquial terms). Plus, I served alongside ministers who embraced the ‘egalitarian’ interpretation of the authority of women in the church; only to see this ‘feminist’ reaction to divine order create confusion.

Another alarming trend witnessed was the ‘health and wealth gospel’; only to see its followers often infected with carnal greed and an inordinate desire for riches. And before retiring from ministry, I was a member of a church that embraced the ‘Toronto Blessing’. Suffice it to say, what I witnessed was dubious, a mixture at best and at worst, demonic. It fell far short of the authentic divine visitation enjoyed by the assembly I attended more than fifty years ago. These threats (some more than others) have injured not only the health of the church but aided in the ungodly regarding the church. ~~Some of these changes~~ Some of these changes to doctrine and praxis have been less radical, yet still troubling. One example is making the corporate gathering a ‘spectator sport’, i.e., an entertaining ‘concert’ with loud, amplified percussive music, strobing lights, and smoke machines. This plus the platform singers dominating the corporate singing experience so the congregants tune out the clamor to passively watch the ‘performance’. Add the trend to sing overly rhythmic egocentric choruses to percussive music catering more to the soul, and this has all but sidelined true ‘worship in spirit’, the prophetic song of the Lord, and vocal gifts of the Holy Spirit. On top of all that, we have a plethora of pulpits peddling warm and

fuzzy ‘lifestyle preaching’ on attaining success, fulfilling a personal ‘dream’, and ‘achieving a destiny’. This feel-good pap and other topics has left little room for the ‘preaching of the Cross’ and the call to pursue holiness.

The current reliance on psychology and ‘psychobabble’ to provide counsel for troubled souls is yet another sign of decline; as in other fields of ministry, brass shields have been substituted for gold ones (See 1Kgs 14.27). Another concern is the current fondness of ministers to seek academic awards to gain recognition. Now, I am not against advanced studies of scripture (I taught in such institutions) but when this trend fosters carnal pride and dependence on the ‘arm of flesh’, it is a dangerous trap. Yet, as much as these signs of decline are a worry, my unease has more to do with the low spiritual life evident in so many believers, even those supposedly consecrated to the Lord. This and the insipid pursuit of holiness—another trend—now has a growing number of believers exhibiting lifestyles anything but devoted to intimacy with the Lord.

Not only do believers exhibit behavior dishonoring to God, many also hold beliefs unfaithful to biblical truth, another sign of a token adherence to the faith. And rather than live as true disciples, believers now are adopting lifestyles of the world; either slavishly following its fashions or watching its immoral and violent entertainment when glued to the TV or the internet. Since Constantine made it ‘easy’ to be a Christian, the church has always had a ‘mixed multitude’, but this debasement in standards has snowballed to see many with priorities far from the mandate to *‘set your mind on things above NOT on things*

of this earth’ (Col 3.2). Often chasing temporal success, be it fame, fortune, or happiness; seeking the reward of *‘all things’* before *‘seek(ing) first the ‘Kingdom of God’* (Mt 6.33).

The deterioration has now reached the point where dishonesty and lack of integrity are epidemic among believers. So bad, some refuse to employ other believers for trade services because the ungodly are more trustworthy. To know the number of *‘christians’* cheating on paying taxes, their wives, or business partners would be an eye-opener. Add all this up, and the failures in behavior and doctrine (many not mentioned) strongly point to the time when the *‘love of many will grow cold’* (Mt 24.12) and it to find *‘faith’* (Lk 18.8) on the earth an open question. A scenario much closer than many imagine is occurring. More over, this is coming for ease, acceptance, and popularity has believers opting to please themselves rather than, *‘deny self-daily and take up their cross’* (Lk 9.23). Too many pursue the comforts of an affluent lifestyle, as crucifying the *‘flesh’* is seen as too *‘legalistic’* and living sacrificial, consecrated lives is not exciting. Instead, the *‘pleasures of sin’* (Heb 11.25), the *‘deceitfulness of riches’* (Matt 13.22), and *‘things of this world’* (1Jhn 2.15) are sought. As to suffering *‘for righteousness sake’* (1Pet 3.14), this is far from the minds of many.

The possibility of discomfort, deprivation, or boredom in this new century sees the children of God behave more like Esau who, *‘sold his birthright’ for a ‘mess of pottage’* (Heb 12.16). An epidemic of backsliding into apathy and indifference to *‘heavenly things’* that has more than a few going further—either into unbelief or apostasy. Also hard to miss is the large swathe of believers still bound by habits and lusts of the flesh even many

years after ‘conversion’. If it’s not bondage to a serious sin, it is the inability to gain victory over cravings for food, entertainment, and excitement; often in the lust for sexual voyeurism, or an addiction to cigarettes, alcohol, and illicit drugs.

However, the more telling evidence of an unhealthy church is the number failing to maintain the spiritual disciplines of a follower of Christ. The widespread lapse in regular prayer, praise, reading, and study of the bible—all vital to pursuing a righteous life—is nothing short of alarming. This becomes a staggering number when those failing to regularly ‘*assemble together*’ (Heb 10.25) even in an informal ‘house fellowship’ get added. The number of ‘unchurched’ believers may, in fact, exceed the ‘churched’. Overall, in choosing to ‘go with the flow’ of the world, many are forgetting to be ‘*faithful in all things*’ (1Tim 3.11).

Summing up: too often, the difference between the conduct of the ungodly and many who claim to be ‘born again’ is negligible. To find a believer walking the pathway of separation from the world with a radically different lifestyle is rare. That is, a life so exceptional and distinctive it glorifies ‘*the Father in heaven*’ (Matt 5.16). The sad truth in all of this is many will only realize their poverty of spirit and lack of intimate knowledge of Christ on the day of reckoning when they hear, ‘*I never knew you*’ (Matt 7.23). Rejected because they failed to live a dedicated, holy life. To imagine a ‘nod to God’ rather than what is required of a disciple will not be punished is more than naive.

This decline in spiritual life has seen believers leave the historic churches in droves, at least in developed nations; every week, members walk out church doors refusing to endure the scarcity of spiritual life or the ‘shenanigans’ they witness. Seeing it as the only option to find genuine fellowship and experience ‘Kingdom life’, many go ‘outside the camp’ to gather in home fellowships or other unconventional gatherings. The more disillusioned choose to remain ‘un-churched’ even as they continue to live dedicated to the Lord. Not an ideal scenario, but they say better than the mess left behind.

I realize this cataloging of failures and errors is more than some like; it is unedifying, discouraging, and even depressing. But I purposely have spent this chapter identifying the ‘symptoms’ of a sick church to highlight a prescribed remedy—one far more edifying! Indeed, what I recommend to cure the patient will be heartening, hopefully, helping many to experience fresh life in the Kingdom of God. Now, is there a simple cure for this ‘sickness’ in the body of Christ, e.g., a course of ‘vitamins and supplements? Most ‘watchers’ concerned about this decline in faith don’t believe so. They see much stronger medicine is required if God’s purposes for the church are to be fulfilled before the end of this age, even surgery to cut off ‘*the branches not bearing fruit*’ (Jhn 15.2). I see it requiring surgery, medicinal treatment, and extensive rehabilitation to correct the symptoms the ‘patient’ presents—the full gamut of remedial attention.

With too many believers hanging on to falsehoods from humanistic understanding and demonic deception (new age beliefs in particular), it certainly calls for a return to biblical teaching.

Truth rectifies wrong mindsets, warped worldviews, and false beliefs, even when deeply entrenched and in grave error. But more than the false beliefs need correcting, a push to rectify the ‘soulish’ and worldly practices (despite their popularity) polluting the ‘temple’ of God must also be on the agenda. If biblical structures, ministries, and the worship God desires are to be restored, it requires both approaches.

My twin grandsons were born three months premature (at 900g and 1200g) because of insufficient nourishment in the womb and this has impacted their health. Numerous ‘followers’ of Christ suffer a similar deficiency, one of truth, and others, due to a premature ‘new-birth’, struggle to live as true disciples of Christ. Now, I realize more factors play into these problems with ‘new born’ believers, including a lack of conviction of sin, delay in being water baptized, and not experiencing the ‘Baptism in the Spirit’ (the third leg in a disciple’s biblical foundation). But whatever the cause, many start their new life in Christ ‘handicapped’, some with severe ‘disabilities’. This is why my book highlights a critical element missing from the modern ‘gospel diet’. As ‘folate’ in the mother’s diet during pregnancy prevents ‘spina bifida’ (a serious outcome), I am convinced a major part of the solution to this sad reality is the remedy proposed in these pages.

I refer to the missing element of REPENTANCE. The biblical tenet virtually absent from all current evangelism and in the discipling of believers. What we have instead is a ‘gospel’ best characterized as ‘easy believe-ism’; where the message of salvation asks little of a sinner other than to ‘ask Jesus into their heart’. A travesty of the ‘good news’ the church

is commanded to preach to make disciples. This lack of the call for repentance (a wholehearted turning away from sin) has left the church a deficient gospel, and as a result, false ‘converts’.

Restoring the truth of repentance won’t remedy all the ills of Christendom, but it will increase the number truly ‘born again’ and growing in grace. After reading my book, I trust you will agree with the remedy; even more, heed the exhortation to live for Christ by embracing a daily walk in repentance.

Though reticent to labor the focus of this chapter, I am compelled to add this comment by a gospel preacher I received recently.

AMERICA - HARDER or EASIER for CHRISTIANS?

About a month ago during a time of great trial in my walk Jesus the Lord spoke to me about being a true follower of Him, not a nominal believer but a true follower. The word I heard was that America is the hardest place in the world to be a believer. This came as a shock to me, for I had often thought and commented on how easy we have it here. But what the Lord opened to me is how hard it is to walk with Him in this land of comfort. It is so easy to be distracted by the cares of this world in our nation, in fact so easy, we have created our own American doctrine to make us feel better about a land of comfort. Jesus, Jesus, every meal it’s far easier to trust Him, and if meeting with a body of believers puts your life at risk, commitment would be easier. Let’s face it - we have built a “what’s in it for me” doctrine to fill our buildings and programs. What’s amazing is that we even believe that God has blessed us with all these distractions. We’re even taught to pray for them. After all, surely God wants us all to be rich

and happy. This very notion causes us to max out credit cards and other credit, so we can look the part. Even our churches fall for the “bigger-newer-nicer” lie! If we go back to the basic Gospel we can’t teach the American doctrine because the words of Christ dispel it completely. Even when Jesus gave us a model of how to pray He taught us to be dependent upon Him. “Give us this day our daily bread” is a simple request, isn’t it? Can you find a prayer for riches or possessions in it? Think about this - how can the Lord provide our daily bread when our cabinets, ice boxes, and freezers are full? Do you get the point?

Being a follower of Christ is almost impossible in our nation. So many of the things we say God blessed us with are distractions given to us by our adversary the devil designed to turn us away from Jesus. This is why we don’t see the power of God in our life, we simply don’t need it, or, in fact, want it. It would mean an end to our way of life and sure death to the American doctrine of feel-good religion—a bloodless, powerless conviction-less, and (last but not least) God-less faith.

The condition of the body today is sickening. We can’t even call sin “sin” anymore. I am ashamed of myself and other leaders who have let our walk slide so far. Starting with me I repent for the half-hearted service to the Lord and struggling with sin that should be put away. Help me Lord to walk worthy of your calling. In the last few days I have seen men that once walked with Jesus struggle with the world and struggle over issues that should not even be a consideration for a true follower of Christ. God help us to return to you with a pure heart, break us Lord, open our hearts to you.

In the next few days, we will be conducting prayer and repentance meetings through our network of churches and house churches as well as out in the public arena... We must repent and cry out to God for our nation. We have slept long enough.

DARREN SMITH

CHAPTER 2

A FULL GOSPEL

But even if we...preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

Gal 1.8

Changing the gospel entrusted to the church to preach and teach alters the only message that can save both sinner and saint. Rendering the ‘good news’ powerless (at some level) to convict of sin, change the mind of the rebellious, and engender faith in the Savior. And when the gospel is the ‘*power of God unto salvation*’ (Rom 1.16), putting in jeopardy believers enjoying the installments of salvation. Confirming propagators of a false message deserve the judgment called for in the verse.

AN ADULTERATED GOSPEL

‘Stand...in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled...with a yoke of bondage.’ (Gal 5:1)

Adding ‘legalism’ was the prevailing corruption of the gospel in the first century. But this adding of ‘dead works’ by the ‘Judaizers’ diminished faith as the real ‘*work*’ (Jhn 6.29), both for sinners to be converted and saints to ‘*live by*’ (Rom 1.17). It saw believers thereafter struggle with these legalistic requirements and, hence, the denouncement of those robbing the church of its freedom in the new covenant in verse above. At this end of the age, the opposite is true; the gospel has been stripped of the truth of repentance to make it less demanding. Only to leave the church with a novel ‘low fat’ gospel where the sinner is offered salvation as a ‘free gift’ merely by ‘asking

Jesus into their heart'. A travesty of the apostolic gospel when salvation has the two requirements of repentance and faith; both for the conversion of sinners and the ongoing salvation of believers. The harm from this should surprise no one.

‘For men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny...our Lord Jesus Christ.’ (Jude 1:4) Pulpits now emphasize grace, but often it is a caricature, stretching grace beyond its biblical meaning. Especially when it omits repentance from sin as a requirement for the ‘new birth’ and the path to holiness. This adulteration now has many believing it is no longer even necessary to, ‘*keep the commandments*’ (Jhn 14.15,21) of the new covenant. A dangerous change, for in one swoop it omits the need to shun sin and worldliness and the imperative to pursue holiness. Indeed, some preach all ‘legalistic’ constraints are gone as believers are to enjoy the ‘liberty’ grace offers; yet, what is promoted is not ‘liberty’ but freedom bordering on license—often ~~indeed the the goal is to make men to look happy~~ (2Tim 4.3) of believers with topics like realizing the ‘American Dream’ or another worldly aspiration; a friend even told of hearing a sermon on how to profit from the stock market! Or it is the false notion a simple request for forgiveness is the only requirement for Heaven to pardon sin. Some say this is even unnecessary as grace has made it or any other prerequisite moot. No wonder religion today has a lax attitude to sin and much of what displeases the Lord, with more and more believers subscribing to the ungodly maxim of ‘even if permission is not granted, forgiveness is’—a travesty of biblical truth.

When *'false brethren'* (Gal 2.4). change the grace of God (i.e., favor or imparted strength that is not deserved) into what is none other than 'greasy grace', the phrase *'turn the grace of God into lewdness'* (Jude 1.4) perfectly describes them. (The greek for 'turn' means to 'change into something different from its true intent'.) Minimizing the imperative to shun sin is to pour gasoline on the sin of presumption (Num 15.30), lighting a fire to see many get burnt. The grace of God is to be cherished, not a gift to be taken for granted. Taking liberties with it inevitably breeds the mindset of presuming upon Heaven's mercy, a slippery slope ending, more often than not, in 'antinomianism' (living without law) (Rom 6.1,15). The error Paul also addressed when reminding the Corinthian church of what Israel suffered by 'overly testing' (1Cor 10.9) the grace of God. In other words, warning of the judgment sins of presumption can incur.

A 'FULL GOSPEL'

'For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God' (Act 20:27). The gospel, *'once delivered to the saints.'* (Jude 1.3) is the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died on the Cross and rose again to secure atonement for the sins of humanity. (1Cor 15.1ff) This alone offers forgiveness for sin to 'whosoever will' receive salvation as a gift—except this gift is not 'free'. Like any other requiring the recipient to reach out to take it, this gift has conditions attached. The foremost is a sinner must not try to earn it by offering 'works'; forgiveness and justification in God's sight are based in the efficacy of the blood of the Savior. However, to accept only this truth is not sufficient; the sinner has other

conditions to meet to receive what Christ purchased on Calvary. Even the requirement for faith is not the ‘full gospel’. To have the ‘*whole counsel of God*’ (Acts 20.27), both sinner and saint must know other truths, but before detailing them, let me make this clear. Fulfilling any other requirement does not earn salvation, it simply makes the sinner ELIGIBLE. By way of illustration: to join the elite Royal Grenadier guards of England a man must be a certain minimum height, but in meeting this requirement the applicant has not earned the role—his height simply qualified him for it. Let’s, then, look at what it takes to qualify for salvation.

THE REQUIREMENTS

‘Testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.’ (Act 20:21) ‘To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those... sanctified by faith in Me.’ (Act 26:18) These texts spell out the two basic requirements for salvation—the first is repentance and the second is faith—one without the other is insufficient.

With the imperative for both to be in place for genuine conversion, it is regrettable to see an emphasis almost solely on the second requirement. A stress on faith many say is justified by the 16th-century catchphrase of ‘sola fide’ (faith alone). But this reformation slogan had words added—these, ‘but faith is never alone. Works are necessary to faith’—and this has surely been at the expense of the other; hence this defective gospel of ‘easy-believism’. Granted, it is not sufficient to preach repentance only, but this has never been a problem as far as I can tell. The bottom line: for divine balance, Heaven has prescribed repentance as the

step of turning away from Satan and sin, and faith as the step of turning toward the Lord. In other words, to preserve both requirements, the willingness to turn from 'sin' must accompany faith in Christ. Indeed, the readiness to change direction helps facilitate faith, and tinkering with this gives the dubious results seen today.

THE FIRST WORD OF THE GOSPEL

'When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.' (Mar 2:17) *'And he went into the entire region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.'* (Lk 3:3) *'So they went out and preached that people should repent.'* (Mar 6:12) *'And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'* (Luk 24:47) *'Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'* (Acts 2:38) *'Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.'* (Acts 3:19) *'Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.'* (Acts 17:30) *'Leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.'* (Heb 6:1)

This comprehensive list confirms the first word of the gospel is the call to repentance. The sinner challenged to

believe in Jesus Christ must also be faced with the mandate to turn from sin. In fact, the willingness to repent releases the grace to trust, rely on, and adhere to Christ. Faith from above must undergird any natural capacity the sinner may have to believe in Christ, and this is given in response to obeying the call to repent. Reversing the order only creates a problem with faith. Now, sinners reject the gospel mainly because they, *'love darkness rather than light'* (Jhn 3.19), yet many claim it is something else. Some say they are unable to have faith in Christ even if they want to, but this is false as the real problem is usually an unwillingness to turn from sin, not a lack of faith. The struggle to believe is due to underlying rebellion. Others claim their 'unbelief' is due to an intellectual problem, perhaps an unanswered question, but this also is often not as they say but a moral problem. They too find it unpalatable to turn from a life of sin. All this should not be a surprise when the unregenerate heart is an *'enemy of God'* (Rom 8.7), in revolt against His lordship. The bottom line: grace from above makes possible faith in Christ, but Heaven grants this 'undeserved favor' to those willing to turn from rebellion.

WHAT IS TRUE REPENTANCE?

Not only has the call to repent been stripped from the gospel but its meaning is not made clear when it is included. I once asked an official in a worldwide evangelistic association why the gospel message they preached did not include repentance and was told, "Oh, we don't need to specifically mention that, it is just part of faith". This lax understanding of the role repentance plays in conversion and how it is distinct from faith is, *woeful*. *If you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner...*

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.’ (2Cor 7:9, 10) The KJV bible translates two greek words in the N.T. with only the one english word ‘repent’. But the first of these words means to regret actions (what Judas did (Mt 27.3), and is called ‘worldly sorrow’ in the text above. The second greek word, ‘*Metanoeo*’ (Str3340), conveys true repentance and has the basic meaning, ‘to think differently or afterwards’, or ‘reconsider’ (morally to feel compunction). Thayer’s lexicon defines it as ‘to change one’s mind for the better, and to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins’. Vines (Dictionary) says it is ‘to perceive afterward, to change one’s mind or purpose, always invoking a change for the better’. Repentance, then, has two major aspects; the ‘change of mind’ first, and second, the ‘outward changes’ from rethinking. When actions are to demonstrate the change in thinking, the ‘act of repentance’ and the ‘fruits of repentance’ (Matt 3.8) must be evident for true conversion.

In other words, unless there are changes in both directions—away from sin and towards God—conversion as the bible reveals has not occurred. Now, those with a profound ‘born again’ experience often testify to radical changes from the start. But as a rule, wholesale change at the beginning is not what God expects; He recognizes people usually turn from their old lifestyle and conduct as their heart is renewed over time. Nevertheless, basic ‘fruits of repentance’ should be evident at the beginning to demonstrate a genuine decision was made to be a disciple of Christ. The minimum ‘fruit’ for the repentant convert is their willingness to be baptized in water; it

is the ideal test to prove the commitment to leave the old life behind to follow Christ is genuine.

‘Worldly sorrow’, by contrast, never leads to the changes of true conversion. Incomplete or phony repentance can result in new behaviors but not necessarily praiseworthy ones. For instance, it can make a person more careful about repeating the sin or crime, even devious in covering it up. Besides, changes for the better are usually short-lived; to turn from *‘useless things to the living God’* (Acts 14.15) takes true, godly sorrow. Repentance, then, is best understood when the evangelist R. A. Torrey defined it as, ‘such a sorrow for sin, such abhorrence for sin, such a change of mind about sin...it leads sinners to turn away from sin with all their hearts.’ Fake repentance, then, is often the reason converts’ show no or little evidence of genuine change. Even why they continue to struggle to grow in the Lord and remain ‘infantile’ with all the problems of infants, with **GODLY SORROW WILL LEAD TO A CHANGE OF HEART**

What other changes should result from true repentance? First off, a new set of biblical beliefs to replace innate worldviews and mindsets. Corrections only realized over a lifetime as humanistic philosophical frameworks, false concepts, and mental constructs are replaced by the ‘mind of Christ’. (Hasty changes are often superficial and limited.) Alterations so godly motivations and goals essential for the transformation of behavior are also imbibed.

A CHANGE OF ALLEGIANCE

‘For they declare...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.’ (1Thes 1:9) The sinner’s loyalty before

conversion is usually to their family, nation, and perhaps a sports club or similar entity. More often it is to themselves if they are honest. Yet, the allegiance of a sinner not ‘serving the living God’, is really to the kingdom of darkness; they serve the devil and the ‘idols’ of this world his kingdom empowers. A core outcome of repentance, then is a change in allegiance so the convert willingly submits to the ‘Lord of all’—an impossible ask if prior allegiances are not renounced. Repentance is when old masters are disowned and fidelity given to a new ‘Lord’.

‘Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.’ (Rom 8:7) This change in allegiance includes forsaking rebellion to the ‘*ways and thoughts*’ (Is 55.9) of Heaven; now the convert chooses the Kingdom’s precepts of righteousness over those of the world. By being ‘*obedient to the faith*’ (Rom 1.5), it also means the convert is obligated to turn from a life of independence and willful self-pleasing (‘doing it my way’) to submit to the will of God. The bottom line: the sinner is not only called to take Christ as Savior (the popular offer) but also make Him also their ‘Lord’. And lest any be mistaken, ‘Lord’ in scripture means ‘master’ or ‘sovereign ruler’.

Of course, relinquishing self-autonomy so Christ is the master is a work in progress as the convert learns to obey His commands and comply with His wishes. Repentance is not a short dash but an ongoing walk over many years, hopefully, reaching a level of consecration where His approval is eventually sought even on habits and buying behavior. ‘If Christ is NOT Lord of all, then He is NOT Lord at all’.

A CHANGE OF BELIEF

'But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.' (Heb 11:6) The changes in thinking must include a newfound belief about God; atheistic or agnostic positions must give way to *'believe He is'* i.e., He exists. But much more must change as the convert discovers the truths of the bible. The understanding is darkened before conversion, (Eph 4:18) and any knowledge of God is usually inaccurate, humanistic, even demonic. The distortions of His character and ways must be discarded (even if incrementally); especially any caricatures from worldly understanding or false philosophy. If God is to be given the honor, majesty, and worship due, He is to be beheld in all of His glory. ~~ALONG WITH NEW~~ **WHAT IS TRUSTED**

'This I...testify...that you should no longer walk as ...the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind.' (Eph 4:17) The human mind can be fickle; at times, its thoughts utterly futile. To realize these required changes, the believer must turn from their previous reliance on intellect and rational thought, even logic. Indeed, so prone is the mind to err, to trust in mental constructs, opinions, and viewpoints accrued before conversion is the height of arrogance. Wisdom' garnered from the world with its reliance on the intellect must, therefore, be held as suspect, and discarded when found to be at variance with the truths of scripture. Yet, to succeed in this quest of giving up every, *'way that seems right to a man but its end is the way of death'* (Prov 16:25), it is not only wise to embrace repentance but mandatory.

‘Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.’ (Prov 3:5) This dethroning of ‘humanistic’ understanding as the authority in deliberations and judgments is a critical outcome of conversion; otherwise embracing scripture as the touchstone of truth is a lost cause. But also vital for the convert to jettison all *‘arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God’* (2Cor 10.5). Now, this outcome is mainly realized as they continue to grow in faith and understanding of biblical truth, yet equally, as they also grow in humility. Unless there is the lowliness of mind to discard what was previously held dear and trustworthy, accepting divine truth is impossible.

Indeed, the believer must subscribe to the adage, ‘the more we know, the more we realize the less we understand’. Now a disciple of Christ is bound to do all He asks, (Cf. Jhn 2.5), and for the most part, this means responding to His words recorded in scripture, e.g., *‘take My yoke and learn of Me’* (Matt 11.29). Yet their response to biblical truth and any directive will boil down to the place the intellect and mind have in the disciple’s life—the deference given them. If rational thought and logic still reign supreme, this will be an uphill struggle. I am not, of course, suggesting ignoring these natural faculties; the text quoted above says not to, *‘lean on the understanding’* (Prov 3.5). The degree a believer relies on cognitive abilities is the issue. In their place, the mind and intellect can be most helpful, so I am not advocating discarding all rational thought. As long as full confidence is not in them, they can be dutiful servants; only, in any judgment or consideration, they are not the ultimate authority.

Believers differ in how they understand the bible and the truths they hold as sacrosanct. This renewal of mindsets and beliefs, therefore, is not a simple or quick process. To overcome the mind wanting to be carnal, proud, and logical to the detriment of *'the wisdom that is from above'* (Jam 3.17) is a lifelong battle. In fact, despite 'postmodernism' highlighting the need to move away from the Enlightenment's excessive worship of reason and logic, too many believers rely too much on the intellect and critical thinking in searching for truth. This doesn't mean I advocate mindless acceptance of what is promoted as the truth of scripture—I don't. Any doctrine advanced is to be tested (1Thes 5.21) to *'prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God'* (Rom 12.2), and this requires 'weighing' by both the mind and spiritual faculties. Interestingly, Israel had to conquer two kings to possess their inheritance, and these giants (Sihon and Og) both dwelt in cities with names meaning 'reason' and 'intelligence' (Josh 11.1; 12.2). Unless victorious over them, Israel couldn't possess them. As the principle holds for the church today, **BEHAVIORAL CHANGES** *'That you put on the new man which was created according to God in...righteousness and holiness.'* (Eph 4:24) What other 'fruits of repentance' should result from this renewal of the heart and mind? John the Baptist said the changes were to be behavioral, practical, and observable; hence, he told the soldiers, tax collectors, etc., to treat others with honesty, dignity, justice, and compassion (Lk 3.8-14). The more complete answer, however, is in the passage cataloging what is to 'put off' from the old life so the new can be 'put on' (Eph 4.22-29). Paul's list includes 'sins of the flesh' such as lying, immorality, stealing, and foul language,

sins most would agree must go; but he then adds unforgiveness, bitterness, hatred, jealousy, and malice, sins ‘of the heart’ able to grieve the Holy Spirit’ (Eph 4.30-32). Hence, both overt and covert sins are to be ‘put off’ for the believer to ‘walk worthy’ (Eph 4.1) of their calling—all while they ‘put on’ righteousness. (By the way, ‘putting on’ opposite attitudes and behaviors negates the ones ‘put off’.)

Now, when this ‘putting off’ the old life is a lengthy process, it calls for much patience; especially with the more entrenched sins ‘of the heart’. Besides these changes, the convert is obligated to make another important one—to ‘put on’ certain devotional habits. Something I realized, fortunately, soon after my conversion, so I made sure, therefore, the spiritual disciplines of prayer, praise, and reading the Bible were included in my daily schedule. A practice I observed in a devotional time specially set aside each morning. Those habits plus the study of scripture at other times and regular attendance at church services. I found all were necessary to maintain my new walk and way of thinking. The bottom line: each person has a unique testimony about the changes in their life after conversion and the order they occur. When these changes can take many years, what counts is the willingness to do this, not the time it takes.

FAITH IN CHRIST

‘That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.’ (Rom 10:9-10) This ‘gospel’ in vogue now has also

diluted the requirement to have faith in Christ for forgiveness and ‘justification’ before God. Rather than demanding too much, it has made it easier as the sinner now only has to believe ‘Jesus died for their sins’ (and ‘ask Him into your heart’). True, comply with the above text, but in reality, asked to subscribe to little more than what the ‘demons believe’ (Jam 2.19). This travesty of faith dictates its nature be explained.

‘So, they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”’ (Act 16:31) All agree faith is a requirement for salvation, but what sort of faith? Is it merely ‘believing Christ died for sin’ as this novel ‘gospel’ claims? Certainly not! Such a message negates the call, nay the command, for the sinner to ‘*believe on (or in the person) the Lord Jesus Christ*’. Yes, the convert is to believe certain ‘propositional truths’ about Christ Jesus—He is the Son of God who died for sin, rose again from the dead—and other fundamentals concerning His work in redemption. When false ‘christs’ (new age and others) are promoted, trust cannot be in any ‘savior’. But subscribing to facts does not satisfy the primary requirement for the sinner to put faith in the person of Christ Jesus. That is, trust Him to be the Savior who delivers, provides, sustains, and protects. To say this is the same as accepting facts about Christ (even if they are true) is a delusion. Assenting to facts can never result in disciples with long-term allegiance to the Savior. Only a commitment to the person of Christ ensures the convert will be able to ‘*endure to the end*’ (Mat 10, 22), *you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls,*

For My yoke is easy.” (Mat 11:28-30) To greatly respect someone is not the same as being married to them. Hence, believers are to do more than respect or even honor Christ, they are to ‘know’ Him as their ‘betrothed’. The relationship epitomized when Christ said ‘*take My yoke*’, the agricultural device so two animals move in tandem and can work as a harmonious unit. The bottom line: the faith which trusts Christ to be the ‘propitiation’ for sin must also rely on Him to save from the ‘world, the flesh and the devil’. To be ‘all they need’. Reliance both on His character and promises that keeps growing as the believer goes ‘*from faith to faith*’ (Rom 1.17). Indeed, a lifelong quest as experiential knowledge of the Savior is developed.

CHAPTER 3

THE PREACHING OF REPENTANCE

*That repentance and remission of sins should be preached
in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

Luke 24:47

Mention the word repentance, and what usually comes to mind is a ‘wild-eyed’ preacher with a sign saying ‘Repent, The End is Nigh’. This caricature evoking derision and mirth has held sway long enough. And it confirms the concept of repentance needs serious rehabilitation, especially when many believe only the ungodly sinner has to repent. Nothing could be further from the truth. Repentance is to also shapes the walk of the ‘born again’ believer, and unless both truths are restored, sinners will not be converted and believers will remain in bondage. In particular, to carnality and rebellion, the two killers of piety making not only inroads into secular society but also within the church. Thankfully, the message of repentance for both sinner and saint is to be proclaimed before the end comes. Absent this merciful act, the church will not have revival and there will not be the final harvest of souls.

PREPARATION FOR THE FIRST COMING

‘John...came preaching in the wilderness...saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”’. (Mat 3:1-2) ‘When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming...he said,... “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance”’. (Mat 3:7-8) ‘John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of

repentance for the remission of sins.’ (Mar 1:4) ‘While Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region(s) ...preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: “THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS: ‘PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD; MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT. EVERY VALLEY SHALL BE FILLED AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED PLACES SHALL BE MADE STRAIGHT AND THE ROUGH WAYS SMOOTH”’. (Lk 3:2-5)

With a ministry eclipsing that of previous prophets, John the Baptist was the ‘voice’ sent to a backslidden Israel before Christ’s first coming (Matt 11.11). Endowed with the anointing of the prophet Elijah and the mandate to ‘prepare’ the nation to receive their promised Messiah. With a ‘fiery’ message of reproof, John and Elijah were both tasked with confronting a nation mired in sin. Even those who had not sunk to such depths often showed only ‘lukewarm’ piety. Hence, they both came at historic junctures in the nation to give, ‘sinners in Zion’ (Is 33.14) their final chance to repent before divine judgment.

“And he will turn...Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS TO THE CHILDREN,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord”’. (Lk 1.15-17)

John was to especially confront the ‘disobedient’, challenging them to return to the ‘*wisdom of righteousness (or justice)*’, and the nation’s spiritual ‘*fathers*’ to turn and give pastoral care to the penitent. The children and fathers both had to repent to make, ‘*smooth*’ and ‘*straight...the paths of the Lord*’ (Lk 3.4,5). And though the call to repentance was for the whole nation, it was directed more at the proud; the depth of preparation in them would largely determine Israel’s fate. (Yet, as the proud were humbled, the lowly were to be ‘lifted up’.)

Incidentally, to deliver their message of repentance, John and Elijah had unusual training. In preparation for the mission they were tasked with, both endured the rigors of a wilderness—as Moses, David, Paul, and Jesus also did. They required much fortitude (‘foreheads of flint’, Eze 3.9) to deliver their harsh words of rebuke and warning; the courage Jesus confirmed by saying John would be no ‘*reed shaken by the wind*’ or the one ‘*wearing soft clothing*’ (Mt 11.7). The ultimatum John delivered, then, contained no ‘soft words’ or ‘easy’ sayings as rejection of the imperative to repent (to the Pharisees and Sadducees in particular) would attract a strong response from Heaven. Getting the children of God ready for a divine visitation has never been easy or straightforward; the reality re the preparation the church is now undergoing.

To live with the burden his ministry would determine the fate of the nation, if it would see blessing or judgment, must have been difficult for John. Fortunately, many responded to his message and as proof of their repentance, were, ‘*water baptized for the remission of sins*’ (Lk 3.3). John’s mission to ‘prepare the way’ is, therefore, the template for the return of the Messiah; not as the

‘Lamb of God’ but the *‘Lion of the tribe of Judah’* (Rev 5.5). What requires vessels also anointed with the (Spirit) of Elijah; those not faint of heart to declare the prophetic word to confront sin and backsliding. Almost certainly, a message delivered by those also trained in adversity and ‘wilderness loneliness’. ‘Voices’ with the fortitude to sound the alarm warning both believers and the ungodly of the consequences of not heeding their message.

THE MESSIAH’S MESSAGE

‘From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”. Mat 4:17. “But go and learn what this means: ‘I DESIRE MERCY AND NOT SACRIFICE.’ He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance”. (Mar 2:17) ‘So they went out and preached that people should repent.’ (Mar 6:12) ‘I tell you...unless you repent you will all likewise perish.’ (Luke 13:3) ‘Likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.’ (Lk 15:7)

Of the many things Christ spoke to the ‘lost sheep’ of Israel, the call to repent was central; if the nation was to escape judgment by the Romans—the *‘wrath to come’* (Mt 3.7), it required widespread, wholehearted repentance. Yet, (as the above texts confirm) Christ also made clear repentance was necessary to enter the (soon-to-be inaugurated) ‘Kingdom of God’. The connection He reinforced at its inauguration by announcing seven (plus one) ‘Beatitudes’ detailing the truth on repentance. The understanding as the prologue to His seminal

teaching in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ on how its citizens are to behave. The instructions on living in this new realm all rest on Christ’s teaching on repentance in the Beatitudes. In other words, the traits the Beatitudes highlight undergird the ‘laws’ of the Kingdom; they are the foundational truths for its ‘Magna Carta’ (governing manifesto) as spelled out in the full sermon. After reading my book, I hope you agree repentance is indeed the master key to enjoying its life.

THE GOSPEL THE APOSTLES PREACHED

‘Then Peter said... “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Act 2:38) ‘Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from...the Lord.’ (Act 3:19) ‘Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.’ (Act 17:30) ‘But declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and...all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.’ (Act 26:20) Before departing to heaven, Christ told the assembled apostles and disciples to be His witnesses and take the gospel of salvation to the ‘ends of the earth’. The book of Acts gives the initial years of this missionary endeavor and the record confirms repentance was central to the gospel they preached. For instance, (in the quotes above), the apostle Peter commands sinners to ‘repent’ to be ‘converted’ so their sins are ‘blotted out’ or remitted (Act 3.19). Incidentally, these missionaries followed John the Baptist, insisting any decision to put faith in Christ be followed with ‘works befitting repentance’ (Act 26.20). The first ‘work’ was for

converts to be baptized in water (Act 5.32) to comply with the command having the promised *'the gift of the Holy Spirit'* (Act 2.38).

THE ENDTIME MESSAGE

'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.' (Mal 4:5-6) *'And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.'* (Mat 24:14) *'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.'* (Rev 2:16) *'I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery...into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.'* (Rev 2:22) *'Remember...from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place...unless you repent.'* (Rev 2:50) *'Remember...how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come...as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come.'* (Rev 3.3)

Christ's first coming saw the inauguration of the Kingdom of God; its full manifestation must wait until He returns from heaven at the close of the age, to finalize its establishment on the earth with Him as King (Act 1.11). The theologian G.Ladd, voiced it as the Kingdom is here "already but not yet" fully established.

What is it going to take, then, for the church to be ready for Christ's return? In a quote above, Malachi makes clear (at least

to me) it will mean radical reformation of a church, now moribund and weighed down with ‘lukewarm’ adherents. Hence, the reason anointed ‘Elijahs’ will be thrust into the Lord’s vineyard with the commission to ensure repentance in the ‘disobedient children (of God)’ and the ‘fathers’ (of the faith). Malachi’s prophecy also speaks of the *‘great and dreadful day of the Lord’*, the day with an initial fulfillment in 70AD when Jewry suffered judgment. Its ultimate fulfillment (‘sensus plenior’ or fuller meaning) is reserved for the end of the age—though a plausible thesis is this ‘great and terrible day’ started to dawn two thousand years ago.

However, before it fully arises to bring apocalyptic judgment, a sick, sinful world, and a backslidden church must hear the message of repentance. Given their final opportunity to turn—as God said to Solomon—from their, *‘wicked ways, humble themselves and seek’* the Lord’s face so their *‘sins...(are) forgiven’* (2Chron 7.14). Hence, prophetic ministries are now being prepared to come forth in power and authority to *‘blow the trumpet in Zion’* (Joel 2.1). Many are like Joseph, hidden away in ‘prisons’ enduring rigorous training before being ‘thrust into the harvest’ (Mt 9.38) to trumpet a far from gentle or comforting message. What they declare will not be to ‘comfort the afflicted’ so much as to *‘afflict the comfortable’* (~~awaken Zion~~ *‘tickle before they fall’* (Is 30.26)). These seers, teachers, and preachers, in a much-needed ministry, will ‘trumpet’ a message to *‘wake up those that slumber and are at ease’* (Amos 6.1). Indeed, when Christendom is in such a parlous state, they will challenge believers with the ultimatum Elijah had for Israel; namely this, *‘How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow*

him' (1King 18.21). Before terrible judgment arrived for Israel, John the Baptist, Christ, and the apostles were sent to give the nation their final opportunity to repent. Believers 'sitting on the fence' at this end of the age will be given the chance to turn from their backsliding to also escape judgment.

Is the generation alive now the one to hear this final call to repentance? No one can be certain but from the indications and 'signs of the times'. it more than likely is. Whatever the truth, two things are certain: repentance is the only hope for the unsaved to escape the judgment seat, and believers will need to embrace repentance if they are to escape the judgment of the 'Great Tribulation'. Hence, the call for repentance is front and center in the letters sent to 'seven churches' in the book of Revelation. Letters, somewhat relevant to the first-century church, but written ultimately for believers at the end of the age. It makes no sense if the warnings in these letters are not futuristic—prophetic messages for the endtime church. (I find wanting the 'preterist', 'historicist', and 'amillennial' positions for the book of Revelation.)

By drawing on types and shadows in the O.T., these letters were penned for seven existing churches (seven the number of totality) specially chosen to represent Christ's body in the endtime. Written to alert each group of believers (a church) to the threats they need to overcome. With many believers already falling into these traps, it is not hard to see these letters are specific to the church today. Indeed, unless there is widespread repentance in the church, many more believers will be casualties to these threats as the '*days of evil*' (Eph 6.13) peak. A tragic outcome, as they will not inherit the promised

rewards. Outcomes from the pledges in these letters to be interpreted as offering deliverance from judgment in the '*day of trouble*' (Zeph 1.15), aka, the 'Great Tribulation'. (For more on this, read my book called 'The Hope of Perfection'.)

REPENTANCE IS NOT A 'ONE OFF'

'Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner.' (2Cor 7:9) It is clear, then, sinners must hear the call to repentance if they are to be converted and be a disciple of Christ. But equally clear, the believer who seeks to be holy must also hear this message. Now, when convicted by the Holy Spirit, a believer is to turn away from the sin; but this is none other than the walk of repentance. Also not hard to see, many believers have much to turn from before the 'great and terrible day of the Lord'.

CHAPTER 4

THE BEATITUDES

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for 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 sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Mt 5:1-10

It is one thing to respond to the call for repentance, what it means in practice is another. The Beatitudes, by detailing the outworking of this biblical discipline, fill this gap; they ‘flesh out’ the basic understanding already given. And it is clear, in explaining what it means to respond to this mandate, repentance is not a minor renovation demanding little of the believer. What my book details from here onwards may,

therefore, be a hard ‘pill to swallow’, yet the believer desiring to ‘*understand what the will of the Lord is*’ (Eph 5.17) will find the insights they need to walk in this biblical tenet.

Now, all students of the bible recognize the Beatitudes provide the introduction to the ‘Sermon on the Mount’. But not many realize they are not just an ‘entrée’ to the ‘main course’ or a garden path leading up to the house. The Beatitudes are the all-important prologue to the rest of Jesus’ sermon on living in the Kingdom of God. They have the ‘*key of knowledge*’ (Lk 11.52) to unlock its truths. The many ‘laws’ Jesus gave for living in this new realm all rest upon the foundation of the tenets of repentance in these seven (plus one) ‘Blessings’. A connection between the Kingdom and repentance confirmed by Jesus saying words like this, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.*”

(Matthew 16:15) Repentance is at the core of the gospel and the Beatitudes provide the understanding to walk in it. Now, for most believers, repentance is a doctrinal truth lacking practical application. The Beatitudes rectify this, but they also reveal the cost of walking on it; a pathway demanding more than the word itself might suggest. Now, if I am honest, the Beatitudes were an enigma for much of my early Christian life. A view somewhat justified judging by how many interpret them; no wonder believers see the precepts these ‘blessings’ espouse as unworkable, even irrelevant. With more than a few consigning them to oblivion along with the rest of Christ’s ‘Sermon’. Now, no one denies the interpretive challenge they pose, but to dismiss the Beatitudes—or any other passage of scripture—because of this is unjustified. However, after many years ignoring their message, I was divinely drawn to take a fresh

look. Only to discover after lengthy consideration and prayer, they are not obsolete; each Beatitude is up to date with the insights today's believer needs to experience the life of the Kingdom. A life many seem unable to enjoy. Incidentally, please don't dismiss this 'thesis' linking repentance with the Beatitudes before reading through the book. It may appear novel but once each one is studied, the connection becomes clear.

THE PRECEPTS OF THE KINGDOM

But before I do so, an overview of the full 'Sermon on the Mount' is in order; the ground-breaking address of Jesus with instructions on living in harmony with the ethos of the Kingdom. In other words, so believers can live in agreement with its 'laws', and why many don't enjoy the victory Christ purchased on Calvary for them. Numerous ones opting instead for a poor substitute, the fleeting pleasures of the world. To experience the life of the Kingdom, it is not enough for the believer to know they are translated out of the *'power of darkness...into the kingdom of his dear Son'* (Col 1.13). Though legally true, it only becomes a reality when they align with its 'laws', and why Jesus warned His disciples not to *'break'* the *'commandments'* (Mt 5.19). A statement seriously misunderstood if interpreted as a reference to the Mosaic Law. True, the greek here for 'commandment' can refer to the Mosaic Law, but its more basic meaning is a 'principle or a 'tenet'. It, therefore, more aptly refers to the 'laws' of the Kingdom and it is unnecessary to teach Christ is referring back to the legalistic laws of the old covenant (with severe punishments if broken). Now, some will point to Christ saying

the ‘*law would not pass away*’, so let’s clarify what He meant. First off, He did not stop there but went on to say ‘*until it be fulfilled*’ (Mt 5.18); Now, if there is doubt when this happened, Christ tells us here, ‘*I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*’ (Mt 5.17). They were fulfilled at Calvary as signified by His cry, ‘*It is finished*’ (Jhn 19.30). A truth Paul confirms when he says the ‘law’ was given until ‘*the seed would come*’ (Gal 3.19), i.e., Jesus Christ, or his other statements saying believers, ‘*are not under law but under grace*’ (Rom 6.14) and, ‘*the law is not made for the righteous*’ (1Tim 1.9). Solid proof the Mosaic Law and its ‘commandments’ were abolished for the children of God with a new covenant.

I once met a Christian who insisted this passage in Matthew’s gospel obligated believers to keep the Mosaic food laws; a position impossible to justify when Jesus said ‘*all foods (are now) clean*’ (Mk 7.19 NIV). This confusion regarding the O.T. Mosaic laws and the new Israel of God is of concern, but it is not the only one; it is troubling to see believers continue to keep the ‘Sabbath’ or observe ‘feast days’ of the religious cultus in the old covenant. The ‘*commandments*’ Christ said were not to be ‘*broken*’ were those of the Kingdom of God.

THE BLESSINGS OF THE KINGDOM

The Beatitudes (indeed, the whole sermon) certainly are radical; revolutionary enough to unsettle the Jews still living under the ‘law of Moses’. But a challenge also for the believer today seeking to arrive at a valid application for each Beatitude. However, despite this not-insignificant problem, it doesn’t mean there is an escape from the imperative to observe the ‘precepts’ they highlight. Not if the believer is to qualify for the promised

rewards. Now, while the full ‘sermon’ lays out all the precepts to enjoy the life of the Kingdom, these ‘seven (plus one) blessings’ underpin them. They spell out what it costs to turn from the ‘*paths of destruction*’ (Is 59.7) to travel on the ‘*highway of holiness*’ (Is 35.8). Is the cost the believer pays worth it? Those on the path of repentance say yes, with most testifying, compared to the peace, joy, and empowerment they enjoy the cost was minimal. They also attest to these ‘laws’ not being burdensome or grievous as often made out to be; indeed, to comply with them, they say it is a delight (1Jhn 5.3).

In this seminal ‘sermon’, Christ also makes plain how this ‘blessed life’ is not found in natural, carnal success. When riches, fame, and approval are pursued, the blessings of the Kingdom usually elude. Such worldly goals may not be sinful, but to ‘*seek after them*’ (Lk 12.29, 30) before pursuing Christ cannot be wisdom. Heaven grants many ‘things of the world’ to enjoy, but to seek them to the detriment of ‘*seeking first the kingdom*’ not only is foolish (Matt 6.33), it is disobedience. In fact, why do so many believers strive for these ‘things’ when they have the promise of unequalled, ‘*spiritual blessings in heavenly places*’ (Eph 1.3)?

“Let your light...shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Mt 5:16)

Interpretations abound for the Beatitudes, with some teaching they apply to the church as a ‘nation’, some as governing secular society, and some even advancing they are for unconverted Jews. I find such notions unconvincing. The divine precepts the Beatitudes highlight are tailored for individuals wanting to walk in obedience to Christ to

experience the life of the Kingdom. Proven, negatively, by the number of believers now defeated and disconsolate after dismissing them as impracticable or hard to understand, some even seeing them as onerous. For a believer to think they are excused from complying with these divine precepts not only discredits the Kingdom and its life, it is unworthy of a child of God.

THE THEME OF CHRIST'S SERMON

Finding the overarching theme for Jesus' complete 'sermon'—how to live in the Kingdom of God—is not difficult. Any difficulty lies with interpreting the precepts. Many are deeply puzzling, with the figurative language (in wide use at that time) they are clothed in tripping up the unwary. With the extensive use of hyperbole (sometimes even gross exaggeration) throughout the sermon, it is fruitless, even dangerous, to interpret them literally. If the truth be told, reaching a valid application for each precept calls for wisdom from ~~Although~~ not in this sermon, Jesus' directive to '*call no man father*' (Mt 23.9) nearly tripped me up when I was a new Christian; it left me unsure if I could use the 'term' when addressing the priest from the catholic church in my street or even my natural father. Many precepts in the sermon itself, though, pose greater difficulties; including this, '*if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out*' (believers in China have done this) or this, '*I tell you not to resist an evil person*' or this, '*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth*'. No one, then, claims it is easy to arrive at practical applications for what are often radical directives, especially when they appear nonsensical, e.g., in giving alms how does a believer not let '*his left hand know what the right hand is*

doing”? (Mt 6.3) It is, of course, why many have found it easier to dismiss them as irrelevant.

Yet, by using figurative language with its grandiose, poetic expression, Jesus could present truths in highly memorable terms, capturing the listener’s attention while highlighting the revolutionary nature of each precept. Besides, it also hid divine truth from the natural, carnal mind (Mt 13.13,14). Overall, by presenting the ‘laws’ in such a striking way, it helped Jesus reinforce the radical difference between the new Kingdom of God and the old. The differentiation between the two kingdoms and their covenants is, in fact, the key to unlocking the rationale for Jesus giving this ‘sermon’ on the Mount.

In other words, His core reason for announcing these precepts was so the lives of His followers would differ from those of the ungodly. Not mildly distinct, but radically dissimilar to how the ‘world’ behaves and thinks. So notably different, believers can be agents of change (‘salt’ and ‘light’) in their circle of influence. (Not that I advocate the ‘reconstruction’ of society espoused by ‘kingdom theology’.) The bottom line: when Kingdom values rule the life of the believer, they have the hope of slowing down the degradation of the world. In other words, by manifesting its righteousness they become witnesses illuminating evil, their life such a viable testimony to the gospel, the ungodly cannot but *‘glorify the Father’* (Mt 5.16). Though not fully realized as yet, it will be when believers truly display the beauty of Christ.

Most Christians subscribe to the maxim of being ‘in the world’ but not ‘of the world’, yet few seem to understand the implications. Yet, even a cursory reading of the bible

establishes the fact believers are ‘called out’ from this world; the redeemed to be, *‘separate from sinners’* (Heb 7.26) even as was Jesus. A simple concept on the surface, yet its outworking generates much disagreement. This is where Jesus ‘sermon’ provides the clarity every child of the ‘Most High God’ needs. First, by showing they are to exhibit the divine attributes of mercy, love, generosity, kindness, etc., and second, by detailing how the believer’s lifestyle is to differ from a worldly one. When these aspects of holiness are both meant to characterize the believer’s life, it is disappointing to see so many adopt lifestyles failing to reflect the values of Heaven. Sad, because when their lives are not different, the ungodly find the gospel tasteless and uninviting; sadder still, the *‘name of God (is)...blasphemed among the gentiles’* (Rom 2.24). The bottom line: this ‘worldliness’ now in the house of God is both a barrier to God receiving glory and a stumbling block to the ungodly. This has to change if the harvest of souls is to eventuate.

If there is one thing true about this modern era it is more relaxed standards are in vogue compared to what guided believers previously on interacting with the ‘things of the world’. Now, the old standards were often legalistic and ‘pharisaic’. I found this out after years fellowshiping with ‘old time’ Pentecostals; they disapproved of feminine makeup, ladies’ hair being cut, dresses shorter than ankle length, and were horrified when children were called the offspring of goats, i.e., ‘kids’. But now the pendulum has swung wildly the other way so the lifestyles and ethics of the godly and ungodly are almost indistinguishable. The church’s witness as a ‘unique people’ has suffered greatly as a result.

If the church's testimony to the gospel is to be restored, these standards of the Kingdom no longer can be ignored, particularly the values the Beatitudes highlight. But here's the rub: the chance of this is zero unless there is a wholesale turning away from sin and lives are transformed. Radically changed so the heathen cannot but '*glorify God in the day of visitation*' (1Pet 2.12). This portends sweeping change within the household of God, including the shift away from the fixation on the 'love of money' and wanting a life of affluence and ease. Those changes plus the others Jesus highlighted, e.g., how believers treat those they disagree with or even an enemy, how their taxes are paid, fidelity to the marriage covenant, and other sacred duties. Much has to alter.

THE IMPERATIVE FOR TODAY

Let's sum up. Projecting a life distinct from an ungodly one is going to depend upon the depth of repentance in the church. The Beatitudes detail what this means in practice, and they prove such a walk will not be easy. Yet I hope my book is the incentive for others to promote the Beatitudes. When its truths have been ignored for so long, it only leaves a slim chance of believers being '*prepared and made ready for the Lord*' (Lk 1.17).

CHAPTER 5

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for
theirs is the kingdom of heaven”*

Mt 5:3

This Beatitude is the important ‘cornerstone’ the others build on; if not in place, making sense of repentance is impossible. Interpreting it correctly is critical; if not, the key is missing to fathom the other Beatitudes. Remove this ‘landmark’ (Prov 22.28) and whatever else I write on the Beatitudes is of no use. ~~The Spirit of the Lord~~ *GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound.*’ (Isa 61:1) Isaiah’s prophecy here announcing salvation for the ‘poor’ (quoted by Christ, (Lk 4.16-19)) speaks of liberating humans from sin and its outcomes; freeing them to become the new ‘*Israel of God*’ (Gal 6.16), the nation born ‘in a day’. (Cf. Isa 66.8) Hence, when these recipients of salvation are not the financially impoverished ‘poor’ (as is done also with this first Beatitude) as many suppose. The ‘*broken-hearted*’ and ‘*prisoners held captive*’ in this prophecy are those ‘*bound*’ by sin, and the ‘*poor in spirit*’ in this first Beatitude. And surely, no one can doubt the atoning work of the Cross was so these ‘poor’ would have spiritual ‘riches’, not necessarily those of the material kind. These spiritually ‘poor’ are desperate for the riches (‘blessings’) of the new covenant; revealed as the ‘*riches of His goodness forbearance and longsuffering*’ (Rom 2.4), ‘riches of

His glory’ (Rom 9.23) and the *‘riches of His grace’* (Eph 2.7). The wealth they crave is not natural but that of the Kingdom.

POVERTY OF SPIRIT

‘But on this one will I look Says the LORD: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.’ (Isa 66:2). The link between the *‘poor in spirit’* and a *‘contrite spirit’* here interprets this other coupling, *‘For thus says the High and Lofty One... “I dwell in the high...place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit’* (Is 57.15). Together, these texts confirm the *‘poor in spirit’* are the *‘humble in spirit’*—proving humility is the core trait to enjoy the ‘blessings’ of the Kingdom (Cf. Pro 29.23). This trait, in particular, because this important ‘law governs the Kingdom of God—*‘before honor is humility’* (Prov 15.33, 18.12). A ‘law’ the world will disregard (evidenced by the number of honors conferred on the arrogant), but not so the Lord; bypassing this ‘law’ to bestow ‘blessings’ on the proud damages the integrity of the Kingdom.

In fact, not only is it ‘unlawful’ for Heaven to overly bless those lacking humility, but more likely to destroy than benefit them. An adverse outcome for the proud due to the fact it requires maturity of character and uprightness—traits of the humble—to steward the riches of the Kingdom. Proven by the number who have fallen into sin even gross sin, after God greatly blessed their ministry. Disasters due, more often than not, to a serious lack of humility. They no doubt started as did King Saul of Israel—humble servants to God’s people—but after enjoying the favor of God, like him, their end was calamity and shame. An evangelist highly blessed by God held

a crusade in a South American nation where more than 200,000 attended one of the meetings. The campaign also saw many miracles including the healing of the country's President. Yet, when he came years later for meetings in the city where I lived in New Zealand, he was a drunkard; a tragic ending compared to his beginning.

The inevitable result of the blessing of God in the wrong hands—a life not built on the cornerstone of humility—is disgrace and not the expected glorious end. Need more proof humility is mandatory for a position of esteem and glory? Then, look no further than the Godhead (Mt 11.29); though *'highly exalted'* (Ex 15.1), unsurpassed humility characterizes them. No more evident than in their condescension to dwell with humanity, the lowest creation. This humility undergirds other attributes of the Godhead, even as it should for the believer. The bottom line: unless founded in deep humility, ~~righteousness is unstable as a tree whose roots are severed (Ps 138.6).~~ *'God gives grace to the humble but resists the proud.'* (Prov 3.34, Jam 4.6) *The humble will be exalted and lifted up.'* (Ps 147.6, Jam 4.10, 1Pet 5.6) *The humble will rejoice in the Lord and His salvation.'* (Is 29.19) These texts prove this trait of humility is indispensable for the believer wanting to experience the life of the Kingdom. Here, then, is a simple definition as to what constitutes true 'humility of heart': it is a quality of mind and spirit which does not lift itself in pride, arrogance, or hubris, but admits, absent God's grace, it is undone. Let's explore ~~some aspects of its practical understanding.~~

HUMILITY IN PRACTICE

Defining humility theoretically is not enough; the practical outworking is what counts. But first, let's clear up a myth:

humility is not the same as self-hatred, self-loathing, or feeling ‘worthless’; all are signs of false humility. The humble soul thinks differently. First, they acknowledge being bereft of anything making them acceptable in God’s sight and, therefore, don’t in any way try to justify themselves (Lk 18.9). Absent the atonement of Calvary, they see themselves only worthy of condemnation. Second, they readily admit to not being a whole or complete human, but a broken, even crushed vessel in need of God’s grace. That is, they don’t deny the ‘depravity’ (as reformed theology teaches) all descendants of Adam inherit and the need for entire sanctification. They also freely confess to needing God’s mercy, grace, strength, and wisdom to live as a disciple of Christ, i.e., left to their own resources, they admit to lacking the ability and strength for such a high calling.

The humble believer, then, puts ‘*no confidence in the flesh*’ (Phil 3.3) but freely admits (aside from Christ), ‘*in me dwells no good thing*’ (Rom 7.18). Even when there are natural talents to boast of, they refuse to trust in these abilities and faculties of the ‘flesh’. Yes, they will offer natural intellectual prowess and skills in the service of the Lord but refuse to put confidence in them. Or, for that matter, in whatever else the world boasts about—deep sensitivity, a strong will, physical health, strength, or even innate courage. They realize these too are ‘fallen’ and fallible. Plus, they recognize what is accomplished in their strength, even if worthy of praise, is not something to boast about.

The bottom line: the humble confesses to being a ‘sinner’ not only because they sin, but as a member of the ‘adamic race’, they are constituted as such. Yet, though admitting to

this, they will not use it as an excuse to diminish any culpability for sin. Aware divine forgiveness is received in proportion to what is admitted, they honestly and fully ‘fess up’—like David, they ‘*acknowledge their sin and do not hide iniquity*’ (Ps 32.5). Finally, they realize absent God’s grace it is useless to expect to behave more righteously; without divine help, they know failure awaits.

PRIDE

Pride not only is the opposite of humility, it is also the antithesis of the Kingdom’s ‘*righteousness, peace, and*’ joy, (Rom 14.17). The enemy of those traits due to its propensity to foment strife and fear. All because pride makes humans think more highly of themselves than they ought to and, then, when the exaggerated self-esteem is under threat, insist on salvaging it. This penchant to preserve their dignity (pride of face, pride of place, and pride of grace) has the proud constantly trying to ‘save face’ by justifying themselves or shifting the blame. Ergo, their contentious stance and need to argue a point until it is proven (at least to themselves) they know better, are wiser, and ~~the more capable~~ the proud have is in persisting with the romantic belief of humanity’s inherent ‘goodness’. In other words, the denial of their depravity (corruption) and weakness as a fallen human being. After a mistake or sin, even despite repeated failures, this self-confidence in a ‘better nature’ has them insisting it will be different next time. Of course, this adds to the stress already about failing and sets them up for more of the same. Trying to live up to self-appointed, often exaggerated standards dooms the proud to a life of anxiety (even if much of this is subconscious). A level of stress for them that has increased since the touting of proud self-confidence as indispensable for success.

Yes, self-assurance is of benefit but only when confidence is in the Lord and His strength, not in human frailty. What also is unhelpful for the proud is the self-loathing after failing to achieve often what is unachievable and berating themselves.

The truth is this: as the reaction to the inferiority sinners must suffer, every soul enters life with a baseline of pride. All it takes to become a real problem is for parents or another authority figure in the child's life to withhold their acceptance and validation. Pride steps in to compensate for the rejection and feelings of inferiority, but in doing so, boosts self-worth above what is valid. Of course, Satan (the 'proud one' par excellence) is working at the same time to exacerbate this inherent arrogance by instilling a '*crown of pride*' (Is 28.3) in every segment of society. What is in full bloom currently and proven by the excessive independent stance and rebellion against authority (including God's).

Finally, to counter low self-worth, the proud are prone to boast of achievements, glorying in accomplishments (cf. Jer 9.23). This, plus the tendency to 'one-up-man-ship' and excessive competitiveness, often insisting they are better at sports, academics, etc.. A strategy they find necessary for only by feeling superior do they feel comfortable in their skin.

THE 'STRONG MAN' OF PRIDE

'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to obedience of Christ.' (2Cor 10:4-5) While scripture confirms pride is an abomination to God, (e.g., Prov 8.13, 16.5), not only He finds

the proud insufferable. So do fellow human beings, with many testifying of a relationship or a venture with the proud doomed from the start. Predictable when the proud suffer so much anxiety, even fear.

However, the problems reach a new level when pride becomes a stronghold in the psyche, usually because what is innate is reinforced by familial, national, or cultural pride. Now, it will be a problem no matter how deep the roots of pride go, but the outcomes from a stronghold are far more troublesome. Usually, due to a demonic component strongly resistant to removal. Fortunately, Heaven has provided ‘mighty weapons’ to ‘pull down’ (text above) entrenched citadels like this in the psyche. Weapons best utilized by those with a ministry of deliverance, and a godsend for those fated with excessive pride. It was for a counselee who inherited a stronghold from a father in the British Foreign Service, and the counselee was a ~~man~~ **man** (inference) causing the downfall of Lucifer from the position of foremost angel in the heavenly host is pride now permeating the ‘kingdom of darkness. What the demonic forces in that evil realm constantly seek to inject into every level of society (even in the poorest urchin). Very successfully judging by what is witnessed today. And though other factors (scientific breakthroughs and technological advancements) contribute to this hubris, most of it is driven by these dark forces. (Still, it is a concern to hear scientists boasting of colonizing Mars and promising humans will soon live past 150 years of age.) In any event, there is every indication the level of pride and boasting is heading toward what was on display at the tower of Babel, and it took the judgment of God to stop everything ‘*they proposed*’ (Gen

11.6). However, what is more alarming is finding this hubris no longer confined to the ungodly. As shepherds and sheep in God's flock stray into worldly paddocks and devour its '*wisdom*' (1Cor 1.20), the ugly side of pride—contention, strife, deception, heresy, and judgmental attitudes—is now increasingly on display.

Finding an answer to this excessive pride in the house of God is the need of the hour, yet the solution to this scourge must be truly viable, for pride is not a nuisance or a personal foible, it is a vile SIN with tragic consequences. Now, because it deals with both the 'root' and 'fruit' of pride, this book of mine advocates radical repentance as the answer. However, it is the solution only if believers first put on the foundation garment of humility; once made a priority, victory over the plague of pride is achievable.

HUMBLE YOURSELF

"If My people...humble themselves...and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven...forgive their sin and heal their land." (2Chr 7:14). *'Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.'* (1Pet 5:6). Though repentance is the remedy for pride, this can be greatly enhanced when believers are willing to 'humble themselves'. A choice they alone can make, no one else can do it for them. Now, lest you protest and claim the battle with pride will never be won absent divine assistance—I agree. However, to put the onus first on the Lord to effect humility gets the order back to front. Only after fulfilling their part in the humbling process can the believer rightly seek Heaven's help. Indeed, getting the

balance right here between divine sovereignty and human responsibility is critical.

How do believers humble themselves? First, by owning up to pride and admitting the reprehensible sin it is—a humbling experience on its own. An admission made free of any attempt to justify it or make excuses. If seen only as a character flaw or idiosyncrasy due to a cultural, family, or ethnic background, the battle with pride can never be won, especially if it is a stronghold. Living in denial is not the answer.

The confession free of all denial must then be followed up with seeking Heaven’s forgiveness. (Where entrenched pride calls for deliverance ministry, this confession can also be made to a mature, spiritual believer (Jam 5.16)). Also, not an easy step to take as pride is not only stubborn, it hates to be exposed; it will, therefore, seek to deceive (Obad 1.3) by hiding behind other ‘problems’ or cloaking itself in a multitude of justifications. Besides, to admit to this sin offends the sensibilities of the proud. The time of the disengagement, effected in a concerted, prayerful effort to disown the sin. That is, by the use of daily affirmations and negations so as to renounce the connection to pride and its negative effects. But also realized by verbally (out loud, so it is heard) choosing humility. Those measures plus daily meditation on the relevant biblical passages to undermine the mindset of pride. Now, this process of unshackling can be long, going on possibly for months or longer and, therefore, is a step the proud can become lazy or indifferent about. But shifting ingrained patterns of thought feeding pride is not easy, so a one-off effort to disengage from them will never succeed.

Finally, with the daily resolve to heed Paul's admonition, *'not to think more highly of oneself than one should'* (Rom 12.3), victory becomes achievable. Incidentally, he strikes the right balance in this by saying not to overreact and 'self-flagellate' with thoughts of worthlessness. Now, if the battle with strong pride is not to continue, some will need the help of additional 'means of grace'. One is fasting in conjunction with prayer (Ps 35.13) as it can expose undetected self-reliance, self-confidence, and the other fruits of pride. Though not a 'cure-all', it can 'supercharge' the humbling process.

THE HUMBLING OF THE LORD

'EVERY VALLEY SHALL BE FILLED AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED PLACES SHALL BE...STRAIGHT AND THE ROUGH WAYS SMOOTH.' (Lk 3:5) Though heavy with metaphor, this passage reveals the Lord is determined to 'bring low' those lifted up in pride. Not to discourage them, quite the opposite. Heaven understands they need help to overcome this enemy, so, in effect, the proud are not left to fight this 'monster' on their own. Hence, the promise to fight on their behalf, in the main, by giving the grace so they can walk in repentance.

Yet, so the proud can be *'clothed with humility'* (1Pet 5.5), Heaven provides extra assistance. By this, I mean the merciful work of divine 'chastisement', and though not popular, it is where Heaven allows inglorious, humiliating situations to effect humility. A work used by Heaven to deal with proud prophets, priests, and kings in Israel, but also in the humbling of foreign rulers like Nebuchadnezzar. And while varied means

were used to deal with their stubborn pride, all had to endure chastisement.

Now, some believers may be tempted to reject this notion of painful ‘dealings’, imagining it is contrary to how a loving Heavenly Father acts. But this is to lose sight of the damage, often disastrous, from the ‘cancer’ of pride—an outcome Heaven is well aware of. A child of God, then, cannot expect to be exempt from this ‘tough love’. Indeed, with many already showing entrenched arrogance, it will be no surprise to see Heaven use harsher measures.

The judgment meted out to a world arrogantly seeking to ‘reach heaven’ at Babel is a clear foreshadowing of the apocalyptic Day of Judgment. A preview of when ‘the Lord of hosts’ brings low ‘everything lifted up’, i.e., humble the lofty looks of humanity to reveal the ‘*glory of His majesty*’ (Is 2.10-18). This ‘day’ when divine wrath is poured out on the unrepentant more than confirms Heaven’s hatred of pride. And though the full dawning of this ‘day’ of judgment is not until the end of this age, it began to dawn in AD70 with the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of Israel. Yet, this judgment is not only for the ungodly; it will also catch believers stubbornly proud of heart. What the Lord takes no delight in, hence, this work of ‘chastisement’ to spare them a disastrous end. Yet also crucial if Heaven’s plan to bestow great honor on a company of believers is to be realized. Though Christendom has drunk deeply from the wells of worldly arrogance, this cannot thwart the divine plans to discipline you all, for pride has fully red-decked your hearts, bowed only Christ to the proud self-sufficiency on display. If it is not

trusting in the sciences to do the Lord's work, e.g., of psychology and sociology (the 'arm of flesh'), it is reliance on the marketing tools of public relations, and promotion they have spawned. Manipulative tools that have overturned the trust in prayer and faith to further the Kingdom of God. Yes, these 'aids' may be helpful servants, but are not good masters.

In writing about these 'dealings', the author of Hebrews implores the believer to see them as the '*chastening of the Lord*' (Heb 12.5). (Incidentally, 'chastening' has always been part of the cost of bearing the 'cross' (Mt 16.24)). Thankfully, he takes pains to also explain the specifics of this divine work; making clear it is centered in the tribulations believers must endure. The '*trial(s) of...faith*' (Jam 1.3) Heaven allows to test, purify, and strengthen a believer's trust in the Lord. More specifically, the divinely ordered setbacks, reversals, disappointments, and even failures to correct proud self-sufficiency in the heart. a work of '*nurture and admonition*' (Eph 6.4) about to increase in intensity if believers to reach full maturity before this age ends.

This work of 'chastisement' involves the 'labor pains' (Mt 24) birthing the next age; the trials to also bring forth the Kingdom in all its glory. Both sinner and saint must endure the suffering in this earlier period of tribulation. Now, some will see the prospect of believers having to endure even this time of 'much tribulation' (not great tribulation) as harsh and perplexing. Yet, when pride cannot be left untouched, a loving heavenly Father has deemed it necessary. Trials important also if Christ is to have the glorious 'bride', '*without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*' (Eph

5.27) He is promised. The bottom line: when nothing can thwart this work of ‘perfecting the saints’ (Eph 4.12), it is not only unwise to try to sidestep this ‘chastening’, but those who do make themselves ineligible to rule and reign with Christ. Refusing to submit to this work of ‘correction’ is to lose out on a divine destiny. Even as Vashti, the disobedient wife of King Ahasuerus, lost out on hers to be replaced by the humble, obedient Esther. The one willing to undergo rigorous preparation under the direction of Hegai (a type of the Holy Spirit) for her role of Queen. (See the book of Esther) Again, it signals much discipline lies ahead for those destined to be the ‘Bride of Christ’, ruling as His co-regent.

‘He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly.’ (Lk 1:51,52) So the ‘paths’ of the Lord are ‘straight’ or ‘level’ (Mt 3.3), Mary’s prophecy here confirms the proud are to be ‘scattered’ (Grk, laid waste). Paths prepared for the first coming of the Messiah by John the Baptist. But when His return requires much greater preparation, expect to see prophetic ministries arise with the same anointing as Elijah and John. Raised up with the boldness to confront a backslidden and moribund household of God with the ‘word of the Lord’—to, *‘bring low every mountain and hill’*, and *‘straighten out’* what is *‘crooked’* (Lk 3.5). Not all believers are going to welcome this work of humbling; nevertheless, the church must expect to see a divine law in play, this one, ‘A man ~~Not pride will be his downfall~~ *will be brought low*’ (Ps 10.3). work of divine correction will ‘spare the rod’. Israel had to cross Jordan to enter their ‘promised land’, and when the river’s name means ‘descending’ (the river descends steeply from the mountains of

Lebanon to finish far below sea level in the Dead Sea), this foreshadows believers having to descend much deeper into humility. Again, it confirms severe dealings lie ahead for those destined to enter their ‘land of plenty’ (not heaven), an inheritance of glory and power before the age ends.

In summary, not every Christian is going to meet the requirements and qualify for the ‘*salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*’ (1Pet 4,5), the deposit of grace ‘reserved in heaven’ and antitype (fulfillment) of Israel’s inheritance. Only the believers willing to descend into humble, heartfelt obedience inherit this final deposit of salvation delivered in a final outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the focus on humility in this first Beatitude. The trait also critical to surviving the terrible events of these final days—those lacking humble trust in the Lord will flounder in this time.

Once the ‘*day of evil*’ (Eph 6.13) peaks, this will demand much of everyone, testing especially if the believer is truly trusting the Lord for sanctification, provision, guidance, and strength. For, this time when ‘*created things (are) shaken*’ (Heb 12.27), not only shakes beliefs, societal structures, and institutions, it tests the sincerity of every believer. The time also when riches, fame, privilege, and every other ‘*broken reed*’ (Is 36.6) of ‘Egypt’ will be a far less attractive ‘savior’. Indeed, those who insist on ‘going down’ *to trust in the ‘shadows of Egypt’* (Is 30.3) will be ashamed.

This earlier time of trial, described as the ‘*distress of nations*’ (Lk 21.25), will especially wound the overconfident and self-reliant believer; crippling the proud ego as Jacob was made ‘lame in the hip’ (Gen 32.25) (the thigh, the epitome of

strength). For the humble believer trusting the Lord, it will be different; they will abandon props depended on previously.

CONCLUSION

Repentance is the process of turning from beliefs, mindsets, world-views, mental constructs, and patterns of thought leading to sinful behavior. A challenge for every believer but especially for those with stubborn pride. Yet they can take comfort in the fact the Holy Spirit will not fail to *‘convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment’* (Jhn 16.8); none will be left wondering if pride has filled their heart. Yet, when pride always seeks to stop its downfall, more than a few will be tempted to silence the voice of conscience pleading to ‘turn from (their)...wicked ways’. The opposite is true with the humble; without arguing, making excuses, or trying to shift the blame, they agree with the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Even if the infraction is slight, a ‘misdemeanor’ others accept, they turn away from the humble Christian ever balk at what repentance requires? They may resist initially, even more than once, but knowing it pleases the Lord, will eventually submit to correction as they recognize ignoring conviction can open the door to demonic attack. (Yet, they reject false conviction or condemnation.) Hopefully, you the reader have grasped how humility will be indispensable to surviving the last days, but here is another reason. Due to the Scribes and Pharisees false understanding about the Messiah, they rejected Jesus as the One. They stubbornly refused to admit their error because of a lack of humility. If some believers don’t show greater humility about their eschatological schemas, they could reject aspects of Christ’s

return. When the details are not yet clear, too many are overly certain about when and what takes place.

THE PROMISED BLESSING

The promised reward for those qualifying as the ‘poor in spirit’ is the ‘Kingdom of God’—it *‘shall be theirs’*. And there is no greater blessing than the ‘life’ of the Kingdom, in the N.T., revealed as the ‘life of eternity’ (eternal life). The life also enjoyed in Heaven and spelled out as, *‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’*. (Rom 14.17). A reality on some level now for the believer filled with the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 6

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Mt 5.4

Many see this Beatitude as promising a reward for those suffering natural loss, and while the Lord is well disposed to comfort those mourning a bereavement, scripture endorses the mourning of sin far more. There are references to mourning the loss of God's blessing, but the grief is really over the cause of the tragedy—their sin. Nothing could be more natural as the next step in the believer's repentance, therefore, than for them to mourn their sin; grieving both the damage to them and the Lord's name (Ezek 7.16, 2Cor 12.21). An important step because it has two outcomes critical to turning away from sin; it elicits a greater hatred for and the impetus to turn from sin. If seen as a trivial step or the desire to grieve sin's destructive nature is missing, this makes any claim to be repentant suspect. They both say a lot about the heart.

'Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.' (Jam 4:8-10)

When James says the believer is to '*lament, mourn and weep*' over their sin to purify the heart, no believer can afford to ignore (often from ignorance) this step. Especially if grievous sin has opened the door to the demonic and it requires deliverance ministry. With

such an ‘infestation’, this step can be life-changing when honestly carried out.

GODLY SORROW

‘Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing that you sorrowed in a godly manner’ (2Cor 7:9-11). Paul also is unequivocal about the need to mourn over sin, but warns it must be ‘*godly sorrow*’ if it is to ‘lead to salvation’. Instruction directed clearly at believers to confirm repentance is not only for the sinner seeking Christ, especially when salvation (being made whole) is not merely escaping condemnation to hell. The redemption purchased on the Cross saves from more than just sin’s penalty and power. It delivers (saves) also from fearful thoughts, unwanted motivations, addictions, demonic attachments, and more. Repentance and the willingness to mourn over sin is a way of life long after conversion for the believer seeking to be rescued from their fallen state.

In this same passage, note Paul also warns about false mourning, calling it the ‘*sorrow of the world*’. This counterfeit for godly sorrow can also have emotions of shame, guilt, and regret, even deep, but is not true repentance. The feelings are from self-pity and anguish over their sin being exposed and possible punishment; what criminals often feel when faced with prison, yet leaving them still with unresolved guilt, possibly depression, even suicidal thoughts. ‘*Godly sorrow*’, by

contrast, mourns how sin offends and grieves the Lord, not because of being ‘caught out’. It is healthy, liberating from guilt and shame to bring fresh divine life—minus the morbid frame of mind elicited by the false—and what David shows here, *“I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done this evil”* (Psa 51:3-4). True remorse because he understood how sin dishonors the Lord.

To rightly sorrow, then, is to grieve the loss the Lord suffers from sin rather than any damage to the believer’s reputation and self-respect. Theirs is of little consequence compared to the dishonor it brings to the Name of God. Make sure not to confuse ‘godly sorrow’ with ‘worldly sorrow’. As indicated, mourning over sin helps the penitent soul *‘hate what is evil’* (Rom 12.9 NIV); a key outcome when most only make the effort to break off all alliance with sin after realizing it is repugnant to the Lord. Mourning is the key to such a disgust for sin, the *‘clothing that has been stained’* (Jude 23) is hated.

THE RESULTS OF MOURNING OVER SIN

‘Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy; Break up your fallow ground, For it is time to seek the LORD, Till He comes and rains righteousness on you.’ (Hos 10:12) Besides making the believer feel guilty and condemned, sin hardens the ground of their heart. Mourning plows up the heart hardened by sin, making the conscience once more sensitive to sin’s ugliness while reversing resistance to the tug of the Holy Spirit.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psa 139. 23-24) One key to victory over sin

for the believer is knowing why they do it, and given enough time, the Holy Spirit exposes these evil roots. Yet, this can accelerate with earnest supplication as the psalmist in the text above did. And though Heaven is willing to grant such a request, it can't be a one-off; such prayer must continue until the desired outcome is achieved. Of course, once the 'roots'— intents of the heart such as pride, greed, unforgiveness, hatred, etc.—feeding the 'fruit' are exposed, they are to be mourned even more. Remember, though, it is not an exercise in self-examination and recrimination to 'dig up dirt'. As a specialist in 'internal surgery', God is well able to find these 'cancers' (Eph 3.16, 1Pet 3.4, Psa 36.9).

In confessing these 'roots' to God, there must be the same candor as in seeking forgiveness for the 'fruit', i.e., taking ownership as to the true nature and any culpability. It short-circuits the process to 'plea bargain', plead special circumstances, shift the blame, or try to 'balance the books' with righteous acts.

'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us...and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' (1Jhn 1.9) Mourning over sin helps in both these steps of confession and forgiveness, especially if there is overwhelming guilt because of grievous sin as it gives the motivation to confess to a 'righteous' person led by the Holy Spirit; one who can then pronounce absolution (Jam 5.15,16 and Jhn 20.23). Now, if you protest, saying this is a 'Roman Catholic' rite, I beg to differ. Even if Protestants largely ignore it, this is a 'means of grace' for those burdened with stubborn guilt.

Finally, because mourning strengthens the desire to repent in the fullest possible way, it overcomes any unwillingness to make ‘restitution’. Even if it is only an apology to ask forgiveness from those sinned against, it is difficult because it is so humbling. Even more mortifying if restitution requires the return of stolen goods, etc., or where the sin has led another astray, e.g., sexual immorality. Mourning supplies the push to comply with these amends. Of course, it requires divine guidance to ensure the restitution is timely and it is wise to do so, or if it can’t be made. After seeing the benefits from mourning over sin, I hope you will not ignore this step critical to release from its consequences. If this step is not in place, freedom from addictions, evil habits, rotten attitudes, and demonic strongholds becomes harder.

THE BLESSING OF COMFORT

The promise of ‘*comfort*’ in this Beatitude is also the reward for those who ‘*mourn in Zion*’. Where, in exchange for grief (mourning), they are promised the ‘*the oil of joy*’ along with ‘*beauty for ashes...the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*’ (Isa 61:3). And when the word ‘*comfort*’ in greek comes from a root to ‘call near’, this outcome is from the Lord drawing near, in particular, to console the guilty conscience. To ensure your repentance is biblical and effective, make sure to include this step.

CHAPTER 7

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK`

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

Mt 5:5

This third ‘leg’ in repentance ensures it has a robust foundation; but a misunderstood Beatitude also if interpreted by the use of the word ‘meek’ in modern parlance. As the ancient word for ‘gentleman’, it doesn’t convey the true meaning of the greek word for it in the N.T.. Now ‘*praus*’ (Str.4239) was used for mild winds and sounds, but more significantly, it described a horse after it had been ‘broken-in’—tamed. It, of course, conveys the temperament the horse acquires so it is now willing to be directed by the bridle, responsive to a rider without resisting and bucking. This is the important sense of the word when seeking to understand its use in the N.T..

The reward promised in this Beatitude, then, is for the believer who responds in a gentle, amenable manner to directives. Rather than insist on their agenda, they seek as much as possible to find agreement with what others desire. But most importantly, the word ‘*praus*’ defines how the believer is meant to relate to God. In his “Word studies of the N.T.”, Vincent says this, “Christian meekness is based on humility, which is not a natural quality but an outgrowth of a renewed nature. To the pagan, the word often implied condescension; to the Christian it implies submission. Meekness is most evident, then, when there is true submission

to the will of God, yielding to His Lordship”. In other words, the depth of submission to God as exemplified by Christ (Mt 11.29). Note, how Vincent points out this meekness stems from ‘humility’, the trait the first Beatitude highlights, to indicate meekness is only acquired after pride is dealt with.

These first three Beatitudes, then, underscore the core fundamentals of repentance’; they lay out the ‘main highway’ the believer is to walk to experience the life of the Kingdom. Absent these traits and the favor and blessing of God slip beyond reach. Since they are crucial, no one should be surprised to find the cost can be sizable to acquire them. These traits are not normally innate but forged in the believer’s life through tribulations; more so with meekness as the trials have to expose pride within the heart. Now, though other qualities contribute to a meek spirit, this trait essential to yielding to the Lord usually indicates the believer passing through some ‘deep waters’. Now, meekness is not weakness, a passive ‘spinelessness’ crumbling before any threat. It is ‘strength under control’ and the trait, therefore, allowing the believer to also calmly endure circumstances or those working contrary to the will of God. When such ‘threats’ would normally irritate, annoy, or anger, meekness allows the believer to show unusual patience and gentleness. Yet, the meek at times will resist those opposing God or believers straying from the faith (Gal 6.1, 2Tim 2.25), yet confront and rebuke in a forbearing, humble spirit. But they are not ‘doormats’ others can take advantage of at will and, therefore, have every right to reconsider what to endure.

THE MEEK BEFORE GOD

This trait, then, is much more important in relating to God than to fellow humans. And turning from sin in repentance should automatically alter how the believer relates to the Almighty (Act 26.18). Before the ‘new birth’, all are enemies of the Sovereign Lord—‘*sons of disobedience*’ (Eph 2.2). This innate lack of meekness must turn around for those called to be ‘Christ-like’. True, other mindsets need correcting, but submission to the will of God is to be a core outcome of conversion. And if nothing else, this means jettisoning of any perception of Him as a ‘Father Christmas’ or other notion fostering a casual, cavalier attitude to His authority and rule. Since this novel gospel of ‘easy believism’ has promoted a Savior rescuing from ‘hellfire’ yet requiring little in return, irreverence and disrespect for the Almighty among believers has blossomed.

The apostolic gospel, by contrast, requires the convert to pledge full obedience to the Godhead. Yes, it offers salvation from eternal damnation, but if the sinner is to qualify for this merciful benefit, they have conditions to meet. Those who ‘*receive*’ Christ (Jhn 1.12) are to ‘repent’ and put ‘faith’ in Him as their Savior but also make Him their Lord and Master. (An imperative that does not resemble the ‘lolly’ offered today in this new ‘gospel’.) And this new regard for the Sovereign Lord of the universe demands radical changes in thought and deed, at great cost more often than not. It is why Christ told sinners to, ‘*first sit down to count* (this cost)’ (Lk 14.26, 30) before committing to follow Him. The bottom line: neither the requirement to put faith in Christ nor submit to His lordship can be sidestepped.

Now, the sinner's focus in deciding to follow Christ is usually on the offer of escaping judgment and hell and little thought is given to the call to repentance. A full response to obey the will of God usually comes later; a delay the Lord accepts, but only if there is the willingness to repent from the beginning. In fact, as a convert grows in grace, Heaven expects far-reaching changes in lifestyle, thinking, and behavior; made usually after the Holy Spirit has convicted of sin and shown them the, '*wickedness of the heart*' (Jer 17.9). However, when sanctification is a long process, surely the pace of change can accelerate if, from the beginning, converts are made aware of the gospel's call to obey meekly. If Christ is not Lord of all, then ~~The bottom line: the~~ sooner a convert makes Christ their Lord, the sooner rebellion, pride, and egocentricity can be dealt with. Yes, the call to '*fall on*' the rock of Christ (Mt 21.44) in submissive brokenness to His will is unpalatable, a 'stumbling block', even offensive, but this doesn't mean it can be bypassed. Leaving out any call of the gospel (Rom 1.5) only sabotages the sinner's chance to be truly 'born again' and enjoy a successful Christian life.

Sadly, this call to 'die to self' is often seen as too radical, with some warning (as my mother did) full consecration to the will of God leads to mental instability! Satan, certainly tries to stop believers from relinquishing personal sovereignty, usually by frightening with the (false) prospect the Lord will require missionary or some other onerous service. This stops once the decision is made to surrender to Christ's Lordship; indeed, once the 'yoke' of obedient discipleship is accepted, it is found to be '*easy*' (Mt 11.29,30) and not at all '*grievous*' (1Jhn 5.3).

Consecrating my life to serve God was by far the best decision I ever made. A dedication to His will after reading the biography of Rees Howells and how Heaven had blessed a man utterly dedicated to doing God's will. Mind you, a decision made not without a struggle; using the tactic mentioned, Satan tried hard to dissuade me. Fortunately, my reticence did not last long even though I knew in my surrender to the Lord, it would mean He would decide who I married (or even to get married), where I would live, and in what capacity, if any, I would serve Him. In the end, the decision resulted in my leaving a secure, well-paid career as a pharmacist and obey the call to enter full-time ministry; plus the trials in preparing for the role. The takeaway: in dedicating my life to doing God's will, I knew it meant He would be the Master of all, with the right to ask anything.

And after more than sixty years serving the Lord, I have no regrets about the paths this one pivotal choice led me to travel. Not that it has been without resistance on my part from time to time; I soon found out how stubborn the human heart can be. But as my desire to please Him grew—as I died even more to self—the grace was there to obey, sacrifice, and meet the cost of consecration. But 'laying down' in complete surrender was the 'watershed' decision of my life, one of the hardest to make for anyone. Yet may I commend it as the only way to a fruitful walk with the Lord, one filled with much joy.

GROWING IN MEEKNESS

Acquiring meekness can be painful, especially for the ones driven by ambition, competition, or aggression. Now, I am not an 'alpha male', but from an early age have had a high level of

frustration when my plans are thwarted. To work the meekness in me God wanted has meant a grueling journey; one where I was sent back to the ‘school of hard knocks’ to relearn more times than I enjoyed. A flaw like this can mean some tough dealings.

This ‘dogged’ streak also meant a strong intolerance for violations of my rights; it was galling for me to meekly forebear anyone or any circumstance disregarding the standards and rights I held dear. It took more than a few lessons before I could with equanimity accept threats to my right to peace, to be treated fairly, and to get sleep, respect, or privacy. (Quite a list, don’t you think). In particular, to tolerate being woken from sleep around midnight most weekends by rowdy, drunken neighbors stumbling down a pathway beside my bedroom window. But also, a pharmacy college student who insisted on using half of my dispensary bench in addition to his own. To show meekness in both situations took some time: *‘Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek (gentle) and lowly in heart...you will find rest for your souls.’* (Mt 11:29) A key to acquiring this trait is learning from Christ, the epitome of meekness. But because it creates synergy for learning, there must first be the willingness to take His ‘yoke’. The student’s willingness to humbly respond to the lessons determines progress in any school. Yet, even when the believer is yoked to Christ, if meekness is to grow, so must humility; if missing, the odds of becoming meek diminish rapidly.

Resistance to the curriculum (no one is immune to this) also limits progress in meekness; as does the temptation to skip ‘school’ altogether if the lessons are too grueling. The result of both these responses will be going ‘round the mountain’ extra

times—more so for the proud with their aggressive (assertive?) ways. Thankfully, the ‘Teacher’ is wise and patient, aware of individual temperaments and the level of stress each can endure. It is not the Holy Spirit’s way to push students beyond their capability. On balance, no matter how painful the process, the cost is worth it if the outcome is a meek spirit,

Of course, those situations Satan engineers to thwart the will of God are not to be tolerated. In a spirit of meekness, believers are to resist them. Yet recognizing when circumstances are his work or part of the Lord’s purposes is neither simple nor easy. It calls for discernment and the ‘leading’ of the Holy Spirit, for even when a situation is not God’s will, it demands wise management. Someone I know had the vexing problem of a fellow believer constantly visiting his home uninvited at inopportune times. After showing hospitality for some time, he recognized the devil was using the visits to disrupt and adversely affect the family. He saw it was only wisdom to stop the intrusions now that it had served God’s purpose to work meekness in him.

You may think it excessive for God to use harsh measures to form meekness in His children. But fret not, no lesson is outside the ‘curriculum’ and each one is necessary to acquire this virtue. Every lesson for this divine work to ‘educate, discipline and correct’ (meaning of the greek for ‘*chastisement*’ (Heb 12.5)) has been approved. Now, even though trials have other outcomes, a major one is molding meekness in believers’ lives so the bride sharing the throne with Christ has a ‘*meek (gentle) and quiet*’ spirit (1Pet 3.4).

THE MEEK SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH

'The meek shall inherit the earth and delight themselves in the abundance of peace.' (Psa 37:11). This verse, like the Beatitude, has the promise of inheriting the earth; the pledge (no less) to restore humans as its stewards. In other words, fulfill their calling to exercise dominion over the earth on behalf of the Creator God—the destiny humanity was robbed of. (Yet possibly part of the motivation, in some subliminal way, driving humanity to harness its resources.) The Beatitude restores this mandate of stewardship to the citizens of the Kingdom who walk in repentance, i.e., the meek.

A calling they fulfill by refusing to rely on ungodly thinking, the 'arm of flesh', e.g., 'the end justifies the means'. With their trust in the Lord, the meek don't need to use deceptive schemes, manipulation, or 'roughhouse' tactics to push through any agendas. In other words, if plans don't seem to work out or others can't respect their rights, the meek do it heaven's way. That is, they are willing to wait patiently for the right timing for a project or even if it eventuates. If God is to be glorified, the meek know to surrender the outcome 'to God'—leave it in His hands. But in surrendering goals, they enjoy a course of heavenly wisdom. Of course, Heaven will test the believer's meekness, and one of the hardest trials to bear is disappointment. Pangs either felt because they supposed an outcome would eventuate, the expectation was wrong, or others led them to believe in a mistaken outcome. But whatever the reason, it takes inwrought meekness to accept the frustration, hurt, and disillusionment from deep disappointment. The bottom line: meekness allows the Christian to believe 'the Lord knows best', indeed, it is often the only thing to get them through. Even when disillusioned, the meek have peace

knowing, *'all things will work together for good to those who love God, to those...called according to His purpose'* (Rom 8.28).

As indicated, the first three Beatitudes highlight the fundamental traits of true repentance. Humility, mourning for sin, and meekness provide the basic 'wherewithal' to turn from sin and turn towards the Lord. If not in place, a life dedicated to doing God's will is beyond reach.

'I beseech you therefore...by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.' (Rom 12:1) The focus of Paul's letter to the Romans is on the gospel and its promise of '*salvation*' (Rom 1.16)—deliverance from the flesh, the world, and the devil. Paul concludes his letter with an exhortation to underscore a core truth about salvation. Experiencing its fullness becomes 'null and void' absent the believer's dedication and surrender to God's will.

CHAPTER 8

BLESSED ARE THE RIGHTEOUS

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness, for they shall be filled.*

Mt 5:6

By building on the foundation the first three laid, these remaining Beatitudes (starting with this one) underscore a core tenet of repentance. Namely, the onus to forsake sin and live right (Act 26.18, 1Pet 3.11) for those walking the ‘highway of holiness’. And though the believer can claim to be righteous—deemed ‘justified’ in God’s sight—the penitent soul seeks more than ‘judicial’ righteousness. As this Beatitude makes clear, they realize the life of the Kingdom is linked to practical righteousness. Hence, the numerous precepts related to living right in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’.

No believer, then, can neglect or ignore the divine mandate to turn from behavior and thinking contrary to the standards of the Kingdom. Values, often regarded as mere guidelines or suggestions to live by. They are not. Each precept is a duly ‘enacted law’ of the Kingdom, indeed, when righteousness is its lifeblood, commandments to obey. Aligning with these moral and ethical values must be the central concern of every believer, ‘*translated...into the kingdom of His Son*’ (Col 1.13) And though many say they agree with this, far fewer pursue it with the passion this Beatitude mandates.

WHAT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS?

Righteousness, in general terms, is conformity to the will of God; in thought and behavior, meeting His moral and ethical standards. The believer, therefore, progresses in righteousness by first taking on the divine attributes as epitomized in the *'fruits of the Spirit'* (Gal 5.22)—love, joy, peace, etc. But when righteousness is the word from a root meaning 'to be right'—what is proper, fitting, and good'—further progress is from walking the paths ordained as safe (right) for humans. Yes, it is a *'difficult way'* (Mt 7.14) to tread, yet the believer is called to follow this straight and level pathway because it doesn't trip up as the paths of evil. On the *highway of holiness* (Is 35.8), the feet don't become lamer than they are; walking on it improves health, mental, emotional, and spiritual (Heb 12.13).

Sin is the opposite. It is ruinous and hazardous for those not created to handle the corrosive effects of living outside of God's will. And when the *'wages of sin'* (Rom 6.23) are paid at 'penalty rates', not aligning with the Kingdom standards worsens the ills all inherited from humanity's fall into sin. The mind, emotions, and body increasingly suffer decay and eventually death. Unless the life of the Kingdom can thwart this, those living in the *'shadow of death'* (Psa 23.4) die a little more each day.

When the *'law of sin and death'* (Rom 8.2) separates from the life of God, this degradation is unstoppable. The marvels of modern medicine and science may lessen this downward trend, but I think you will agree, it is a losing battle. Sin, therefore, should never hold any appeal; just the opposite as it is toxic, ruinous, anti-righteousness, anti-humanity, and anti-God. An

implacable enemy bent on stealing the ‘abundant life’ promised every believer. Sin has no redeeming features.

Christians often believe Heaven’s forgiveness frees from the consequences of their sin. The sin of King David proves otherwise (2Sam 12). If nothing else, sin degrades to some degree the believer’s connection to the life of God, and to resolve this it can take more than forgiveness. True, some will testify to divine intervention canceling these consequences, but not too many if their sin was grievous. An outcome the O.T. confirms in the severe punishments it decrees for violence and murder, immorality, severe rebellion, and occult involvement—sins Heaven deems especially egregious. To annul the consequences of these is not easy when the outcomes can affect the believer’s soul and body as well as spirit. It is a grave error, then, to claim all sin carries the same condemnation, especially when it destroys a life made in the image of God. Indeed, there are ‘*sins unto death*’ (1Jhn v5) with ~~Now, this Bible penalty~~ only reinforces the need for righteousness but the imperative to ‘hunger’ after it. When the believer sins, their standing before God does not change and neither are they separated from His love. Yet, as still intact high-tension electrical cables suffer fluctuating current from interference, sin estranges the believer from the life of the ‘vine’ to a certain extent (See John 15). Remedying this breach can require more than just forgiveness; it often necessitates some degree of repentance to restore ‘full power’; with minor sins minor repentance whereas major ones require it to be deeper. The bottom line: for the truly penitent, there can be no thought of a truce with sin, just the opposite. In pursuing righteousness, each day is an

opportunity for them to wage war against this enemy deserving loathing and condemnation.

HOLINESS

Righteousness can also be defined in terms of the call to '*be holy as He is holy*' (1Pet 1.15), a mandate the N.T conveys in two greek words. The first of these, '*hosiotēs*' (Str3741), is more or less equivalent to practical righteousness and is twice found reinforcing it (Lk 1.75, Eph 4.24). The second word, '*hagios*' (Str40) is much more frequent, both as a qualifier for the Spirit of God and the people of God, and with its cognates (derivatives), '*sanctify, sanctification*' and *hallow*, it has the meaning 'to be set apart for sacred use'. It describes, therefore, a different holiness, the kind the believer 'called out' of this worldly system is to personify (Jhn 15.18,19). The believer's walk, then, is one of separation (not exclusion) from '*the world*' and '*things of this world*' (1Jhn 2.15).

Abraham disobeyed when told to separate from the Chaldeans and his family and instead took along his father and Lot. Only to later suffer when he had to separate from them both. And before he could reside in Canaan, he had to separate from the Egyptians. The believer is a 'saint' (a derivative of the word for holy) when they follow in the footsteps of their spiritual father (Abraham), i.e.; they lead a life of separation from the world (Egypt). Now, if you query this emphasis on holiness and separation, it is because those in the Kingdom of God are called (using O.T. typology) to be a 'priest'. More correctly, a consecrated '*royal priest*' (Rev 1.6) after the order of Melchizedek as Christ is, and like Him, '*separate from sinners*' (Heb 7.26). By growing in grace, then, the believer is

expected to become more like their ‘holy’ God and less akin to Satan and the ungodly.

Surely no one believes children of the Holy One are to behave like the children of ‘the world’. Indeed, this difference is the focus of what Christ detailed in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’; its numerous precepts underscore the central truth of the believer’s obligation not to behave like the ‘pagans’ or ‘hypocrites’. Even the love they show is to be distinct from that of the ungodly; summed up by Jesus saying, *‘be perfect...just as your Father in heaven is perfect’* (Mt 5.48). In short, when the believer adheres to the standards of the Kingdom, they shine as a bright light, *‘in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation’* (Phil 2.15) still trapped in the *‘darkness of this age’* (Eph 6.12). Their exemplary conduct is what makes them true sons of the *‘father in heaven’* (Mt 5.45), the ‘salt’ slowing down ~~the degradation of the world~~ *the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove (the) acceptable and perfect will of God.’* (Rom 12:1,2) This call, *‘not (to) be conformed to this world’* is the bottom line for every ‘saint’ or sanctified one. A separation seen often as too demanding, yet when sanctification depends to a large degree on the believer extricating themselves from the grip of this world, it can’t be sidestepped. Particularly, the extent they can break free from the humanistic and profane values ruling their ‘old way of life’. Frankly, their success in disengaging from a world the *‘kingdom of darkness’* (Col 1.13, 1Jhn 5.19 NIV) controls.

Escaping this ‘reign of evil’ molding into unfruitful ways is an ongoing struggle for every believer; a battle to get free of the world’s customs, ungodly speech, crude fashions and fads, its

demonically inspired music and entertainment. The cultural influences Satan uses to conform the unsuspecting believer to impious patterns of thought and conduct. Ironically, this pressure to conform is often greater for the believer than the unregenerate soul; the dog of a duck shooter is sent to the quarry still able to escape before retrieving the ones dead. In this ongoing battle, then, success lies squarely in walking the *'paths of righteousness'* (Psa 23.3) able to transform the mind—both conscious and unconscious. Yet, if sanctification is to progress beyond any elementary level, it also demands the inward resolve to resist the daily threats 'running interference', i.e., the pressure by the world to 'follow the crowd' and fit in with what is 'fashionable' or 'hip' or 'cool' (1Thes 5.23). It requires a solid commitment to holiness to withstand this.

Hence, despite the number of preachers promoting a doctrine of 'extreme grace', citizens of the Kingdom have righteous standards to uphold. In fact, so popular is this novel doctrine of 'liberty', many believe it has done away with the 'commandments' of the new covenant and 'the fear of the Lord' (Heb 12.28). A fallacy easily proved by all the commandments for believers in the 'Sermon on the Mount', many with stricter standards than those of the Mosaic Law. Some more exacting than the *'Pharisees'* kept (Matt 5.20). It is indisputable, citizens in the Kingdom of God have *'commandments'* (Jhn 13.34, 15.12) to obey.

I find it sad, then, when so many children of God are determined to indulge in all the world offers and exhibit lifestyles and standards differing little from those of the ungodly. This wallowing in the world now has believers

displaying strange body piercings and tattoos, wearing immodest dress styles, playing violent or occult video games, listening to dark music genres, watching sordid worldly entertainment, guzzling alcoholic beverages, engaging in illicit sex, and from excessive greed for wealth, gambling (this includes many investment schemes). Yes, some of this may not be immoral or sinful, but it indicates the extent to which God's children conform to the world's mores and fads rather than the values of the Kingdom. Surely anyone would feel uncomfortable, as I did, seeing a supposedly sanctified child of God seeking fame and fortune in the rock music scene dressed in a bizarre worldly outfit, with nose, lip and ear piercings, and adorned with tattoos. Some say this is necessary to identify with the ungodly and reach them for Christ. I believe this sends entirely the wrong message.

When believers are called to be holy and to not, *'love this present world'* (2Tim 4.10), why is the church losing the battle with these worldly influences seeking to corrupt? I am convinced it is, in large part, due to believers not being 'on guard'. All that glitters and the 'fog of war' has so confused believers they forget evil forces seeking to enslave are behind these temptations. More than once, Jesus warned to constantly be alert to evil, especially with His imperative to *'watch and pray that you enter not into temptation'* (Mt 26.41, Mk 13.33, Lk 21.36). A warning so the believer 'watches out' and 'is aware' of any influences posing a threat. Not only the obvious ones, but those posed by friends, the societies they belong to, activities of work associates, and those they socialize with. None should miss the importance of His warning.

Some will label this admonition about interacting with the world as paranoia. It's not. Before joining in a worldly activity, it is wisdom to judge if it is 'unclean' or will contaminate. The challenge I had as a new believer was not to give in to the pressure to listen to the 'dirty jokes' I did before conversion. A habit not easy to 'put off' when a notable government official, and customer of the pharmacy where I worked, shared this kind of joke. I had to politely refuse to hear it and testify crude talk was not in keeping with my new values. A test, I believe, to see if my commitment to Christ was real.

Others will protest this radical separation from the world saying Jesus was '*a friend of sinners*' (Lk 7.34). Yes, He was and if a believer walks as He did in '*the power of the Spirit*' (Lk 4.14) then they possibly can be too. But to habitually fraternize with the immoral homosexual and hetero-sexual, or even serious criminals is dangerous without the same anointing. They can be friends, but it had better be because Heaven has granted permission. When Christ ministered to prostitutes and other 'sinners' because the '*Spirit of the Lord was upon*' (Lk 4.18) Him, believers called to evangelize those 'lost' in deep darkness better have the same equipping. Otherwise, the warning about '*evil company*' (1Cor 15.33) must be heeded. And if anyone hasn't already realized, close liaisons with the ungodly can open the way for the transference of demons, what many have found to their dismay.

Now, when believers remove themselves from all interactions with the ungodly (1Cor 5.10) this is unbiblical; living as a monk, nun, or otherwise cloistered to escape the world's influence is self-defeating. Yet, I find it troubling to

find more than a few believers ‘yoked’ together in business partnerships or other arrangements with the ungodly. (This is aside from a marriage where many factors lead to the unequal ‘yoking’). (See 2Cor 6.14) Yes, the ungodly can be acquaintances, even non-intimate friends, but, in general, that is all. After spending excessive time with unsaved friends, too many believers have been led astray, with more backsliding than those won to the Lord.

Another alarming trend is the number of believers ending up spiritually polluted after dabbling with the ‘unclean’ things of this world. Many dubious and dangerous activities could be cited but examples are the use of remedies sourced in the occult (e.g., acupuncture, yoga, hypnotism, rikkei massage), engaging in perverted sex (e.g., oral and anal), and using new-age techniques such as yoga meditation and creative visualization. And though some methods to become rich may not seem dangerous, e.g., gambling (usually out of greed), these too can be lethal traps when demonic spirits seeking to bind with chains are behind much of it (and similar addictions). Confirmed by the lawyer I heard who went to prison because of crimes committed to pay for his losses from a gambling addiction. He testified of finding freedom only after giving his life to Christ and being set free from demons of greed. (While he was in prison, a lady was led to write and share the gospel.)

Christians often think worldly activities are ‘innocent’ or morally neutral, but after counseling them I know seemingly ‘innocent’ activities can contaminate the spirit. After sailing into treacherous waters to end up adrift or even as wreckage, some required salvaging from spiritual bondage. The simple truth is this:

unclean spirits lurk behind anything ‘unclean’ and engaging in a dubious activity—sexual matters in particular—always results in a degree of contamination. Hence, the warning about the threat ‘*uncleanness*’ (Gal 5.19, Eph 5.3) poses to spiritual purity. In other words, what is not patently immoral like fornication or adultery yet are activities believers need to turn away from, e.g., pornography. In traversing a perilous cliff by a narrow track, it is prudent to stay as far away from the edge as possible; many, if ignorantly, disregard this wisdom and the caution not to ‘*touch these unclean things*’ (2Cor 6.17).

‘Do not love the world or the things in the world; if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.’ (1Jhn 2:1) Because the Godhead so ‘*loved the world*’ they condescended to visit it in the Son (Jhn 3.16). But this does not negate the fact the ‘world’ as a cosmic system is an enemy—hence, the above text. An admonition understood differently in the church’s history, changing back and forth as to how separate believers should be from the world. Is this divine injunction, then, valid for today? I believe so, even more relevant now the pendulum has swung too far towards a casual, even licentious approach. In fact, the children of God are so seduced by the world, it is now firmly entrenched in the church. To such a degree we have a gospel of ‘hyper-grace’ and the love of God is now always ‘unconditional’. It is the false feel-good notion of ‘greasy grace’.

Indeed, this current pap (mush) offering greater ‘freedom’ confirms the inherent danger in any form of antinomianism (without law)—it is a license to sin. (See Rom 6.18) Moreover, in subscribing to this new ‘liberty’, many find to their dismay

the spiritual ‘hedge’ protecting them from demonic ‘*serpents*’ (Eccl 10.8) has been breached. Despising this invisible wall protecting from these ‘serpents’ is asking for trouble.

Now, I realize this current ‘liberal attitude’ is possibly a reaction, even correction, to the legalism of the holiness groups in the past. Their strict, legalistic code against shorter skirts and short hairstyles, the use of makeup, etc. was so stifling it produced sour, judgmental pentecostal believers and others in the ‘holiness’ camp. But in response to this legalism, we have the opposite extreme; an alarming trend when the values and pursuits of the world are becoming more unrighteous with each passing decade. Relatively harmless activities and pursuits in the past are now often degraded, even wicked, e.g., movies. (I use the word ‘wicked’ in its true sense). (See Is 5.20). This decline in morals and standards as Jesus predicted (Lk 17.26) has almost reached the decadence in the ‘*days of Noah*’ (Gen 6.12,13), and signals, the violence and corruption back then could be nearer than we think—along with divine judgment. Even decency and consideration for others have descended into what ~~can only be described as a normal~~ *COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM AND BE SEPARATE, SAYS THE LORD. DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN*. (2Cor 6:17) I realize this call requires careful application, yet more and more believers now resonate with it. If nothing else, this is an appeal to make a greater effort to disengage from the pollution of the world, much of which Heaven in the past has winked at. Now, no one, including me, advocates extreme withdrawal from the responsibilities of citizens to society or their patriotic duties. Nonetheless, I am watching my involvement in those areas becoming more suspect in modern culture; such as the internet,

entertainment, sports (making it a religion), and today's love of materialism and consumerism. All are threats to true holiness. The believer, then, should regard as urgent the need to reassess their involvement in these areas and determine if they feed an addiction to pleasure, hankering after wealth, and the fine things of life! Make no mistake, the 'good life' with its luxurious and comfortable living is an insidious trap. (Cf. Lk 16.25, Jam 5.5)

The lure of pleasure and excitement is an obvious temptation today. Yes, much of it can be innocent, but as modern games and recreational activities (many of them corrupt and rigged) promote more and more hedonism, these pose a real threat to a holy life. Even the current preoccupation with gourmet food and drink or activities pursued in search of an 'adrenaline rush' are now an addiction for many. (This makes the promise of a similar 'rush' in religious gatherings also a worry.) These cultural forces certainly confirm Paul's prediction about humans being '*lovers of pleasure*' (2Tim 3.4) in the 'last days'. A time already here to pose a threat to spiritual wellbeing; especially when immorality and greed no longer are merely annoying but have become much stronger temptations. When Lot escaped the judgment of Sodom, it is troubling to find him asking if he could go to a '*little*' (Gen 19.20) city. I trust you do not think, as Paul warned, it is safe to allow a '*little leaven*' in your life (1Cor 5.6). A minute dose of a toxin taken over a long time, can be lethal—useful for those using arsenic to kill.

RIGHTEOUSNESS HAS THE PROMISE OF A 'FILLING'

The believer pursuing righteousness has the promise of being *'filled'*, and the foremost outcome is surely being *'filled'* with the Holy Spirit. Absent this and other longings rarely get met, be it peace, joy, or victory over sin. A *'filling'* they receive on the same basis as the Baptism with the Holy Spirit (by grace (Gal 3.2)). Yet, though it can't be earned, there is a clear link in scripture between repentance and being *'filled'* with the Holy Spirit, e.g., *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* (Act 2:38). (See also Act 5.32 and Heb 1.9) This Beatitude (and the others), then, rewards the believer pursuing the same *'righteousness'* as those who seek to qualify for *'all these things'* (Mt 6.33), i.e., shelter, sustenance, etc.. Indeed, the blessings filling the *'cup'* (Ps 23.5) of the righteous are those the ~~They are prohibited~~ can never enjoy. I list some below.

'Guard...(the) heart above all else, for it is the source of life'. (Prov 4.23. HSCB trans). Demonic attacks are not a figment of the imagination; indeed, they pose a greater threat than any *'flesh and blood'*. Hence, Paul's instruction to put on the *'breastplate of righteousness'* (Eph 6.14) as protection against spiritual *'heart attacks'*. Armor many interpret merely as justification or imputed righteousness. But this piece in the panoply of armor is more the legal standing enjoyed by every believer. When sin can open the door to spiritual attack (does anyone dispute this), it is why Paul highlights this breastplate when concluding his remarks on how believers are to *'walk worthy of the(ir) calling'* (Eph 4.1-6.20). Confirmation this piece of armor must be interpreted as practical

righteousness. Believers thirsting after this kind are ‘filled’ with divine protection.

‘He is a shield to those who walk uprightly...guards the paths of justice, and preserves...His saints’ (Prov.2.7,8) Righteousness thwarts not only demonic harassment, it also preserves from other dangers—in particular, the ‘loose woman’ (Prov 2.16, 5.3, 6.24, 7.5). Now aside from this ‘woman’ being a reference to prostitutes or adulteresses, she is a metaphor for false religious groups seeking to seduce with sectarian heresies. What more than a few believers have fallen prey to after rebelling against a walk of holiness. Incidentally, it also preserves from swindlers and deceivers, i.e., con men.

They shall reign in life.

“YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER; A SCEPTER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE SCEPTER OF YOUR KINGDOM.” (Heb 1:8) More than one enemy—be it sickness, fear, depression, temptation, etc.—threatens the peace and joy of the Kingdom’s citizens. All these must be thwarted, but it requires more than natural charm, aggressive rebuking, positive confession, or another biblical weapon to achieve this. These strategies fail miserably unless backed by supernatural authority and power, and these reside in the ‘scepter of righteousness’ (the symbol for both). Any strategy employed must have the moral authority of a righteous life as its underpinning. Where sin, of course, strips this ‘scepter’ from the grasp. Overcoming any enemy also demands a high level of courage. Hence this proverb, *‘The righteous are as bold as a lion’* (Prov. 28.1) shows the truly righteous have the boldness it

takes to confront these threats; especially the fear conflicts generate. Courage is the first to go when sin is ‘in the camp’.

THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST

Moreover, the reward promised for those who ‘*hunger and thirst*’ after righteousness. Now, believers often acknowledge the mandate to be ‘*holy*’ (Heb 12.14), and some desire to be holy if it fits into their schedule. But as for turning from all sin, most show only half-hearted resolve. Rather than persist with living right, their approach is casual and carefree, i.e., a lackadaisical attitude to holiness. Unfortunately, this won’t ‘cut it’ as the reward is for dealing not only with the ‘fruit’ of sin, but also the ‘roots’. It requires both outcomes to qualify, and this comes from ‘hungering and thirsting’ after righteousness.

Not giving up until every vestige of sin and its roots is over. ~~Now~~ before continuing, let me address the reward of ‘seeing the Lord’. What is referred to also in this verse, ‘*Pursue... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord*’ (Heb 12.14).

Like the Beatitude, it confirms this reward is for those who ‘pursue’ holiness or righteousness. Not in any old way but with the single-mindedness of one starving—‘hungry and thirsty’ for food and drink. Now, such a passion for holiness is because of divine grace; yet this is given to those who embrace repentance. It is disappointing, then, to find so few showing interest in turning from sin to be fully righteous as this Beatitude dictates. Certainly not the approach of the apostle Paul who longed to ‘*lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold*’ (Phil 3.12) of him, and who testified, ‘*Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have*

preached to others, I...should become disqualified' (1Cor 9.26,27). (If you imagine 'see the Lord' refers to heaven, I would rethink it.)

'You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy' (Heb 1.9 NIV). The heart able to rejoice (the 'oil of joy') is yet another reward for pursuing righteousness. However, to warrant this, the believer must do more than '*love righteousness*'—they also must '*hate wickedness*'. The hatred of evil buttresses the zeal for holiness to provide the synergy it takes to win the '*prize of the upward call*' (Phil 3.14). (A 'merciful' soul might think this is unworthy of a Christian, but hating evil is legitimate as long as it doesn't bleed into 'hating the sinner'.)

'I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against You only have I sinned.' (Psa 51.3,4) At the core of the heart of the repentant believer is a moral compass and conscience sensitive to 'evil'. Aware of the harm to God's Name and themselves from sin, they ensure their voices are never silenced. If failing to obey the '*royal law*' (Jam 2.8) of righteousness, they feel the pangs of conviction keenly. Therefore, are quick to show remorse and seek forgiveness from both the Lord and others where necessary.

'Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.' (Psa 51:1-2) Aware that outward transgressions often have hidden 'fountains', the penitent soul not only is concerned with overt sin but pursues freedom from these buried impulses. Yet knowing this can

require ‘heart surgery’, welcome any divine action to expose these flaws.

In the quest to be holy, the penitent believer also embraces the ‘dealings of God’. The trials (often severe) Heaven deems necessary to root out wrong attitudes, values, and behavioral patterns. Seeing these as the ‘*work of righteousness*’ (Isa 32.17), they accept with equanimity, even ‘joy’ (Jam 1.2) any divine ‘chastisement’. Each trial is seen as a blessing, not a curse. Not all believers have this mindset; rather than cooperate with the divine intent, many seek to escape what, admittedly, can be painful lessons. I get it, who wants to volunteer for the school of ‘hard knocks’ with a curriculum of disappointments, setbacks, and anguish.

But an aversion, even hostility to trials, is why the author of Hebrews penned this encouraging exhortation, “*MY SON, DO NOT DESPISE THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD, NOR BE DISCOURAGED WHEN YOU ARE REBUKED BY HIM; FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE CHASTENS, AND SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES*” (Heb 12:5,6). When a heavenly Father only allows what is ‘good’ (Rom 8.28) for His children, this confirms it is foolish to revolt against trials. Seeking to escape what is of eternal benefit can’t be wise. Some won’t do that, but will complain, even resent this divine discipline, but not the penitent soul; they regard these ‘dealings’ as the only way certain ‘*fruits of righteousness*’ (2Cor 9.10) can ripen in their life. To be counted worthy of this ‘personal training’ is seen as a blessing and ‘*They feel disappointed LORD, it is missing in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.*’ (Psa 86:11) The repentant soul, then,

grieves over the smallest failure to walk uprightly. Nor do they give up in seeking to conquer wrong attitudes, the *'weights'* believers are to *'lay aside'* (Heb 12.1). And while others shun instruction on how to be holy—in seminars and books, etc.—not the penitent believer. They value the counsel of *'teachers of righteousness'* (2Pet 2.5) and are willing to spend the time and finance to learn from them. Incidentally, when thousands in the past flocked to holiness conventions at Keswick and other places, this lack of interest in pursuing righteousness is more than troubling. I trust you are not of that ilk, but like the psalmist above, cry to the Lord to *'unite my heart to fear your Name'*. A plea for his conscious and unconscious mind to unite so he can *'walk in truth'*.

A PASSION FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

'Man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness'. (1Tim 6:11) Walking in righteousness must go beyond the insipid desire seen with believers, often more of a wish than anything. Too many are more focused on satisfying the cravings of the flesh than *'on things above'* (Col 3.2), and this is not how it is meant to be for those called to leave a life of self-indulgence to please the Lord (Lk 9.23). Now, for those desiring to walk on the *'highway of holiness'* (Isa 35.8), obeying the commandments of Jesus is an admirable place to start. Especially when He promised to *'manifest Himself'* (Jhn 14.21) to those who do. However, such a mindset to holiness can easily be tainted by self-interest, either the hope of reaping rewards or escaping punishment for disobedience.

‘Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.’ (1Cor 10:31) Holiness has to progress beyond any benefit the believer receives to pursuing it because it honors God, where the focus is now on shunning behaviors or attitudes that fail this goal. But even when there is the desire to see His Name honored (especially among the heathen) this can advance further. Namely to the new level of dedication Paul mentions here, ‘We make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him’ (2Cor 5:9). Behavior and attitudes accepted in society today (and many believers) are often not pleasing to Heaven, ‘For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward...but the LORD looks at the heart.’ (1Sam 16.7). Hence, the believer is focused now on wanting to ‘fully please’ (Col 1.10) the Lord, and where motivations are concerned, the gap between wanting to ‘please’ and ‘fully please’ can be significant.

THE CALL OF THE SPIRIT IN THESE LAST DAYS

‘I counsel you to buy...white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.’ (Rev 3.18) These words of Christ are easily seen to be more relevant for believers living in the ‘last of the last days’ than those in the first century. Notably, a warning for those backslidden to ‘repent’ (v19) and buy ‘*white garments*’ to clothe their nakedness before it is too late. The same garments of ‘*fine linen*’ adorning the bride (Rev 19.8) and symbolic of the ‘*righteous acts of the saints*’. A clear signal the time to be clothed in righteousness is now, not in some vague, distant future. Indeed, when so many agree the ‘*time is short*’ (1Cor 7.29), these words of Christ also are a salutary warning for the church today, “*Behold, I am coming as a thief.*

Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” (Rev 16.15).

Warnings, therefore, leaving those believers not clothed appropriately at His return without an excuse. There is no valid reason they should not suffer the consequences of ignoring Christ’s counsel. As to the penalty, it is discovered by comparing those words with His in the parable of the man lacking a wedding garment and his punishment was ‘*outer darkness*’ (Mt 22.11-13). Now this is not hell (‘*gehenna*’) as the ‘darkness’ is a metaphor for the Great Tribulation’ (Mt 24.21, Rev 2.22). Those found ‘naked’ when the ‘groom’ (Christ) arrives will, along with unrepentant heathen, have to endure this time of intense suffering. When Christ is returning for marriage, the wedding party is expected to wear far more costly clothing than what is purchased for everyday use. Hence, these wedding garments of ‘*fine white linen*’ (righteousness). Clothing the purchasers must pay a high price for, the cost of total consecration to Christ. What is paid now so they don’t lose their life when the two ‘beast’ powers rule the world (Rev 13).

‘He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.’ (Rev 22.11) Many regard the cost of pursuing righteousness as too high and are unwilling to pay it. But for the willing, it means cultivating a passion to ‘*seek righteousness first*’ (Mt 6.33) before pursuing other goals like success, happiness, wealth, or even a successful ministry. The bottom line: as the body of Christ prepares for Christ’s return, this portends radical changes lie

ahead, the most critical being the church's embrace of repentance. For one thing is certain about this coming time of severe trial, all the 'baubles' of this world will be as 'dross', even worthless. It is, then, more than foolish not to pursue holiness, especially when the eminent A.W.Tozer has written, "the one burning ambition we should have in life is to so walk as to fully please the Lord". Faced with the 'perilous' times ahead, many will rue the day they didn't pursue this goal.

CHAPTER 9

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy

Mt 5:7

The remaining Beatitudes all build on the foundation laid by the first four; in the main, by underscoring traits critical to walking in righteousness. And none more so than the trait of mercy, the very essence of God (Lk 6.36). Now, while goodness is the overarching trait of God's character, central to it is the mercy He extends to humanity. Hence, the psalmist's urging to, '*give thanks for He is good for His mercy endures*' (Psa 107.1).

In fact, the psalms of prayer and praise extol mercy more than other divine virtues, confirming it should be the chief theme of the believer's praise. Half the references in the bible to it are found there, with more than one psalm marveling at why Heaven shows such mercy to a fallen, rebellious creation—measuring it by the height of the heavens above the earth, eg., Psa 103.11. One whole psalm with alternate lines repeating the refrain, '*His mercy endures forever*' (Psa 136), is even dedicated to it. Besides those texts, others show God's mercy to be '*great*' (Psa 86.13), '*abundant*' (1Pet 1.3) and '*tender*' (Lk 1.78) and confirm mercy is central to His goodness. An even grander truth is that God '*delights*' (Mic 7.18) to show mercy; where humans are reluctant to bestow it, not so with Him. Even more amazing, He does not spare it, but

‘abounds in mercy’ (Psa 103.8). Is there any other truth providing as much comfort to the sinner?

WHAT IS MERCY?

‘The LORD...proclaimed, “The LORD...merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth.” (Ex 34:6) With this text revealing facets of God’s character, it too confirms mercy to be one of the greatest expressions of His ‘goodness’. Overshadowing even other attributes of God, as James alludes to by saying His ‘*mercy triumphs over judgment*’ (Jam 2.13). If you wonder why God extends mercy to a creation insisting on rebelling against His commandments, even outright rejecting Him, it is because His mercy is rooted in ‘pity’ (Psa 103.13) and ‘long-suffering’ patience (2Pet 3.9). Proof of His great ‘compassion’ (Psa 145.8) for our weak, helpless state—‘*He knows our frame and remembers we are dust*’ (Psa 103.14). In other words, we elicit divine mercy (more than the other created beings) because we were born ‘lame’ when our first parents ‘fell...into sin’ and ‘dropped’ us. A truth causing David to cry in amazement, ‘*what is our God that loving-kindness is of Him to us?*’ (Psa 8.4) *“Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions”*. (Psa 51:1) Both Hebrew and Greek have more than one word to convey the breadth of Heaven’s mercy (the ‘multitude’ of it). And while the O.T. is focused on its ‘loving-kindness’ (demonstrated in ‘pity’ and ‘compassion’), the N.T. shows God’s mercy to have deep ‘inward affections’ (feelings of ‘compassion’ and ‘pity’). When put alongside other aspects of His mercy—*longsuffering, gentleness, slowness to anger, readiness to forgive*—this proves His ‘great love’ (Eph 2.4) for humanity. To better understand divine mercy, it

is helpful to also contrast it with the hardhearted attitude humans often have toward the plight of others; even better, to the kingdom of darkness and its merciless harassment of humans. Finally, one other characteristic of God's mercy, even the epitome of it, is His willingness to forgive. A connection confirmed here, *'To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him.'* (Dan 9:9). More on this later.

THE BLESSING UPON THE MERCIFUL

The willingness to show mercy, then, is central to the believer's walk in repentance. Once humility, remorse for sin, and meekness are in place, pursuing this trait should be automatic for citizens in the Kingdom. And when it sets in motion a 'law' of the Kingdom—being shown mercy in return (2Sam 22.26)—a quest with a big dividend. This cycle of sowing and reaping starts with the Lord showing mercy, but then continues when the believer forgives the *'debts'* (Mt 6.12) of fellow humans. When the Lord responds with even more mercy to this, this completes the cycle. Yet, not only the Lord reciprocates, fellow humans also respond with mercy; their judgments, even criticism or disapproval, are now much kinder, more charitable. To show mercy is indeed wisdom.

This Beatitude also points to the other half of this divine law—the consequence of failing to show mercy. It is to miss out on the forgiveness of God (Mt 6.14,15), one of, if not, the greatest blessing of all. A truth believers must never forget, especially those harboring unforgiveness. Who forfeit the peace of mind 'the pardoned' enjoy, instead to suffer a conscience fearful of judgment. None can escape what is a

‘cast iron’ law of the Kingdom—the measure of mercy proffered is the measure received in return. The bottom line: believers choose the outcome they want, and I deliberately used the word ‘choose’ because, like love, mercy is not a feeling. Now to some practical aspects of extending mercy.

THE NATURE OF MERCY

Slow to judge

‘The LORD is merciful...gracious, Slow to anger’ (Psa 103:8). I have already pointed out how the humble are patient with the weaknesses of others, but this verse indicates mercy (a virtue of ‘grace’) is also lenient with others’ failings—their idiosyncrasies or irritating behavior. In the main, because in judging others (or themselves), mercy doesn’t expect near perfection. Citing Jesus’ statement to *‘judge not’* (Mt 7.1), some claim it is never right to judge. But His edict is clearly couched in hyperbole, the figure of speech in wide use at the time. It cannot prohibit all judging, especially when He also spoke of *‘righteous judgment’* which does not *‘judge according to appearance’* (Jhn 7.24), and, *‘with what judgment you judge, you will be judged’* (Mt 7.2). Rather than a moratorium, the edict conveys the seriousness of judging another—it is not to be taken lightly. But also, a warning so believers don’t suffer what they are merciful to. ~~More merciful to~~ the appraisal of others; again, because the merciful recognize their own proneness to err. Again, the humble has the advantage here, proving humility is the fountainhead for other virtues. Incidentally, to ‘judge rightly’, the believer must first *‘remove the plank from (their) own eye’* (Mt 7.5) because the ‘speck’ seen in the eye of another is usually the fault they have. (The greek words for ‘plank’ and ‘speck’ indicate similar items.)

The merciful, then, are slow to judge, suspending as long as possible any determination. Rather than ‘jump to conclusions’ (as someone said, the only exercise many have) and see someone at fault, they give them the ‘benefit of the doubt’. And instead of thinking the worst where fault can be leveled, the merciful would rather believe the offender had ‘the best of intentions’—they ‘*think no evil*’ (1Cor 13.5). Where someone truly warrants condemnation, then, like God, they extend mercy as long as possible. Not so the unmerciful who are quick to judge—often out of their own hurt—and any appraisal is usually harsh, seeing others as unworthy of pity. But for the child of an All-Merciful God to judge like this is more than unbecoming.

Kind to all

‘As the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering’ (Col 3:12). This link between mercy and kindness is confirmed by the hebrew word, ‘*Khesed*’ (Str2617); it is almost equally translated as ‘*kindness*’ (or ‘*loving-kindness*’) as it is ‘*mercy*’. Now, ‘*kindness*’ (a nebulous trait) is best seen as a facet of goodness, for the most part, the decency to treat others (even animals) with benevolence and respect (Prov 12.10). Incidentally, the main greek word for kindness shows it also to be ‘gentle’ and why it describes the ‘yoke’ (Mt 11.30) a disciple is to shoulder. Translated ‘*easy*’, it means ‘easy to bear—the ‘yoke’ is kind

‘Whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart...does the love of God abide in him?’ (1Jhn 3.17) Though the word itself is missing, this verse

alludes to kindness, seeing it as an expression of love when it meets the needs of others. It also tells us kindness should be shown with the generosity of spirit God extends. Hence, even with an enemy, the merciful don't 'shut up' or '*harden (their) heart*' (Deut 15.7); for by extending mercy, they are a viable channel for God's love—more so when they are willing to '*suffer-long*' (Col 3.12).

Ready to Forgive

'For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.' (Psa 86:5)

This 'readiness' to forgive is perhaps the greatest expression of mercy and is exemplified in God's willingness to pardon the sins and trespasses of humans. But also, in the believer's 'readiness' to forgive those sinning against them (this includes authorities and organizations). Much easier said than done. Thankfully, the believer clothed with mercy from above overcomes the almost universal reticence to forgive. Yet, certain issues can still thwart them from extending mercy as God has asked. One of these issues is not understanding what forgiveness involves. Let's, then, clear up a few ~~misconceptions~~ misconceptions. ~~does not deny the offense~~. Some imagine it is easier to pardon if they embrace a level of denial to diminish the offense. But to not recognize its true nature and extent is not being merciful, just the opposite. While the conscious mind rationalizes complete forgiveness is given, the subconscious knows otherwise and the hurt festers on largely undetected. Now, it is frightening for victims of serious abuse to recognize the full nature of their trauma, yet despite this high hurdle, the truth has to be faced. Even if the time taken for this is lengthy, denying the facts is never the

answer. If it is to be properly dealt with, being realistic about the trauma as soon as possible is what counts. If not, the hurt will affect ongoing well-being.

Forgiveness is not an emotion. At least not primarily, or as most can testify, at the beginning. When benevolent feelings may or may not be present (in most instances, they aren't), emotions are not an indicator of the readiness to pardon. In truth, knowing their fickle nature, God does not expect forgiveness to be accompanied by 'warm fuzzy' feelings. It is an act of the will, and the right emotions follow later, if at all. Yes, emotions can help in knowing other steps to take in life, but not in showing mercy; they only see the believer vacillate.

Committing to a decision to pardon wins the day; it alone can survive the ups and downs of a process which can go on for an extended period, even months, possibly years. A struggle the Lord understands far more than most think, especially if the offense was horrific; in such cases, He does not demand an immediate pardon be proffered. (One saying of Jesus intimates a believer is entitled to see if the offender will repent before pardoning (Lk 17.3,4)).

What is required is the willingness to forgive as the stages are worked through and the offense is fully recognized. In fact, when it takes time to process serious hurt, a pardon instantly proffered is usually not genuine. If this applies, don't let others rush you; take as long as you need to properly deal with all the issues. If not, the hurt will continue to plague you emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

Forgiveness is the willingness to cancel a debt. When someone is sinned against, the offender owes a debt. This may

be merely an apology and request for forgiveness, or the indebtedness may be more substantial. But whether large or small, forgiveness cancels the debt even as Jesus taught with the words, “*forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*” (Mt 6.12). Of course, the offender who has stolen—this includes reputation, sexual sanctity, physical wellbeing besides money—is obligated to make restitution, a remedy the courts may have to determine. Yet, even if a judge decides it requires compensation, this is an opportunity to forgo it in mercy. Suffice it to say, in these situations, the right course of action is not always obvious and it often requires divine guidance to avert problems. Now, even when the Lord indicates is not necessary to forgo a debt, the merciful attitude is being willing to do so.

Forgoing recompense, then, is a high mountain to climb. Letting go the demand a murderer pay for their crime—an almost impossible act of mercy (especially for those who believe ‘revenge is sweet’). In these situations, God’s grace alone allows frail humans to do what is right. Now, when society and the legal system expect criminals to be punished, this too is just. Yet, God doesn’t give the believer what they justly deserve, but in mercy, cancels their debts. He is pleased when the believer does likewise (Mt 18.32-35).

Forgiveness does not embolden the offender. A further hindrance to showing mercy is the nagging thought it gives the offender license to re-offend. Indeed, the notion it emboldens them while making vulnerable the one offended is a tactic Satan uses to stop believers from extending forgiveness. And why many believe it is better if the offender continues to think they owe. But the opposite is true. Holding what is owed ‘over their head’ prevents

them from coming under conviction, while forgiveness opens the way for Heaven to deal with the offender. A truth taught by Paul saying mercy '*heaps coals*' (Rom 12.20) on the offender's head; a figurative way to express the guilt and shame forgiveness 'heaps' on them. Now, this might not apply in every situation, especially with pathological crimes.

Trust does not remain the same after forgiveness. Another concern with forgiveness is the idea of having to regard the offender as before; act as though it never happened and once more put full trust in the offender. This too is false as forgiveness restores an offender to when originally encountered. That is, they are entitled to the trust given to someone when first met and integrity is unknown and unproven. The offended are entitled to be cautious about trusting again, wary until has earned trust once more.

Turning from sin toward God results in changed thinking and behavior. An important attitude the repentant believer gains is forgiveness, usually after they see the hatefulness of their own sin and how the Lord has forgiven them in mercy—not just once but again and again. The repentant soul wants others to enjoy the same blessing.

CHAPTER 10

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

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

Mt 5:8

‘Out of...(the heart) are the issues of life’ (Prov 4.23). This proverb confirms the heart—the seat of affections—largely determines behavior, that by which people are usually judged. However, the outward behavior others observe may not be righteous if it springs from an ‘impure heart’. More than conduct, the intentions of the heart attract the Lord’s attention; what is acceptable in the sight of man is not with Heaven if the source is a polluted ‘spring’. (See 1Sam 16.7) Hence, this requirement for those walking in repentance to have a ‘pure heart’. The believer may have ‘*clean hands*’ but can’t ‘*stand in the Holy Place*’ unless they have a ‘*pure heart*’ (Psa 24.3,4).

WHAT IS A PURE HEART?

‘The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart...a good conscience, and from sincere faith.’ (1Tim 1.5) With this Beatitude having the reward of ‘seeing God’, it is important for me to establish what constitutes a ‘pure heart’. (Distinguished from a ‘good conscience’ in the text above; a pardoned conscience is one thing, a ‘pure heart’ is another.) Now, ‘pure’ in the N.T. is a translation of several greek words, each indicating a different kind of purity—either ‘ritual purity’ or ‘without mixture’. Or what is ‘pure having been cleansed’ (Vines) as in this Beatitude and the text above, (A state different to a ‘circumcised’ heart.)

‘Purity of heart’ (according to the above text) is needed to love as God does; as Paul confirmed in indicating the heart is not pure if the believer’s motive for giving their *‘body to be burned’* (1Cor 13.3) as a martyr is for accolades or some other personal gain. Yet, with that said, a ‘pure heart’ (in the context of this Beatitude) is not necessarily one free from every ungodly thought, desire, or even lust of the flesh. Yes, such ‘heart issues’ must be addressed to meet the standards of righteousness in scripture, yet even when these are dealt with, the heart can still be ‘impure’. This Beatitude mandates a ‘purity of heart’ free of a different, more serious kind of fault; an evil *‘root’* (Lk 3.9) able to corrupt an otherwise praiseworthy life.

Before identifying this dangerous ‘impurity’, it is important to explore the promise of ‘seeing God’. The reward referred to also here, *‘Pursue...holiness, without which no one will see the Lord’* (Heb 12.14). Now, most believers will see this verse and the Beatitude as referring to heaven, and while it may be a valid interpretation, others fit it much better. The first is to see it fulfilled in a time of worship when the curtain is drawn back into the heavenly realm so the *‘glory of the Lord’* (2Cor 3.18) is ‘seen’. Another is to interpret it fulfilled when the Lord is ‘seen’ as *‘present help in trouble’* (Psa 46.1) after ‘sight’ of Him is lost in dark clouds of trial.

However, this promise of ‘seeing God’ is best interpreted by these verses, *‘We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope...purifies himself... as He is pure.’* (1Jn 3.2,3) Note, the same connection between ‘purity’ and ‘seeing God’.

This gives rise to two points: first, this ‘seeing’ is linked to a revelation of Christ at the end of the age. Second, this is not the ‘purity’ imputed in ‘justification’ but the outcome of a proactive approach—confirmed by the words, *‘purifies himself’*. Knowing this requirement or even having the desire to be ‘pure’ is, then, not sufficient; the words indicate much more is required of believers. The step of utter dedication to doing God’s will—what many are not disposed to do.

Now, what I have written above requires elaboration, but before doing that I need to establish the ‘appearance’ this verse refers to. First off, it can’t be when Christ returns with the clouds, a trumpet blast, a shout, and the voice of an archangel (1Thes 4.16); being alive is the only requirement to participate in the event when *‘every eye shall see Him’* (Rev 1.7). When the ‘pure in heart’ (those who paid the price of the ‘entrance ticket’) alone see Him, this has to be a different appearance. It is the event when Christ appears in a private revealing to those who qualify; what this verse confirms, *‘to those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time...for salvation’* (Heb 9.28). This is not a meeting with the ungodly, or even with believers unwilling to ‘eagerly wait for Him’, but a ‘secret appearance’ for those waiting for Christ to return for their impending ‘marriage’. Expectantly waiting much as the Middle-Eastern bride waits for her ‘groom’ to return. Now, to believe every believer ‘eagerly waits’ for Christ’s return is a big stretch; very few now wait as the Middle Eastern bride does. That is, with a heightened level of expectancy because she doesn’t know the exact time of the groom’s arrival. This secret return of Christ demands the same patience and alertness; far different to how someone waits for the bus to arrive, or the kettle

to boil. It speaks of an eagerness to ‘see Him’ found only in those who walk in repentance. (The ‘bride of Christ’ does not include every believer. All are in the ‘body of Christ’, but like the first Adam, the bride of the ‘last Adam’ is taken from His ‘body’.)

More than likely, this is the event Paul refers to here, *‘Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known’* (1Cor 13:12). Now, the full nature of this secret appearance is not understood as yet, and aside from the texts cited, only a few typological events in scripture confirm it. The first of these is when Joseph (a well-recognized type for Christ) reveals himself ‘secretly’ to his brethren (Gen 45.1). Significantly, at a time in the history of Israel’s prefiguring the end of this age. Another is the secret appearance of Jesus (Jhn 7.10) at the ‘Feast of Tabernacles, the final feast of summer and a biblical ‘type’ for the end of the age. (I address these and other ‘types’ more fully in a free e-book ‘Understanding the End-times’ you can request from me.)

THE DEFILEMENT THAT DISQUALIFIES

‘Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.’ (2Co 7.1) This verse confirms impurity of the flesh and the spirit hold believers back from perfecting holiness. Though impurity of the ‘flesh’ is the easier of the two to ‘put off’, the spirit or heart must also be cleansed from attitudes such as pride, rebellion, and unforgiveness—all more difficult to remove. But even when both these are dealt with, the believer can still be

disqualified from ‘seeing God’ if a certain ‘sin of the heart’ is left untouched. Let me explain.

‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.’ (Psa 51.10) The psalmist qualifies his request here for a *‘clean heart’* by asking for a *‘steadfast spirit’*. That is, a heart free of any intent making him unfaithful (not steadfast), thus sabotaging his commitment to both the Lord and the covenant (Psa 78.36,37). Here is our first clue to the ‘heart’ meriting the reward of ‘seeing God’. It is one free of all disloyalty or infidelity, the sin Israel was plagued with throughout its history. Indeed, the sin to greatly anger the Lord and what the prophets especially railed against. Many of them warning of severe judgment if the nation did not repent of its infidelity to their heavenly ‘husband’. In other words, Israel had committed ‘spiritual adultery’ by ‘prostituting’ itself to other ‘gods’ and not staying loyal to the one true God. A grievous breach of the covenant made with them in mercy and loving-kindness and a level of infidelity which saw Israel even ~~officially banished from their inheritance~~ *“Of all who suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?”* (Heb 10.29) The disciple of Christ is also a ‘signatory’ to a covenant with binding obligations; these make the covenant valid, otherwise, it is a mere agreement. Hence, when the above text classifies unfaithfulness to the covenant sealed by Christ’s death as, *‘trampling on the Son of God’* and counting His blood *‘a common thing’*, it would be inadvisable to expect such disloyalty not to be punished, and the sin the letter to the Hebrews signals will be prevalent in the

endtime. It indicates many will be tempted to '*fall away*' (Heb 6.6) or go further and '*shrink back to perdition*' (Heb 10.38, 39). (I address this more fully in an e-book titled 'The Hope of Perfection' You can request a free copy.)

'Do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven. (Heb 12.25) As this age ends to birth the new, its turmoil and distress will pose a major threat to all, especially to the 'lukewarm' believer. In particular, the sin of infidelity for those with 'half-hearted' devotion to the Lord who, '*draw near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips but their heart is far from me*' (Mt 15.8) Of course, many will be only 'adherents' to the faith who even now struggle not to backslide and slip into careless apathy. This time of upheaval and suffering will see more than a few lose the battle and depart from the Lord altogether. Unless there is widespread revival and a fresh wave of repentance, not many will be able to resist this spirit of unfaithfulness. Thankfully, every lukewarm believer will be given a final opportunity to repent before the age closes; yet, when scripture says, '*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*' (Heb 10.31), certain judgment awaits those failing to respond to this act of mercy.

'Beware...lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.' (Heb 3.12) Here is the proof an 'impure' or '*evil heart*' wants to 'depart from the living God'. Now, if you think this mischaracterizes a, '*heart of unbelief*', let me identify its true nature. Yes, more than one version has it as merely 'unbelief', but the greek here is from a

root word revealing it should be translated as an *‘unfaithful heart’* (as in the NAB and other versions). The bottom line: while all kinds of *‘evil’* (Mk 7.21) proceed from within, the *‘adulterous’* heart is far more serious, an *‘evil’* most societies regard as a betrayal of trust, disloyalty deserving the severest punishment.

‘Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression.’ (Psa 19.12,13) The connection here between *‘secret faults’* and the *‘great transgression’* is the next clue to the identity of an *‘impure heart’*. In other words, disloyalty or unfaithfulness is the *‘great transgression’* the psalmist is fearful of committing. As to the level of threat this poses at the end of the age, there is a strong clue when this is linked to a great *‘deception’* (2Thes 2.1-3,10). Now, such is the level of deceit, this *‘strong delusion’* will not only dupe the ungodly; because of this, more than a few believers will depart from the faith. Of course, more will desert to escape the severe persecution, and others because the severe distress has soured and embittered them. Proof of the latter scenario was on display not long ago in Sri Lanka when many *‘christians’* disillusioned by the major tsunami in their region deserted the faith to return to their former religion, Buddhism. It would, then, be a grave mistake to ignore these warnings about the danger of apostasy, one no believer should make. (I address this more fully in an e-book *‘Understanding the Endtimes’*; you can request a free copy from Andrzej@protonmail.com.)

Ameliterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you

think that the Scripture says in vain, “*The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously*”?’ (Jam 4.4,5) James, here, calls those who love the world, ‘*adulterers and adulteresses*’ because they are unfaithful to the marriage covenant with Christ. Now, it is deplorable when disloyalty destroys any relationship—be it a friendship or a business arrangement—but far more so when it is a marriage. So, is ‘spiritual adultery’ any less worthy of judgment?

‘*Draw near to God and He will draw near...Cleanse your hands...and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*’ (Jam 4.8) When James also says believers must ‘purify (the) heart’ of ‘double-mindedness’ if they are not to be disloyal to God’s holy standards (‘cleanse your hands’), this also connects the sin of spiritual ‘adultery’ with an ‘impurity of heart’. Indeed, those who are friends with the ‘*world*’, he labels as ‘*enemies of God*’ (Jam 4.4). At the same time, confirming the world is an alluring temptress; a label more than justified judging by the numerous believers snared by its charms and pleasures in recent years. To be double-minded’, then, is no minor trespass, for as James says, it spurns the undivided love the ‘*Spirit yearns*’ to have (Jam 4.5). Yes, Satan has found in the ‘world’ a powerful weapon to beguile many into compromising their ‘purity of heart’.

CHAPTER 11

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they
shall be called sons of God.*

Matt 5.9

This honor of being called a ‘*son of God*’ is the reward for those modeling a core value of, the ‘*God of peace*’ (Rom 15.33), ‘*The Lord of peace*’ (2Thes 3.16), and, ‘*The King of peace*’ (Heb 7.2). The ‘peace’ (with joy and righteousness) crucial to the life of the Kingdom and why the apostles prayed often for believers might know it (1Cor 1.3, 2Pet 1.2, 2 Jhn 1.3, Jude 1.2). When peacemakers model this divine trait, it is fitting this honor be reserved for them.

The trials all believers must endure, in large part, is the upshot of God’s purpose to have offspring in His ‘*likeness*’ (Gen 1.26). As fire is needed to refine silver (Mal 3.3), trials purify to restore the divine ‘image’ within the believer, a transformation so they can walk worthy of God. Indeed, restoring this likeness of God in the believer is a core objective of their redemption from sin; a truth Christ underscores by saying His followers are to be so like the Father in character and ‘*good deeds*’ the ungodly cannot but ‘*glorify*’ (Mt 5.16) Him. When they embody God’s desire for, ‘*peace on the earth...goodwill towards men*’ (Lk 2.14), peacemakers attest to this. Now, this ‘peace’ is often seen as the absence of disharmony, and it is true, it exists on some level absent disquiet, distress, anxiety, and the other outcomes of conflict. But the hebrew word for peace, (‘*shalom*’ Str7999), speaks of far more

than the absence of discord. To experience ‘shalom’ is to enjoy ‘soundness, prosperity, and welfare’ (all meanings of the word), all outcomes so believers enjoy wholeness of body, soul, and spirit.

WHO QUALIFIES AS A PEACEMAKER?

‘To reconcile all things to Himself...on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through...His cross.’ (Col 1.20) As the primary agents effecting reconciliation, peacemakers restore healing and harmony to relationships disrupted by animosity, hurt, or mistrust. What the Lord God, the ultimate peacemaker, did through the blood of the Cross so alienated humanity could be at peace with Him. And the great wonder of that was the offended party sacrificed to pay the price of reconciliation. Indeed, this supreme act of condescension—no less than the Son’s incarnation and death—resolved more than one core alienation. It also healed the division between Jews and Gentiles, separate ‘races’ before Calvary (Eph 2.14,15). But even more, His atoning death made a way for healing the divisions existing between tribes, ethnic groups, nationalities, genders, and even age groups. A reconciliation so the factions, parties, and diverse groups can live together in true peace. An accord realized only in the fully realized Kingdom of God where its citizens enjoy true harmony because its ruler is the *‘king of peace’* (Heb 7.2). What Heaven has always intended humanity to have.

Who, then, qualifies to be a peacemaker? Though every believer is to strive to, *‘keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’* (Eph 4.3), by maintaining this harmony of ‘spirit’, they act more as ‘peacekeepers’. As catalysts for peace,

peacemakers do more; in the main, due to their willingness to pay the cost of ‘bridging’ the divide separating the parties. Indeed, the readiness to sacrifice so peace is realized makes them true ‘sons of God’. Like Christ, they willingly sacrifice comfort, well-being, or something else so genuine reconciliation is achieved.

Peacemakers also have a proactive management style, and if the situation demands it, an uncompromising one. That is, because of their walk in repentance, the courage to confront where hostility is the result of sin (Prov 27.5), and even to reproof one or both parties. In other words, the moral standing to, ‘*rebuke with all authority*’ (Tit 2.15). However, more often than not, their success is due to investing time and energy into persuading the parties to overcome obstacles to reconciliation. Most often, the feelings of betrayal or hurt because of ill-treatment, abuse, or some other offense, even the distress about the fractured relationship. Peacemakers are also willing to confront an aggrieved party harboring unforgiveness, challenging them to give up such a serious impasse to reconciliation. And keenly aware conflict is likely to break out again if issues are not fully resolved, peacemakers look beyond appeasement or ‘*détente*. They make the effort to remedy any lingering distrust able to imperil lasting reconciliation.

‘*The way of peace have they not known*’ (Rom 3.17). While there is ‘*no peace for the wicked*’ (Isa 57.21)—personally or interpersonally—this verse points to why the unsanctified believer also lacks the ‘peace’ of the Kingdom. Now, no member of the Adamic race is altogether free of the proneness to quarrel, squabble, quibble, and dispute. Yet, the believer embracing repentance doesn’t have to lose the battle with these destroyers of ‘peace’.

The opposite is true absent repentance; even to ‘keep the peace’ becomes difficult, let alone be the peacemaker. In fact, any unwillingness to turn away from the all too human tendency to be argumentative and cantankerous (*‘works of the flesh’* (Gal 5.20)), sees the hope of being a peacemaker dwindle. Other inclinations to be contrary and disagreeable are selfish ambition, envy, and pride (Phil 2.3, Jam 3.14). Once these get a foothold in an assembly of believers, they can disrupt one seemingly peaceful and united.

Indeed, these destroyers of peace are churning up much of the current disharmony and division in the world. To the extent, the level of polarization now citizens seriously at odds with each other, even at war. Is it a foretaste of the judgment when the apocalyptic *‘red horse’* (Rev 6.4) takes ‘peace’ from the earth? It could well be. Thankfully, this lack of harmony has a possible silver lining; it could be the wake-up call alerting peacemakers to the importance of their *‘ministry of reconciliation’* (2Cor 5.18). Their future role in restoring ‘peace’ within families, churches, and communities could determine the well-being of the final generation. Yet, a calling beyond the grasp of any unless the ‘peace’ of God first *‘rules’* (Col 3.15) their own heart.

‘My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace; but...they are for war.’ (Psa 120.6,7) Hopefully, you the reader are not one *‘for war’* but desire to be a peacemaker. Yet, impossible without the resolve to also turn away from the human penchant for prejudice and proud disputation. Faults not easy to shift if the roots go deep in the family line.

'A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle...able to teach, patient.' (2Tim 2.24) The desire 'for war' cripples not only the ministry of a peacemaker, it disqualifies from leadership roles in the house of God. Shepherds of God's flock are to embrace the 'law' of, *'the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace'* (Jam 3.18). Now, every believer must be *'gentle and willing to yield'* (Jam 3.17) but those charged with guiding and nurturing others, this is paramount for. Leaders must also take note of the warning James gives about *'fighting and war'* (Jam 4.2) within the church; he says it often stems from impatience and wrong prayer. *'...speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.'* (Tit 3.2) The link between 'peace' and 'humility' here is yet another key to the success of a peacemaker. (Notice, it also requires them not to 'speak evil' of others). In fact, to counter the human tendency to flare up in temper, belligerence, and violence, other traits the Beatitudes highlight also need to be embraced (Tit 1.7). Not only those but the 'fruits of the spirit' (*fruits of righteousness*, (Phil 1.11)), especially the *'gentle(ness)'* of Jesus (Mt 11.29).

THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE

'Therefore, let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.' (Rom 14.19) While peacemakers are to pursue the *'things which make for peace'*, so must those overseeing the household of God. That is, if they are not to offend those believers whose *'faith is weak'* (Rom 14.21). Elementary it seems, yet judging by what goes on today a policy many forget. The numerous shepherds failing to evaluate how they might offend 'the weak' congregant, even causing them to stumble

by what they say and do, is all too common. A pastor, seemingly with no thought of how it could offend, recently bought his wife a car costing \$US200,000.

The one *'thing that makes for peace'* above everything else is possibly forgiveness. Church leaders must never stop pursuing this expression of mercy, both in their own lives and those they shepherd. Ensuring they take the initiative to forgive from the heart when personally offended (even when the offender has not offered an apology) (Mt 18.35), and counseling others to do likewise. Of course, if a peacemaker offends, they must quickly offer an apology for what they said or did, no matter how small the infraction. Seek forgiveness to rectify any rift, and if the blame is to be shared, do their part as soon as possible.

Peacemakers, therefore, take seriously the biblical warnings about not forgiving and asking forgiveness (being sinned against and sinning against another). They realize failure to do what either scenario requires can result in a prison of torment (Mt 5.23-26, 18.32-35). And rather than curse enemies, peacemakers *'bless them'* (Mt 5.44), making sure to render *'good for evil'* (1Thes 5.15); then the Lord can convict and bring an offender to repentance (Rom 12.19ff).

As noted, there is a price tag to securing genuine reconciliation and 'peace' and though this can mean substantial sacrifice, peacemakers are willing to pay it. Most often it is the time it takes, but the cost can also be financial or the loss of face and privileges. Even if it is not 'fair' or not 'deserved', they pay it anyway, going beyond what is expected. Only after Abraham was willing to give up the right of first choice and

took the ‘leftovers’ was dissension with Lot resolved and peace restored (Gen 13.7-9).

THEY SHALL BE CALLED ‘SONS OF GOD’

The K.J.V. translates the greek ‘*huioi theou*’ (plural) in this Beatitude as ‘children of God’, but modern versions give it more correctly as ‘sons of God’. When Vines’ (expository dictionary) says, “*huios* (singular) primarily signifies the relation of an offspring to parent”, it can be translated as ‘child’ but the much more common greek word for children is ‘*teknon*’. Whereas ‘*huios*’ is reserved for an adult male, a distinction confirmed when the N.T. uses it when referring to Christ as the ‘Son (*huios*) of God’. Moreover, ‘*huios*’ reflects the dynamics of the patriarchal Middle Eastern family where adult males enjoy certain prerogatives, e.g., the inheritance and divine blessing pass to the eldest male on the death of the family patriarch. Adult males were also uniquely endowed to provide safety for the family by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” ...For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.’ (Rom 8.14-19)

In this passage, ‘*huioi*’ (plural) is found twice because Paul is writing about the mature sons destined to steward ‘the inheritance’ (Cf. Gal 4.1-6). And linking the, ‘*revealing of the(se) sons (huioi) of God*’ (v19) with their ‘*adoption*’ (v15). Not the adoption in use today (as practiced by the ancient Romans) but the hebrew rite of passage whereby a son is placed as an adult in the family. (Today, it signifies a Jewish boy’s ‘bar mitzvah’.) There is only one ‘Son of God’, yet Heaven has purposed to have ‘*many sons*’ (Heb 2.10)

(male and female) mature in righteousness and clothed with glory. And because they resemble Christ (relatively), these are the ‘sons’ He is *‘not ashamed to call brothers’* (Heb 2.11). For like Him, they will be *‘led by the Spirit’* (Rom 8.14) and exhibit the maturity qualifying them to be heirs of the Kingdom.

PURSUING PEACE

‘Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace...with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.’ (2Tim 2.22) *‘Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.’* (Heb 12.14) *‘They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.’* (1Pet 3.11) These texts emphasize the need to pursue ‘peace’—between believers and between them and ‘all people’. Mandatory for the body of Christ if its members are to function without disunity, schism, and discord being a handicap. Yet, if the local church lacks this unified ‘peace’, this is when peacemakers take to heart their mandate and *‘make every effort’* (Rom 14.19) to effect what Heaven so highly regards . (Cf. Prov 6.16-19).

The bottom line; it requires more than a casual approach to secure this sought-after unity, a blessing described as *‘good and pleasant’* (Ps 133.1). Hence, as the above texts make clear, the need to *‘pursue’* it as. Yes, other outcomes are to be ‘pursued’ but at the top of the list must be ‘peace’. Are you ready to be a peacemaker and ‘pursue’ what demands much?

CHAPTER 12

BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

*Blessed are those...persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Mt 5:10

This other ‘bookend’ to the important preface to the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ is notably different—it does not have a precept to observe. Instead, it completes the edifice Jesus has built by stating a truism about repentance. The truth of Heaven testing the believer’s decision to embrace repentance—if it is genuine. And is there anyone doubt, the ideal test for this is persecution.

PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

‘Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward’ (Mt 5.11,12). Now, persecution tests more than one aspect of the believer’s walk with the Lord, but none more so than their repentance. An especially rigorous test as the promised reward is for those enduring persecution for *‘righteousness sake’* or as the result of *‘false’* accusation, i.e., those who deal honorably with the ungodly. Those who interact in objectionable or weird ways must expect scorn and persecution.

With this strict criterion for the reward of *‘the Kingdom of heaven’*, it seems to me not too many believers will qualify. To be unjustly persecuted after doing the right thing is going to exclude many believers. Yes, some will accept the maltreatment if it results in earthly rewards of acclaim or acceptance—there is a ‘return on

investment’—but for most, it will be a bitter pill to swallow. Only believers walking in repentance will be willing to suffer this kind of injustice. And when the reward is also for those who can *‘rejoice’* when persecuted, this is impossible, absent repentance. Scripture, of course, gives examples of those who passed the test’, e.g., Paul and Silas, and those who gloried in being *‘counted worthy to suffer’* (Act 5.41). Both could praise God after enduring unjust persecution (Act 16.24,25). Yet to remain joyful while angry, disappointed, feeling hurt, and abandoned will see many lose the battle (Heb 10.34).

Persecution, then, exposes the believer whose commitment to repentance is up to a certain point. A discovery they should welcome, as it can be the catalyst for them to seek the Lord as to the reason(s) for failing the test. Problems can then be remedied and fresh confidence gained on being *‘faithful unto death’* (Rev 2.10). A blessing in disguise when undeserved persecution will almost certainly see large numbers depart the faith.

RIGHTEOUSNESS ALWAYS BRINGS PERSECUTION

‘All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution’ (2Tim 3.12). With the reality of this nexus between persecution and righteousness, why is it so many in the Western world do not suffer—at least, to any real extent—what the believers do in other nations? Very few in the first-world have to cope with the ridicule, reviling, rejection, false accusation, ostracism, banishment, even martyrdom endured by third-world believers. Other factors play into this, but surely a significant one is the fact believers in the West live much like those around them. It is difficult to discern any appreciable

difference in the morality and ethics between them and the ungodly. The bottom line: with this minimal distinction the ungodly are not confronted sufficiently for them to get angry. Stated more starkly: when believers have much the same values in speaking the truth, sexual morality, lack of greed, and a ‘love for this world’, their lives don’t arouse divine conviction in the ungodly. Hence, their willingness not to push-back.

In seeking to apply the precepts in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’, the use of ‘hyperbole’ must be taken into account. Yet, it is evident these tenets of the Kingdom were given so believers would lead starkly different lives from those of the ‘unsaved’; what Jesus reinforced by saying, *‘be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect’* (Mt 5.48). Words many will dismiss out of hand (along with the other mandates) saying to meet such a benchmark is impossible. But don’t be too sure. Dismissing the righteousness the Father in heaven wants to see is a mistake, especially when it is attainable with the firm commitment to *‘press toward’* the goal of *‘perfection’* (Phil 3.14). Not in the believer’s strength, but with them trusting in the ~~power of His righteousness~~ (Eph 6.10) assume many believers embrace much the same standards as the ‘world’ to avoid this persecution. A regrettable strategy, for it not only fails to expose the evil works of the unsaved, but it doesn’t alert them to a realm with purer moral and ethical standards. In other words, it thwarts the divine mechanism to bring them under conviction (Eph 5.11). Incidentally, what truly frightens the ungodly to make them angry enough to lash out and persecute is the prospect of divine judgment. Here is the bottom line: those who seek to ‘be holy as He is holy’ can’t avoid persecution and to imagine otherwise

ignores these significant words of Christ, '*A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*' (Jhn 15.20).

PERSECUTION SEPARATES OUT THE HYPOCRITES

'Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?' (1Pet 4:15-17) Though painful to consider, persecution is most likely the tool Heaven will use at the end of the age to separate out the 'tares', 'goats', and 'bad fish'. The mechanism for the promised judgment of the church; both to remove those unwilling to be '*partakers of His Holiness*' (Heb 12.10) but also so Christ has a bride to rule with Him, i.e., the '*glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing*' (Eph 5.27). Besides, if the church continues to have a '*mixed multitude*' (Ex 12.38), the ungodly will not have the promised witness to the gospel.

This, then, is the sobering truth: the judgment Jesus spoke about in warning of the ax being laid to '*the root of the trees*' (Mt 3.10) and the 'winnowing' to remove those who '*offend and...who practice lawlessness*' (Mt 13.41) must begin at the '*house of God*' (1Pet 4.17). The 'hypocrites' (play actors) only continue to intermingle with consecrated believers until the '*time of harvest*' (Mt 13.30). But judgment also on the church first before it can justly be loosed on the ungodly '*who do not obey the gospel*' (1Pet 4.17). In other words, if believers continue to walk in ways unworthy of the Lord the heathen can rightly argue they were denied the witness convincing them to

repent and believe. The bottom line: when history teaches persecution was used more than other means to purify the church, to think this ‘threshing’ instrument is not going to be used again underestimates the lengths Heaven will go to cleanse the church.

THE IMPERATIVE OF REPENTANCE

‘Go through, Go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people; Build up, Build up the highway! Take out the stones, Lift up a banner for the peoples!’ (Is 62.10) If Christ is to come again, a ‘highway’ of godly people must be prepared. A work I am convinced has already started since hearing in my spirit some years ago the word PREPARE. After reading my book, I hope you are persuaded repentance is at the core of this preparation. Genuine, mind-renewing, life-changing, bondage-breaking repentance so believers turn from all known sin and turn to the Lord and righteousness.

My final plea, then, is this: please don’t ignore what I believe is ‘present truth’; a ‘word’ the Lord wants many to hear, especially those who have not embraced this work of preparation. Those who don’t seriously commit to its precepts jeopardize their chance of surviving these coming days. More than one current prophet has warned the ‘day of evil’ draws near in its fullness, a ‘day’ culminating in a ‘time of trouble’. But also identified as one ‘*of sorrow*’ (Mt 24.8), a ‘*perilous time*’ (2Tim 3.1), and a day when ‘*hearts fail...for fear*’ (Lk 21.26). It will not be easy for either saint or sinner to endure this time of ‘*suffering and patience*’ (Jam 5.10); the tribulation of it will be the supreme ‘*testing of...faith*’ (Jam 1.3), and this before the suffering of the ‘Great Tribulation’,

Last but not least, I cannot shake the conviction one trial more than any other will test believers, and I refer to an unparalleled enticement to sin. As laid out, one serious temptation will be to ‘drawback’ and desert the Lord as a way to escape persecution, but other temptations of diabolical subtlety and wiliness are to flood the earth (2Cor 11.3). Almost certainly to see more than a few of God’s children stumble, with some going further and fall from grace. Numerous believers have already been seduced by the ‘*passing pleasures of sin*’ (Heb 11.25), or if not that, have given in to ‘*pleasure and luxury*’ (Jam 5.5) with its promise of a life of ease. This, with the bait of greater immoral, unclean, even perverse sexual gratification, about to be held out will likely see many more join those already dabbling in it. Only a solid commitment to walk in repentance ensures these alluring ‘honey traps’ do not ensnare. This flood of temptation with the ‘*strong delusion*’ will certainly trap those refusing to turn from, ‘*pleasure in unrighteousness*’ (2Thes 2.11,12). And as mentioned, to imagine this powerful deception is will only affect the ungodly is a grave mistake. Believers still with stubborn rebellion in their heart and those who have allowed deceit to determine their commitment to the Lord will be easy targets. (See Mk 4.19). This mandates deep repentance to escape deception of this magnitude.

STAYING THE COURSE

When repentance is worked out only over time, let me conclude this chapter and the book with a few thoughts on perseverance. Yes, the road is long with many ‘pit stops’ along the way, not to mention accidents. It is, therefore, unwarranted

to be impatient and anxious about the changes the Lord wants; rapid, radical change in any endeavor is unhelpful and it is no different with repentance. When the changes must be more than superficial (those lacking in depth usually do not survive when severely tested) the divine renovation can take a lifetime.

Please, then, don't retreat because it takes too long, seeming to go on forever. Nor fret about having to repeat the lessons, all are troubled by this; change often comes only after repeated failures to respond to conviction by the Holy Spirit. The heart easily rebels against alterations God wants, especially if it means giving up ingrained thinking or behavior. These are usually 'put off' after facing up to them again and again. Don't, then, be discouraged by the slow rate of change; remain steadfast and be '*patient and like the farmer wait for the precious fruit*' (Jam 5.7) of righteousness to receive all the rain. No matter how many times you go 'round the mountain', keep going so you finish the race and receive the prize (1Cor 9.24). One last thought; if humility is the cornerstone of repentance, then setbacks in overcoming sin can be positive if it chastens and humbles even more. If all illusions about how strong and capable the 'flesh' is are destroyed, suffering defeat is not a great loss. In the end, the believer brought to the place of true humility and utter dependence on the Lord can rejoice.

THANK YOU

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I welcome any comments or other correspondence you may want to share with me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Corin was born in Wellington, New Zealand, the great-grandson of the founders of the Methodist church in his locality. Converted in 1960 at age 17, for several years he served in Youth for Christ and Open-Air Campaigners before his marriage to Dulcie and relocating his family to Auckland where he assisted an independent Pentecostal church. First as a nighttime Bible College lecturer and, then, after leaving behind a career of fifteen years as a retail pharmacist, as the Dean of Studies for the full-time Bible College.

In 1985 he relocated his family to Perth, West Australia after an invitation to be Dean of Studies of an independent Pentecostal Bible College and Pastoral Counselor on staff in the local church. This tenure lasted for nine years until his appointment in 1992 as Registrar of the Perth campus of Tabor College. While there, he completed a B.A. in Ministry and resigned in 1995 to found a Prayer Counseling ministry for inner healing and deliverance. John is now retired from active ministry to publish books preparing believers for the end-time purposes of God.



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