

1. The Ethical and Moral Foundation

Jesus came to free the spirit of people from the chains of the flesh that had bound that spirit since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden (Gen 1-3). God had addressed the overt acts of immorality and unethical behavior in the Law of Moses and writings of the prophets. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus extends the letter of the prohibition of sinful acts to the spirit of true disciples, which can overpower the flesh. Paul describes this powerful transformation in Christ in Eph 2:1-5:

2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.

The Beatitudes

Matt 5:1-10:

1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The first part of the Sermon on the Mount, commonly called the beatitudes, sets forth the spiritual dimensions of the gospel law. The control of the external person depends on the nature and strength of the inward person. The impeding force of God's power moves through people, as they become partakers of these divine qualities. Of these qualities, Peter spoke in 2 Peter 1:3-4,

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

A repeated and key word in this text is *blessed*. According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, this word indicates the nature of that which is the highest good. Revelation uses *blessed* seven times. The beatitudes describe those who receive this highest nature of goodness—used twice of God. A highest nature, goodness, couples with a divine reward, based on a disposition of heart:

Blessed	the poor in spirit	the kingdom of heaven
Blessed	they who mourn	comforted
Blessed	the meek	inherit the earth

Blessed	hunger and thirst for righteousness	be filled
Blessed	the merciful	shown mercy
Blessed	the pure in heart	see God
Blessed	the peacemakers	called sons of God
Blessed	persecuted because of righteousness	kingdom of heaven

Inward Power Controls Outward Acts

As Christ lives in us, we are able to overcome the world. When people persecute us, we rejoice:

Matt 5:11-12:

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

That we will suffer persecution is certain. Paul wrote in 2 Tim 3:12, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." The first response from a human point of view might be to strike back. Yet, with the spirit of the beatitudes living in us, we adopt the spirit of Christ. Peter explained how to do this in 1 Peter 4:1-4:

4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. 2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. 4 They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.

Christ is the example that we should follow. Peter again wrote in 1 Peter 2:21-23

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

22 "He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth."

23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

The Power of Christian Influence

Matt 5:13-16 13:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

14 *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

As we become imitators and servants of Christ, our influence runs like salt throughout the world. We become like a city on a hill. Our influence is there for all to see. We do not need to

press to concoct deeds worthy of righteousness; for we are righteous.

Conclusion

Christians are to put on Christ. Paul wrote in Gal 3:27, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." It is in this state that we become new creations according to 2 Cor 5:17-18, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." This power of Christ from within keeps us from sin.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Gen 1:3: When was man bound by sin? What did he do?
2. Eph 2:1-5: In what were the Ephesians dead? What did they follow? What did God do?
3. Matt 5:1-10: What will the poor in spirit receive? What will happen to those who mourn? What will the meek inherit? Who will be filled? What will the merciful receive? Who will see God? Who will be called sons of God? Whose will be the kingdom of God?
4. 2 Peter 1:3-4: What has God's divine power given us? Who called us? How did he call us? Through what do we participate in the divine nature? From what do we escape?
5. Matt 5:11-12: What happens to us when people persecute us? Why should we rejoice when people persecute us?
6. 2 Tim 3:12: Who will be persecuted?
7. 1 Peter 4:1-4: With what attitude are we to arm ourselves? How should we live the rest of our earthly lives? What do pagans choose to do?
8. 1 Peter 2:21-23: In whose footsteps should we follow? To whom did Christ entrust himself?
9. Matt 5:13-16 13: Who is the salt of the earth? Who is the light of the world? If we let our lights shine, what will men see?
10. Gal 3:27: How are we to put on Christ?
11. 2 Cor 5:17-18: What are we, if we are in Christ?