

## How Do Your Attitudes Be?

Do any of us have the right attitude to be called genuine Christians? Jesus gave us a list of attitudes by which we will be blessed, if we hold to them. They are clearly spelled out in Matthew 5:3-11. This is in the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus describes eight categories of blessed believers. These are commonly called the **beatitudes**, but one might also call them the be-attitudes, not the do-attitudes or the attempted attitudes, but attitudes which should be in every Christian's heart and daily life. Let's see what Jesus is telling us:

Verse 3 *"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* This has to do with our attitude toward ourselves, in which we feel our need and admit that we are spiritually destitute without Jesus in our hearts. This means that we must be empty of ourselves before He can fill us with Himself. Here is the opposite of self-sufficiency and of being full of ourselves. God helps those who have come to the end of themselves, and we become rich in spirit only after the Holy Spirit has filled our hearts.

Verse 4 *"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."* 2Corinthians 1:3-4 tells us that God is the Father of all comfort, and also Jesus can "bind up the brokenhearted", as we learn in Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18. This is not about mourning at a funeral. It is about experiencing mourning and sorrow because of our own sins and for the unsaved, as well as for the poor and unfortunate of the world. Faith and trust in Jesus will comfort us because we well know that our prayers will be heard and that through them, as well as our fruitfulness in His name, some will be saved and benefited who otherwise might not have been.

Verse 5 *"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."* If our attitude is of meekness in the faith, we will be sons and daughters of the Father and "joint-heirs" with Jesus in the millennium and ever more. Meekness is not weakness! It is an attitude toward others that has nothing of ourselves to prove. It is a mind set that is teachable and

will not defend itself when wrong. Meekness results from our priorities and focus on Jesus as our only source of strength (see Ephesians 4 and Titus 3).

*“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”* This is an attitude toward God. It is a hunger and thirst for Him. How do we satisfy this hunger and thirst? It is through praise, prayer and pursuit of understanding of Him, His way and His purpose for us as found in His Holy Word. Here is one of the clues, which may help us to determine whether or not we are saved. Is our appetite mainly for Him or for worldly things? Put another way, what do we do when we have some spare time? Do we reach for the Bible, or for the T.V. clicker, or for the sport pages?

Verse 7 *“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.”* Here is our attitude toward others through a forgiving spirit. His mercy and forgiveness towards us must be reflected through us towards others, for we must remember, that we reap what we sow! Mercy is not tolerance of sin. It is God-like love in action!

Verse 8 *“Blessed are the pure of heart: for they shall see God.”* This is about keeping our lives clean, seeking holiness as the only way to happiness in spite of the many worldly pleasures, which tempt us into other directions. There should be a singleness of purpose that is to serve and please Him, and to give all glory to Him. This is not absolute sinlessness, but of truth within, a singleness of heart and purpose. For this we need the new heart we are given when we are born-again. We must feed that new heart with prayer and His Word, and starve that old nature which will continue to tempt us back into worldly ways.

Verse 9 *“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”* We are to try to bring peace between people and God, and also between peoples as well, where possible. God loves peace, and expects us to help promote it with love and kindness and through the wisdom derived from His Word, for He is the God of peace (Romans 14:19, 15:33). This has nothing to do with being a pacifist in the worldly sense.

Peace based on sin, compromise, tolerances or ecumenicalism is not in any way God condoned peace. The ultimate peace, which we are to seek and where possible to promote, is that “peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Verse 10 through 12 *“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”* We must recognize that all who are leading Godly lives will suffer persecution, unless we hide our faith under a basket, as one who is ashamed of the faith. Whether it is being ostracized, ridiculed or stoned, there will be persecution of those who lead sincere Godly lives and publicly express their faith. This is true across most of the world today, and has been since Stephen became the first martyr. It has not been so in this country, so we tend to not notice it. But in these end times, it is becoming more and more evident that the forces of darkness are gaining such power in this country that persecution of all genuine believers is not far in the future.

Here we have the eight attitudes Jesus described as being appropriately and necessary in the hearts of the saved. We think of an attitude as an outward expression of an inward condition. But our natural, deceitful nature is quite capable of hypocrisy, and in this sense, of expressing outwardly an image we wish to be known by, but which is not the same as what is in the heart. This human propensity to deceive is often expressed as to “put our best foot forward” or to appear more “Godly” than we really are. This is something we must always be on guard against. It is so easy and tempting to do this, and so destructive to our souls, that we should continually examine ourselves in this context. Is our outward projection of ourselves merely a contrived image, or is it the real person showing through? In the world, image and perception rather than reality have become the main themes of life, a pseudo reality around which people conduct their lives. Many never even stop to examine what is in their souls, but are quite happy if they can continue

to receive benefit through the image each has created for himself or herself. Isn't this Hollywood or never-never land having become a national virtual reality?

In Matthew 23:13-29, Jesus gives us examples of this imagery and how dangerous it can be as He lists the eight woes against the scribes and Pharisees. Chuck Misler has observed that a careful comparison will show that they somewhat parallel the beatitudes, but in a very negative sense. Remember that the scribes and Pharisees, which Jesus so devastatingly rebukes and condemns, were both of the class, which was highly educated in Scripture. They were also very zealous and sincere regarding their religion. But as Jesus points out, in effect, that somewhere they "lost their first love." That the love of God was not in them, but instead the love of self as well as rules and rituals, many of them self-made and not of the Torah. Let us see what Jesus found as He looked both into their hearts and at their actions.

Verse 13 *"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."* Notice here they are shutting up the kingdom of heaven not only to themselves, but also to others whom they influence. This is the opposite of those in Matthew 5:3, who are able to receive the kingdom of heaven. What a horrible indictment it is to be charged with influencing others into eternal damnation! There are many very notable "religious" personages around today which will one day have to answer to this same charge!

Verse 14 *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows' houses, and for pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation."* This is all show and no righteous substance. Instead of comforting and helping widows and orphans (examples of those who mourn of Matthew 5:4) they actually steal from them while saying long and empty prayers to impress others with their piety. We see variation on the same theme through some of the "tele-evangelists" and other false or half-truth teachers who are on the prowl today.

Verse 15 “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*” In Matthew 5:5 they hunger and thirst for righteousness, here they are greedy for gain, for the gold. They value earthly power and prestige more than any eternal kingdom. In bringing others to their evil ways they condemn their hapless proselytes. Another horrible indictment, reminiscent again of many of the false teachers and compromisers, will clog the airways, fill bookshelves and stand in pulpits.

Verse 23, 24 “*Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.*” Here Jesus accuses them of paying great attention to the small things, including the minor aspects of the 613 points of law, many which they themselves made up, while at the same time missing the main point of God’s message. They were legalists and, therefore, their focus was on details while they miss the big picture, “the weightier matters,” the great principals involved. Remember how they had no problem condemning an innocent Man-Jesus to death but dared not enter Pilates’ mansion, a gentile house, for fear of defiling themselves. In Matthew 5:7 they obtain mercy, here they reject the idea and show no mercy. Even in their tithing they are cheap and hypocritical, making offerings merely of inexpensive easily obtained herbs. Tithing is giving 10% of your income. This is what already belongs to God. If you choose to offer up a gift to Him, it must be something in addition to the 10%.

Verse 25-28 “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisees, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*” Here Jesus

is using two idioms, the cup and the sepulcher, in order to illustrate that they strive to show their cleanness on the outside which the world can see, while they are filthy on the inside (something to which we must all be alert). Inner cleanliness is obviously the more important, but they strived for the opposite. In Matthew 5:8, 9, it is only the pure of heart and the peacemakers who are blessed. But the scribes and Pharisees seem to all have dirty hearts, as Jesus points out. There can be no Godly peace associated with a filthy heart.

Verse 29-35 *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zechari’ah son of Berechi’ah, who ye slew between the temple and the altar.”* Here again Jesus points out this hypocrisy when the scribes and Pharisees appear to adorn and respect the memories of the prophets whom their fathers killed and who they will also scourge, crucify and kill. He tells them that they will do this to those He sends (including Himself) Who is the sender of the prophets? Only God has that power and authority! Here Jesus in effect is disclosing Himself to be God, because it is He who is sending the prophets! In Matthew 5:10, 11 the persecuted receive the kingdom of heaven and they are to rejoice because they are in good company, that is the persecuted prophets before them. In the remaining verses of chapter 23, Jesus laments over their hypocrisy and longstanding unholy behavior, and predicts the dire consequences that will result. Notice that every woe, every accusation is characterized by their hypocrisy, that is pretending to be, or do, or believe the opposite of what was really in their hearts.

As previously noted, these were biblical scholars of the first order, in their day. Their lives were supposedly dedicated to studying, preaching, teaching and living what they understood to be what God had ordained through the Torah. They came from a long line of such agents of the law and were extremely proud of their heritage as sons of Abraham. In these woes, Jesus is showing them their total failure and the downright sinfulness of their representation of the Holy Word. Their shock at hearing these things is again against the messenger, and they appear to have learned nothing except a hatred for the message and it's Deliverer. Jesus did not mince words; He was brutally clear and accurate in His condemnations. One might wonder what the reactions would be today if He were to personally address an assembly of many of the modern pastors, evangelists, and other church leaders. I suspect that the message and the reactions would be little different from these described above.

There is a great deal to learn from all of this for those of us who call ourselves Christians. The potential that we may have some level of hypocrisy regarding our faith and outward expressions of it, is always present and should be guarded against through frequent, deep into-the-heart self examination of our motives and purposes for which we do "good things." Remember, it is not what good we do, but what is in the heart, dictating the why of what we do, which causes it to be either gold, or hay and stubble. This is made clear in Matthew 6:1-4 when Jesus says, *"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms; let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."* Here Jesus is telling us to not advertise our good deeds. We should keep them as secret as possible so that any deserved credit will come from God alone. If we are credited and praised here on earth, there will be no added brownie points in heaven. So again this matter, as with all things, all boils down to what is in the heart. As Jesus said so many times, *"He who has ears let him hear what the Spirit says."* As far as I know, we all have ears.

