

One by one the beatitudes tell us that the blessings of eternity will only be given to those who have become new creatures in Christ (II Cor. 5:17). The *merciful* obtain mercy, the *pure in heart* see God, and the *peacemakers* are called the sons of God. This is not simply a call to do good works, for Jesus was clear that external righteousness was not enough. He told His followers in Matthew 5:20: "Unless your righteousness *exceeds* that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." He was not teaching that people needed to do more good works than the Pharisees in order to enter the kingdom of God, but that every righteous act must have a corresponding inward component to be true righteousness.

Being merciful and *being peacemakers* describe what we are *to be* as people, not just what we are to do. Though "being" will result in "doing," those who enter the Kingdom of God must have both; we must *be* new creatures inside and out.

5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Galatians 3:26 tells us how to become sons of God: "we are all sons of God through faith." We become sons by trusting in Christ for our forgiveness and hope. In verse 9 Jesus is saying that sons of God are also peacemakers. That is, people who are peacemakers will be recognized as the sons of God at the judgment and they will be called what they are and welcomed into the Father's house.

In Jewish thought there is a slight difference between being called a "son" or a "child." The word "son" often bears the meaning of "partaker of the character of." Both "son of God" and "child of God" express family relations, but the former has more emphasis on character than position (Carson, 28). An example of this is in Matthew 5:44-45: "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

As a son of God, the Christian should reflect the character of God, his Father. From what we see in Scripture our heavenly Father is a "God of peace" (Romans 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). He made peace by the blood of the cross (Colossians 1:20). What Jesus is saying in Matthew 5:9 is that people who have become sons of God have the character of their heavenly Father.

There are many reasons why men lack peace, but the basic reason is that they are separated from God, the source of peace (Ro.15:33; I Thess. 3:16). Christ removed the barrier of sin making it possible to have peace with God and others (Eph. 2:13-18). Therefore He is the great Peacemaker (Isa. 9:6). It also follows that the greatest peacemaking message is the message of salvation, and the Christian who proclaims it becomes a peacemaker (Isa. 52:7; Ro. 10:15).

But being a peacemaker is not limited to sharing the gospel. Peacemaking involves lessening tensions and seeking solutions to problems. Both the one who brings peace between men and God and the one who brings peace between men and men shall have the privilege of being called sons of God.

Some see Matthew 5:9 as a contradiction to other teachings of Jesus. For example, Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. (Matthew 10:34-37). But this is not a contradiction. There is a difference between peace and appeasement, for the peace of God is not peace at any price.

On the one hand, Jesus is saying that we should actively strive for peace. As far as it depends upon us we are to live peaceably with all men (Ro. 12:18; also I Cor. 7:15; I Pet. 3:11; Heb. 12:14). But this does not mean that our lives will be completely free of conflict. If we are to be worthy of Christ, we are to put Him first and love Him most - even above our nearest and dearest relatives. Conflict, therefore, is the inevitable result of His coming. To proclaim "Peace, Peace" when there is no peace is the work of a false prophet not a disciple of Christ (Jer. 6:14).

Those who like to quarrel and cause strife do not reflect God's character and therefore are either not sons of God, or are disobedient ones. God is a peacemaker and so the disciple of Christ should be one, too.

Matthew 5:10-12 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven . . ."

The final beatitude does not say, "blessed are those who are persecuted because they are objectionable, or because they are right wing conservatives." The blessing is restricted to those who suffer for righteousness. The believers in this verse are persecuted because they have decided to live as Jesus did (I Pet.3:13-17; 4:12-16; Jn. 15:18-20). The type of persecution to be expected is defined in verse 11 as insults, false accusations, and being spoken of with hostility.

There is a basic principle that appears over and over again in the NT. If a Christian displays righteousness in a sinful world, those who see it will either be repulsed or drawn to it - there is no middle ground (Phil.1:29; II Tim. 3:12; I Thess. 3:3; Jn. 3:16-21).

In Acts 5:41, the apostles rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer for Christ. In I Peter 1:6-9, Peter saw trials as a means to test true faith and purify it. Because the disciple of Christ knows the future blessings he will receive by living righteously, he will decide to do so now. If suffering for Christ pleases God and is rewarded by entrance into the Kingdom, it's worth it.

Jesus says that persecution is to be expected. In fact, if a person doesn't experience persecution, they need to ask why. Is it because righteousness is not being displayed in his life? Has the believer's "light" been hidden under a bushel? (Matt. 5:14-16) If it is not being displayed, one wonders, "How then, can such a person enter the Kingdom of God?"