

# The Only Way to Live and Die

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Scripture: Philippians 1:12–26

*“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

—Philippians 1:21

The apostle Paul did not have an easy life. He endured many a trial for the sake of Jesus Christ. One of those trials was imprisonment. Twice he was imprisoned in Rome. We read of his second and last imprisonment in 2 Timothy, written when he was expecting to soon be executed.

But during his first imprisonment in Rome, about 60 A.D., Paul had a certain degree of liberty. He was allowed to live in his own rented house. And it is from that house that he wrote the Epistle to the Philippians. Paul, who had persecuted the church of Christ for many years, is now a prisoner of the very Savior whose followers he once cast into prison.

Of this Savior he now says in our text, “He is my life.” Paul the prisoner has become a free man in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has freed him from the law of sin and death. So he writes to Philippi with joy. While he is in prison he writes this epistle, often called *the epistle of joy*. Paul says to them, “Rejoice...and again I say, Rejoice.”

The church at Philippi had a special place in Paul’s heart. This church was founded by Paul on his second

missionary journey. It began with the conversion of Lydia and the Philippian jailer and his family. So Paul writes this letter full of reminiscence, affection, and gratitude. He thanks the Philippians for ministering to his physical and temporal needs, which was quite remarkable because the Philippians, in terms of earthly treasure, were rather a poor congregation. But he knows that these gifts show their love for him.

In Philippians 1:18 he speaks of his joy in the Lord and in verse 19 he says, “For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer.” He knows that even his imprisonment must be subservient to his salvation through the Philippians’ prayers and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (cf. Heidelberg Cat., Q. 1). He says in effect, my imprisonment is going to work together for good, for Christ will be magnified even in this, “whether it be by [my] life or by [my] death” (v. 20).

And then he says with great confidence, boldness, and simplicity—and this surely is the apex of this opening chapter of Philippians—“For to me to live...Christ, and to die...gain” (v. 21). Notice the word “is” is in italic print in the Authorized Version; it is only added to make it a complete sentence since the Greek text has no helping verbs. Paul says, “What is my life? When I look to the future, to the past, and to the present—why am I here? What is my life all about? For me to live,” and you can see him pausing here with his pen, and he writes, “Christ.” And then he says, “and to die...gain.”

That is what we need today and every day as we look to the future. May this be the model for your church and your family. May this be your goal. May this be something you not only post on your refrigerator, but something you know, something you live, something you experience. May this be what all your prosperity and all your adversity looks toward: for me to live—Christ; for me to die—gain!

And these two are connected. When for us to live is Christ, then for us to die will be gain, because to die is to be with Christ forever.

Let's look more closely, then, at the words of our text in Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Under the theme, "The Only Way to Live and Die," let us consider, first, how Christ can be our life, and second how death can be our gain.

### **How Christ Can Be Our Life**

What does it mean to be able to say, "To live is Christ"? I would like to suggest four things to you, revolving around the words link, life, love, and likeness.

#### *We Are Linked with Christ*

When Christ is our life, we have a special linkage with Him. As theologians say, we are united to Him. This union with Christ is foundational. We must be in Christ by faith. In a word, we must have a relationship with Him.

Someone was speaking with me this week and they said about a friend, "I'm connected with him." That is a popular word today. People want to feel connected with other people. When you are in Christ, when your life is Christ, you are connected with Jesus Christ.

Of course, that had not always been the case with Paul. Originally, as a Pharisee, he persecuted those who were connected with Jesus Christ. For Paul, prior to his conversion, to live was Moses. He did everything right, according to the law, and he would have said, "For me to live is the law," for he gloried in legalism and man-made righteousness.

But on the way to Damascus all that changed (Acts 9). A light shone from heaven; Paul fell to the earth trembling, astonished, blinded, and conquered by God. And you know the story—his friends brought him into Damascus.

For three days he could not see, nor did he eat or drink. He could only pray.

And there in “the street which is called Straight” the Holy Spirit showed him who he really was in the mirror of the holy law of God (Acts 9:11). Paul saw that “for me to live is sin.” That was something he never learned at the feet of Gamaliel. But now he learned that he was a stranger to God, a stranger to grace, a lost sinner before a holy God. His uncircumcised heart was humbled, and there Paul accepted the punishment of his iniquity.

But there too in the street called Straight the Holy Spirit led this persecuting Pharisee to Jesus Christ. The scales fell from Paul’s eyes and he says, “It pleased God... to reveal His Son in me that I might preach him among the heathen” (Gal. 1:15–16). His life was henceforth linked to the life of Jesus Christ. He entered into a real and vital relationship with Jesus Christ. He came to love Jesus Christ, and in Christ he was filled with the peace that passes all understanding. Christ became his life.

From that moment on Paul is determined to know nothing, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). Acts 9:20 says that just after Paul was converted and came to know Christ, “Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” He says to the Philippians, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord...and do count them but dung, that I might win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ” (Phil. 3:7–9). That is the way to live, linked up with Jesus Christ. He is our life. He is our righteousness. He is our foundation.

What is your life? Just fill in the blanks for a moment; think autobiographically about yourself. Don’t think of

anyone else. For me to live is ... what? Is it Christ? The way you are living right now—is Christ your life?

What if you have to say, “For me to live is work”? Or, “for me to live is friends and popularity”? Or money? Or reputation? You fill in the blank. What is the highest point in your life? What is the lowest point? What is the foundation? What is your life? Can you say with John 17:3 that this is life eternal, to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent? Could you live without Jesus for a week? A month? A year? Are you linked with Jesus Christ?

### *We Have Life in Christ*

When Christ is our life, we are not only linked to Him but we have life in Him. We are linked to Him and united with Him for our justification, finding atonement and forgiveness in Jesus Christ, but Paul’s concern here is the living of our daily life. He is saying, “The aim of my daily life, the means and the content of my daily life is Christ.” In other words, Paul is discussing our sanctification.

He wants to know Christ better in His person, better in His natures, better in His offices, and better in communion with Him. “For me to live—Christ,” says Paul. “Day by day He is my teaching Prophet, and my sacrificial, interceding High Priest, and my ruling and guiding King. The aim of my life is to commune with Him daily. If I don’t have contact with Christ in a day it is an empty day, a sad day. But if I have union with Him, and communion out of that union through His Word, the means of grace, and the pursuit of other spiritual disciplines, I rejoice! For me to live is truly a life in Christ.”

For Paul everything outside of Christ is death. Only Christ gives real life. Sin means death for Paul. So Christ and sin are antithetical to each other. That is why Paul is so grieved about his indwelling or remaining sin. It is a sorrow for him. He wages war against it and cries out,

“O wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24). He grieves when he sins because he knows that to sin is not to live in Christ.

What about you? Do you see the emptiness of all of life outside of Christ? Do you see death in all that is not Christ? When you look back over the last year is this what you valued? Did you grow in Christ in this past year? Did you commune with Christ? What is all the rest of life if you haven’t had communion with Christ? It is empty, isn’t it? Empty at best, and it will condemn you at worst. Oh, to live truly is to live in Christ, by Christ, for Christ!

### *We Have Love for Christ*

To live Christ means not only to have linkage with Christ and life in Christ, but to have love for Christ. Paul loved the Lord Jesus Christ. If you love your earthly life partner so much you say, “I love you so much, I can’t put it into words. I think you are so special!” That is the way true Christians feel about Jesus Christ, and they say, “I love Him so much.”

To the Ephesians Paul says he yearned for them to know the love of Christ in all its depth, height, and breadth, asserting that it passes all understanding (Eph. 3:17–19). To the Corinthians he writes that the love of Christ constrained him to preach the gospel and to warn against sin (2 Cor. 5:8–15). The love of Jesus Christ was Paul’s greatest motivator. It is what made him get out of bed in the morning, so to speak. It is what made him tick all day long; it is what filled his mouth, filled his heart, and filled his life. It was the engine that moved him to do whatever he did. That is why Christ is everywhere in his letters.

I love what Luther said: “Paul could not keep Christ out of his pen because the Holy Spirit kept Christ in his heart.” An old saying is that all roads led to Rome. For

Paul, all matters large and small lead to Christ because Christ is all. “For I am determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). That is Paul’s great theme. He said to the Colossians, “Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11). That’s it; everything we believe, and have, and are as believers, we believe and have and are in relationship to Jesus Christ. He is our only theme.

What is amazing about Paul is that even in practical areas of daily life, mundane things, or everyday problems, he is always taking us back to Christ. Are there divisions in the church in Corinth? He points them to Christ. He writes, “Is Christ divided; was Paul crucified for you?” (1 Cor. 1:13). If the problem is an immoral man in the assembly, he points to Christ again. “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump...for even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). If the problem is immoral temptations, Christ crucified is once more the answer: “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11).

What about living in the home as Christian wives or husbands? Again, he points to Christ. “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:22). “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right” (Eph. 6:1).

For every aspect of life, every relationship, everything practical, everything spiritual, Paul takes us to Christ. When he tells us to forgive each other he reminds us of Christ who forgave us (Col. 3:13). When he exhorts us to be generous in our giving he reminds us of Christ who gave so much for us (2 Cor. 8:9). When he exhorts us

to humility he says, “Put on the mind of Christ” (Phil. 2:5). When he exhorts us to everyday holiness it is on the ground that we are crucified and risen with Christ (Rom. 6:3–5). Christ is the answer to every human problem. To the lost or to the saved, it is all Christ. He is all I preach. He is the sum and substance of my ministry. For me to live is Christ; I love Him with all my heart, says Paul.

Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? I know when you compare yourself to Paul you feel that you come up short. But can you say with Peter this morning, “Lord, although I don’t love Thee as I should, Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love Thee. I love the Lord Jesus Christ”?

#### *We Have Likeness to Christ*

Finally, when our life is Christ we don’t only have linkage with Him, and life in Him, and love for Him, but we also have likeness to Him. If we really love someone we start to become more like that person, don’t we? It is such an intriguing thing to see an elderly couple who are still ravished with each other, still on their first honeymoon, as it were, fifty years after they are married. They are so close to each other. They think together, they speak together, they walk together, they talk together, they pray together, and they read together. They just love each other. They become like each other, even in physical appearance. After a while they almost look like sister and brother.

And so it is in a believer; when his life is Christ he becomes more like Christ. There is a savor of Christ that oozes out of him, says Paul elsewhere (2 Cor. 2:15). The fruits of Christ are the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, humility, temperance. All those fruits listed in Galatians 5:22–23 are really nothing but a moral profile of the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer begins to exercise these graces more and more. We become more like Christ, so that in

the great day we can be fully like Him when we enter into glory and see Him as He is. As John says in 1 John 3:2, “We shall be like him,” perfectly like Him on that day.

To become like Christ involves chiefly three things.

First, it involves developing, by God’s grace, *a servant heart*, thinking not of myself and what *I* want, and what *I* like, and what *I* wish for, but to think in terms of God and His people, and to think corporately in terms of *we* as believers, and in terms of *we* as God’s family, and living a life of service to others in Christ’s name.

Second, it involves developing *a loving heart*. Christ had such a loving heart. He was a people person. He loved people. He took up little babies in His arms. He healed the lepers, and dared to touch them though they were unclean. There was nothing that held Christ back from loving people. To be like Christ is to love as Christ loved.

Third, to be like Christ is to have *a humble heart*. He was meek and lowly. The more we are like Christ, the more humble we are. You know the famous story about when someone approached Augustine and asked, “What are the three most important Christian graces we need?” His answer was, “Humility, humility, humility.”

This is what Paul means then when he says, “For me to live is Christ.” It means linkage with Christ, life in Christ, love for Christ, and likeness to Christ, all flowing out of knowing and experiencing Christ’s love to us.

But then he adds these amazing words: “To die... gain.” This brings us to the second part of Philipians 1:21.

### **How Death Can Be Our Gain**

Is death gain? Why does Paul tie death to life? Because the two belong together. It reminds us of Question 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism: *What is thy only comfort in life and in death?* The world and our natural hearts try to separate

the two. I will live the way I want to; I will live for myself. I'll worry about death later. Paul says no; because I live in Christ, to die in Christ—that shall be gain to me. The two belong together; the one truth implies the other. What an amazing confession—death equals gain.

Death is a heavy loss by nature. We have to leave our husband, wife, father, mother, and children behind. What a loss! We have to leave our work behind, our relationships behind, leave behind everything we have acquired and enjoyed. We say to each other, and rightly so, “You have my sympathy in your loss.” Paul says, “For me it is not a loss, it is a gain.” It is not a loss for the people of God. For me to live is Christ and therefore death is gain, for we both live and die in the Lord.

There are two things we need to look at here if we are to understand this text: what the apostle leaves behind, and what he receives when he dies.

### *What Paul Leaves Behind*

So what will he leave behind? He will leave behind his beloved brethren in the Lord. He will leave communion with the people of God on earth. He must leave his beloved son Timothy. He leaves his brother and friend Silas. He leaves all that is on earth behind.

But he also leaves behind the body of sin and death. He leaves behind that earthly state or condition which he frankly acknowledged and lamented: “I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that do I” (Rom. 7:14b–15). He leaves behind the body of sin when he dies.

He also leaves behind a life which at best is only labor and sorrow. He leaves behind a life of afflictions. Twice he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned. Thrice he suffered shipwreck. He was in the deep for a night and a day and had been in perils of waters, perils of the city and the

wilderness and the sea, perils of false brethren, weariness and painfulness, and hunger and thirst. He underwent fastings and suffered cold and nakedness. He leaves it all behind.

And he leaves behind a life of temptation, a buffeting Satan, an enticing world—no more problems with the lust of the eye, with the lust of the flesh, or with the pride of life. He leaves behind that troubling thorn in his flesh. No more unanswered prayers, no more vexing riddles.

Death, dear believer, shall be gain for you as well. You will leave behind your sinful heart, the hardships of your difficult life, your temptations, and the thorns in your flesh. Think of it. There will be no more sin, no more Satan, no more worldliness, and no more old nature. All evil is walled out and all good is walled in. No more tears, no more pain, no more night, no more death, no more curse, no more temptation. For me to die is gain because of what I leave behind! But even more, dying is gain because of what we will receive.

### *What Paul Receives at Death*

David Murray has written a wonderful article on “Why do believers have to die?”<sup>1</sup> Consider his list of the benefits that a believer receives in death:

(1) “Dying brings us into communion with Christ’s sufferings.” That is a great benefit. Though our death does not pay the penalty for our sin, dying reminds us of how Christ died for us and connects us more deeply and lovingly to Him (Phil. 3:10).

(2) “Dying gives us a unique experience of Christ’s all-sufficient grace.” Dying can be very difficult, painful, and fearful. Christ will help you through your death hours.

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1. David Murray, “Why Do Believers Have to Die?” *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* 20, no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 17.

(3) “Dying transforms us into Christ’s image.” What a glorious thing that is! Death can intensify our sanctification so that as the outer man decays, the inner man is renewed in spiritual growth (2 Cor. 4:16).

(4) “Dying is our last and perhaps greatest opportunity to witness for Christ’s glory.” The deathbed is a pulpit. It may be our supreme test of faith, and the occasion for us to bear witness that Christ is enough. The Lord has saved many through the testimony of a dying saint. This brings us to the most important point.

(5) “Dying brings us into Christ’s presence.” That is what you will receive, and that is everything, dear believer. To be in His presence is everything you desire, everything you could hope for. This is the apex. This is heaven’s heaven—to be with Christ, to be His bride, to be in perfect communion with Him, to enjoy knowing Him and seeing Him and loving Him and praising Him and communing with Him uninterruptedly! What a life, what a future awaits the people of God! For me to die is gain because I will be with Jesus forever!

Of course, that involves so much more; so much surrounds being with Jesus. Let me unpack some of the blessings of going to be with Christ.

(1) Dying brings us to perfect eternal life with Christ. Our death is no satisfaction for our sins, but it is the abolishing of sin and entrance into the fullness of life. The eternal life that begins here on earth at regeneration shall now be made perfect. Jesus said, “Because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19).

(2) Dying grants us perfect knowledge of Christ. Believers know Christ here on earth. But in death that knowledge will be perfected. Now I see through a glass darkly, but then I will see face to face. Here I know in part, but there I will know as I am known (1 Cor. 13:12).

(3) Dying initiates us into perfect activities. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q. 37) says, “the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness.” We will do all things well as “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb. 12:23).

We will worship God perfectly. Believers will “stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints” (Rev. 15:2–3).

We will serve God perfectly. “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them” (Rev. 7:15). We will reign with Christ.

We will have perfect fellowship with the saints in glory. They “shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11).

(4) Dying welcomes us into a perfect home. We will enter into perfect mansions shining with the perfect light of our perfect God. We will perpetually feast with Him at whose right hand are pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11).

(5) Dying ushers us into perfect communion with the triune God in Christ. We will have more intimate communion with Christ than we have known in our highest peaks of spiritual joy on earth. We will have a clearer vision of Christ’s glory than our most lucid insights here. We will forever bask in His smile, bathe in His glory, and feast in His presence.

Death does more for us believers than anything this earthly life can do for us. Death is gain for it brings me to Jesus. Death is gain because it brings more of Christ to Paul and more of Paul to Christ. The whole Christ comes no more through a glass darkly. Every believer will be brought to Christ in heaven to be with Him forever. That

is why Samuel Rutherford said that God could make ten thousand heavens full of good and glorious joys, but all of them together could not compare to Christ.<sup>2</sup> To die is gain, when to live is Christ.

But if Christ is not your life, your death is not gain. Your death is tragedy. Your death means hell. Your death means to live forever apart from God. Your death means being shut out of the favor of God, even the common grace you may have experienced in this life. So what we need to ask is this: Is my life Christ? Because only then when I come to die, will death be gain.

Death can't harm you, dear child of God. Death will only do you good; it will take you higher and farther than the Bible, and prayer, and the sacraments, and worship, and all the means of grace will take you in this life. It will take you right into the presence of Jesus Christ.

So Paul has this dilemma. He wants to remain here for certain reasons, but he also wants to depart to be with Christ. Here, as William Hendricksen observes, we have a "temporary residence," a mere tent; there, "a permanent abode." Here, "suffering mixed with joy"; there, "joy unmixed with suffering." Here, "suffering for a little while"; there, "joy forever." Here, "absent from the Lord"; there, "being at home with the Lord." Here, "the fight"; there, "the feast." Here, "the realm of sin"; there, "the realm of complete deliverance."<sup>3</sup> To die in the Lord is great gain.

Are you ready to die? May I ask you that? Are you really living? That is the question. If you are living in Christ, you are ready; your house is set in order. If you are

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2. Samuel Rutherford, letter of July 6, 1637, in *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, ed. Andrew A. Bonar (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, n.d.), 413.

3. William Hendricksen, *Exposition of Philippians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), 78.

not living in Christ, you are not ready. Dear friend, you must be ready. You must be born again. There is no other way. The Puritans used to say that the way to get ready to die is to practice dying while you are here—dying to yourself, dying to everything that would draw you away from Jesus Christ.

Charles Spurgeon put it this way:

No man would find it difficult to die who died every day. He would have practiced it so often, that he would only have to die but once more; like the singer who has been through his rehearsals, and is perfect for his part, and has but to pour forth the notes once for all, and have done. Happy are they who every morning go down to Jordan's brink, and wade into the stream in fellowship with Christ, dying in the Lord's death, being crucified on his cross, and raised in his resurrection. They, when they shall climb their Pisgah, shall behold nothing but what has long been familiar to them, as they have studied the map of death.<sup>4</sup>

I'm afraid that some of you are not ready to die, that some of you are still clinging to empty toys and trinkets of this world. For some of you to live is your possessions, your wealth, or your legalism, or maybe, God forbid, some of you even live for sin, or friendships, even things legitimate in themselves, but you are not living for Christ. You are not ready to die. You are not really living. You could die at any moment!

Rutherford wrote, "Build your nest in no tree here, for God has sold the forest to death."<sup>5</sup> Repent, believe the gospel, and bow before the living God. Don't rest until you too can say, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

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4. C. H. Spurgeon, "Dying Daily," sermon 828, on 1 Cor. 15:31, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 14* (Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications, 1976), 491.

5. Rutherford, letter of Jan. 15, 1629, to Lady Kenmure, in *Letters*, 41.

There was an Italian man named Galeacius who was converted at the time of the Reformation. He had to give up his estates in Italy and flee to Geneva. His loss was so considerable to the Church of Rome that he was offered a free passage back and restoration of his estates if he gave up his new-found Reformed faith. This is the note he sent back to Rome: "Let their money perish with them, who esteem all the gold in this world worthy to be compared with one hour's communion with Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit."<sup>6</sup> One hour with Christ is better than a lifetime with this world.

I would also remind you of John Paton who went to the New Hebrides in the late 1850s on the Island of Tanner. He was beset by great difficulties. Cannibals there had never heard the gospel. His wife died after childbirth and his little boy died also. Paton buried his wife and his child, and then had to sit on the grave to prevent the cannibals from digging up their bodies and eating them. He was left alone. Then his house was burned down by one of the cannibals. He lost everything; he had absolutely nothing. He spent the night hiding in a tree, trying to sleep in that tree. He tells us that in the middle of the night as he sat in that tree the words were as clear to him as if they were written across the sky in large letters of gold, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."<sup>7</sup> That is the way to live.

For me to live is *Christ*, a Christ who is with me always until the end of the world. And to die is *gain!* Amen.

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6. Cited in Thomas Watson, *The Duty of Self-Denial* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), 25.

7. See *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides* (London: Banner of Truth, 1965).

# Glorifying God in Our Bodies

*Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven*

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6

*All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

—1 Corinthians 6:12–20

Our text is from 1 Corinthians 6:12–20, and we will consider those verses in detail. In addition to that we want to consider Lord's Day 41 of the Heidelberg Catechism. There we read in question 108, "What doth the seventh commandment teach us? Answer: That all uncleanness is accursed of God; and that therefore we must with all our hearts detest the same, and live chastely and temperately, whether in holy wedlock or in single life."

And then question 109 reads, “Doth God forbid in this commandment only adultery and such like gross sins? Answer: Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, He commands us to preserve them pure and holy; therefore He forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto.” This confessional understanding of the seventh commandment should not be relegated to the sixteenth century, but is highly relevant in our day and culture as well, and is really a summary of what the Bible teaches about human sexuality.

And that raises the question, “How does a believer live in thankfulness to God in respect of the seventh commandment?” Sometimes we think that if we arm ourselves with enough information, we can then live out this seventh commandment before God. Indeed, it is important to know the underpinnings of the philosophies that bombard us day by day in the secular media. It is helpful to look back in history and take stock of how we have gotten to where we are today. If there is one issue that has defined our culture in the last sixty years, it would be the issue of human sexuality. Since the 1960s and the so-called liberation of that generation from a biblical, sexual ethic, our culture has seen a precipitous decline in the ethics of the seventh commandment. A decade after the sexual revolution of the 60s, sexual license gave way to the issue of abortion and its legalization after *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 and the loosening of the biblical underpinnings of society. This further opened up the floodgates of sexual permissiveness, encouraging no-fault divorce, and cohabitation by young couples—sadly, even Christian young couples; the denigration of marriage; the onslaught of pornography and explicit material on the web; the legalization of same-sex union; and the mainstreaming of the transgender ideology. It is important to understand the arguments

behind the sexual revolution. But I would argue that it is not enough just to know enough about these issues. Some would add that we need to engage in Christian activism on these issues, confronting our leaders to pass legislation to protect human life, biblical marriage, and biblical sexual ethics. Those are good things, and we need to be engaged in them, especially in our day.

But activism or being well-informed on cultural happenings alone is not enough. The Apostle Paul did not tell the believers at Corinth to arm themselves with knowledge of the pagan culture surrounding them. He didn't tell them to become Christian activists and confront the political leaders of the day. No, he wanted them to understand how the gospel intersected with the question of human sexuality—because the church at Corinth had a problem. They wanted to live according to their own rules, so Paul came to them and taught them, at times very pointedly, about the seventh commandment.

It is my burden to help you understand the same teachings. It is not only Paul's teaching; this is God's teaching and burden for us, so that we might know what God wants for believers and unbelievers alike. Our theme is "Glorifying God in Our Bodies": (1) by recognizing Christ's authority over our body; (2) by countering our ignorance of our bodies; and (3) by caring for our body as Christ's purchase.

How does the church counter this deluge of filth and immorality, even when those sins have crept into the church? In our prayers we can rail on the sins of the culture as the sins "out there," but that does not deal honestly with those sins. Or we can pretend that those sins are not in the church, but that denies the reality of sin. Or we can engage in political action and rhetoric or enforce morality through legislation, which can be a helpful way of approaching some of the issues and do a world of good.

But these solutions do not go far enough in addressing humanity's deepest need—the gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of that gospel to change lives. That is what the Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians of as he writes to them to glorify God in their bodies, flee sexual immorality, and live out their identity in Jesus Christ. He reminds them and us of the power there is in the gospel to change our lives and the lives of those caught up in sexual sin.

### **1. Glorify God by Recognizing Christ's Authority over Our Bodies.**

The Corinthian church was a unique church that lived by its own rules. Time and again, Paul had to rebuke them and bring them into line with the Word of God and the teaching of the gospel. This is no less true when it came to the problem of sexual sin in their midst. In 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, he reminds them of what many of them once were in their former lives—sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunks, slanderers and swindlers—not a pretty picture. But then he goes on to show how the gospel has changed their lives in verse 11: “But such *were* some of you.” You see, the gospel operates in three tenses. Children, you learn verb tenses in school; in third or fourth grade, you learn about past, present, and future tense. Paul is speaking about who the Corinthians *were*—such *were* some of you. This is the past tense of gospel life. For a believer, there came a point where God made a change in your life through regeneration, through justification. He constituted you a new creation. There was a point where you stopped being what you once were. The reality is that the gospel changes us into those who are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. We receive a new identity in Christ. This is the present tense of the gospel. Believer, you are no longer who you once were. You have a new identity in Christ. This is what

Paul is trying to get us to understand. Such *were* some of you in the past. This *is* who you are now in the present. But the gospel also has a future tense, doesn't it? We are heading somewhere. Yes, we have a new identity and we are becoming something that we were not—progressively growing more and more into our identity in Christ. God is working in you, bringing to fruition what He has intended for you.

But this is not how the Corinthians were living. Some of them were using their new life to justify old patterns of sin. I pray this does not describe some of us today. But maybe it does. Maybe you confess a new life in Christ, but you use that to justify old patterns of sin. You say and think that God has forgiven you anyway, so it doesn't matter. Either you are not living out of the identity that God has made in you, or you have not yet received that new identity. That is the reality that faces you: you are either confessing a new life in Christ and yet using that new life to justify old ways of living, or perhaps you are even showing that the life you thought you had, you still don't have. Either way, Paul challenges this mindset and wants the Corinthians to understand and recognize the authority of Christ over their bodies.

He does so by addressing several expressions that were common in the Corinthian church. The first expression is found in verse 12, "All things are lawful unto me...." Paul repeats this expression that was commonly circulating in their culture back to the Corinthians. He repeats it twice. The Corinthians were saying that because of their newfound freedom in Christ, all things were now permissible for them. They had "Christian freedom" and could do whatever they wanted. But Paul is clear that this is not the case. Yes, there is such a thing as Christian liberty and freedom, that we are called to exercise, but that freedom is not found in the ability to sin whenever you feel

like it. It is rather found in the ability and freedom not to sin, and the ability to keep the moral law of God and the seventh commandment because of your new identity in Christ, because of the power of Christ that dwells in you. So Paul qualifies this statement “all things are permissible” for the Corinthians. On the one hand, he affirms their freedom in Christ, but then says that even though all things might be permissible to them, not all things are expedient or advantageous. Some practices are even dangerous as he goes on to show in the following verses.

He also qualifies this freedom by showing how that a license to do whatever you want can actually bring you back into bondage to the very sin that you were delivered from! The Corinthians used this saying to claim that they were now free to commit fornication and sexual immorality because of their freedom in Christ. But Paul says “I will not be brought under the power of any,” even though everything was permissible for him (1 Cor. 6:12). He is reminding them and us that we are indeed free in Christ, but that this freedom does not give us permission to do whatever we want and sin against God. The Christian freedom that Paul is describing is hedged about by the law of God. Christian freedom does not mean that we can throw off the law of God as antinomians. The bottom line is that Christian freedom is not an opportunity for antinomianism or throwing off the law of God, but it is an opportunity to exercise that freedom within the gracious boundaries of God’s law. We are now free to obey the law and so we need to heed Paul’s exhortation from Galatians 5:13, “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” Let us not use our Christian freedom to excuse sexual sin.

There is another expression that Paul tackles that was common in the culture surrounding the Corinthian

church. The second expression that the Corinthians were throwing around in their desire to live free is found in 1 Corinthians 6:13, “Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats.” In other words, they were saying that one bodily function was just like another. They applied this argument to the area of human sexuality, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food; well then, sex for the body and the body for sex.” But Paul makes it clear that these two functions are not the same thing. Paul says that the function of eating and drinking will perish. This function of the body will somehow be destroyed by God, rendering it null and void. We don’t know how that will look in the resurrection of the body, but we have enough to tell us that God is going to change something about the way we eat and drink in the resurrection. The Corinthians used this saying to reduce every bodily function to its lowest common denominator. Paul counters this expression by saying, as it were, “Yes, human sexuality incorporates bodily functions, but there is more to the body than just that”—because at the end of verse 13 Paul says, “That the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord.” Here we begin to see that Christ is the authority over a believer’s body, and so our bodies are for the Lord and the Lord is for the body, as He takes up residence in our body, which Paul teaches in the verses that follow.

In qualifying these two popular expressions in the Corinthian church to justify sexual sin, Paul clearly wants the Corinthians to understand that they were not the authorities over their bodies, nor are we the authorities over our own bodies. It is clear that Christ is the authority over our bodies. Sex outside of God’s boundaries is not advantageous. Sex outside of God’s law brings believers back into the bondage they were delivered from. Sex, and the desire for it, are not merely bodily appetites that need to find expression in whichever way we want. They need

to be hemmed in by the seventh commandment, to live chastely and temperately in this world. This raises an important question: “Who is your authority, beloved, when it comes to the area of human sexuality?” Is it Christ? I pray it is. There are many “authorities” that speak on this issue today. Are you guided by your feelings? Do you allow your feelings to dictate who and what you are and what you should do? Do you tell yourself, “I will bring my body into conformity with my feelings”? Are you guided by the philosophies present today that give license to every sexual expression under the sun? Are you guided by your fear at the anger and vitriol of the leaders of the sexual revolution who try to intimidate you if you don’t fall into line with their radical ideas to overturn God’s law? Do you fear being called a “bigot” or “hateful” if you don’t fall in line? Or is Christ the authority over your body through His gracious law? We need to come back to and refresh our minds with the truth that Christ is the authority over our bodies. It comes down to this equation for each one of us today: Will I choose what is popular, convenient, and what seems liberating, but ends in unspeakable pain and guilt and bondage and ultimately death if it is not repented of? Or will I choose what is unpopular, inconvenient, and what seems restrictive today, but ultimately ends in glory with Christ?

Paul brings us to the consequences of that latter choice when he says in 1 Corinthians 6:13–14, “Now the body is not for fornication [sexual immorality], but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.” You see, we often operate with three different views of the body. The first view is that the body is something evil; it is just a shell that houses the soul, and one day I will put off this shell and my soul will be complete in glory before the Lord. But that is not what Paul is teaching here, is it? The body is for the Lord and the Lord is for the body. There

is something elevated about the biblical view of the body that destroys this gnostic view of the body which says that the body is bad and only the soul is good.

The second view is the one that most of us know because of the cultural information that saturates our lives—that the body is something to be worshiped and that I need to do everything I can to satisfy the urgings, cravings, and appetites of my body. The body is everything. That too is inaccurate because if the body is for the Lord then our bodies need to be brought under the authority of the Lord. Christ is the object of our worship, not our bodies.

The third view is the biblical view: the body is destined for resurrection. There is something inherently valuable about our bodies that we need to understand in relation to sexual sin. The body is not for sexual immorality, but the gospel tells us today that the body is destined for something far more glorious! During the testimony of the President's former legal counsel, Michael Cohen, before the House Oversight Committee in early 2019, an expression kept recurring because of all the underhandedness and schemes that were unearthed: "We are better than this."<sup>1</sup> But when it comes to the body, "believers are better than this"—better than giving ourselves up to sexual immorality—because a believer is in union with Christ, both his soul *and* his body will be raised again on the last day. Union with Christ and the doctrine of the resurrection serve to transform our view of the body and human sexuality in general. The body is not simply a shell which serves bodily functions, nor will we be disembodied spirits in the resurrection. Yes, we commit our bodies to the

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1. Michael Cohen was interviewed on February 27, 2019 before the House Oversight Committee. The Republican leader on this committee, Jim Jordan, as well as the Democratic chairman of the committee, Elijah Cummings, used this phrase.

grave. The soul is in heaven in the intermediate state. When Christ appears, however, He will unite our souls with our glorified bodies. The Bible places inestimable value on the body and how believers live in the body between the now and the not-yet of the resurrection. Believer, because you are in union with Christ, you are called to glorify God in your body now because of the glory that awaits your body in the resurrection. Indeed, the prospect of the resurrection ought to spark in us a thrill of joy and longing in anticipation of what is to come. When Christ appears He “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:20–21). In the meantime we are called to live in anticipation and in view of the glorious transformation that is going to take place. And so a believer has no business engaging in sexual immorality. Christ says today that you are better than that. You are to live in light of the resurrection.

Some of you might say, “That’s well and good for believers, but what if I am not a believer and not in union with Christ? What does this passage say to me?” My friend, let me say this—you need to repent; you cannot use this passage to excuse yourself because Paul is addressing believers in this passage; don’t think you can give yourself license to continue living as you are. The fact that this standard is being set calls you to repent of your sin and come under the loving authority of Christ. He reminds you of what you are to be in Christ and what you can become through repentance and faith. He still bears that authority over your body whether you believe in Him or not. By virtue of creating you, He owns you and calls you to repentance and faith, lest your body and soul be cast into hell. That is the sobering reality that confronts you from this passage today. If you are not Christ’s today, then you are mastered by sin. Sin is a harsh taskmaster. Don’t see it as a burden or as giving up pleasure; that pleasure is only momentary

and fleeting. Christ calls you to follow Him, “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28). Come under His gracious rule. Christ calls you to a radical amputation of sexual sin in your life: “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Matt. 5:29). Count the cost of the lifestyle you are living without Christ, and compare that to the resurrection of the body and everlasting glory with Christ. The latter is far better and so Christ beckons each one of us to come under His gracious authority and to recognize that our bodies are His and not our own. You and I do not have license to do what we want with our bodies.

## **2. Glorify God by Countering Our Ignorance of Our Bodies.**

Believers, we glorify God in our bodies when we recognize and live under Christ’s authority, but we also glorify God in our bodies when we counter our own ignorance regarding sexual sin. The following verses of our text help us to better understand what is at stake, and Paul addresses our ignorance through three important “Do you not know?” questions. These questions are rhetorical: they are asked to make an important point, not to get a “yes” or “no” answer. As Paul asks these questions, he elevates the biblical view of the body through union with Christ by addressing the power and nature of sexual sin, thus again highlighting the value that the triune God places on the body by purchasing and dwelling in our bodies.

The first question comes to us in 1 Corinthians 6:15: “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot?” What is Paul’s answer? “God forbid.” What is Paul doing here? He is saying that you,

believer, are in a whole-person union with Christ as a result of the transforming power of the gospel. It is not just your soul, but also your body, that is in this intimate union with Christ. You are a member of Christ—not just your soul, but also your body. This has implications for the resurrection. It has implications for how you live in regard to keeping the seventh commandment and living out the ethics of biblical human sexuality. A redeemed sinner in a whole-person union with Christ has no business making a new union with a harlot or defiling his or her body with sexual immorality. Union with Christ is a sacred union, sealed and purchased by the blood of Christ, and whenever sexual sin of any kind is committed, that union is defiled and another union is established. Shall we then bring this body into union with a prostitute and with other sexual sins? God forbid! May it never be so! Are you beginning to see how we are called to live narrowly—how we must not give any quarter to any hint of sexual immorality? The next time you are tempted with sexual sin, ask yourself this question, “How can I, who am in union with Christ, devote this body to something so grossly immoral? Am I willing to pay the price for defiling this sacred, holy, and precious union with Christ?” I pray your answer will be, “God forbid!”

The second question comes from 1 Corinthians 6:16: “What? Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” In other words, Paul is saying, as it were, “Why would you trade a whole-person spiritual union with your Savior for an illicit, one-flesh union with a prostitute? This is mind-boggling!” He wants us to understand that when we enter into that union with a prostitute or engage in sexual sin we are not only grievously defying union with Christ, but we are entering into a new union involving the whole person. In verse 16 Paul

quotes Genesis 2:24 to reinforce the fact that sexual sin with a prostitute involves a bodily union: “for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.” This is the one-flesh union of God’s institution of marriage in the Garden and beyond the Garden for life in the here-and-now. A one-flesh union with a prostitute, or engaging in sexual sin, does double-damage. It destroys spiritual communion with Christ. It also destroys the design that God made from the beginning of the world for union between a husband and wife in sexual intimacy, which itself is ultimately a reflection of that spiritual union with Christ. Alistair Begg concludes, “Sexual immorality is intimacy without intention. Communion without commitment.” A believer’s life is controlled by union with Christ. We are under His authority and are called to live with intention and commitment to Christ. We are called to live with intention and commitment to our spouses. Young people, you are called to live with intention and commitment to your future spouses. Will you take that which is joined to Christ and join it to a prostitute?

But Paul continues answering this question. In 1 Corinthians 6:18, he gives the command to flee fornication. The word “fornication” is not often used today. It is a broad word, highlighting sexual sin in its varied expressions, not just the commission of adultery. The Heidelberg Catechism picks up on this word when it speaks of “all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto” (Question 109). We shouldn’t just think of “fornication” in relation to a prostitute or physical adultery; it is a broad term. Then Paul highlights the fact that sexual sin is different from other sins because it arises from within. He says in verse 18, “Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” Paul already knew enough in his day to know that sexual sin is devastating and self-destructive. Fornication is not satisfied until

it finds expression on the outside. Its desires come from within and exert their forces in control of the body, and when it has finished, it affects the human psyche like no other sin does.

This is not just true of an illicit relationship with a prostitute. It is true of pornography and self-gratification. I wish I didn't have to mention these things. But these are the things that we face as believers, as pastors, as elders. Considerable pastoral work is expended on these particular sins. These sins are actually more addictive than drugs; they carve new neural pathways in the brain—it should not surprise us that Paul calls this a sin against one's own body. This is true of sexual abuse, where the perpetrator sins against the victim as well as his own body. He severely damages the body and psyche of the victim, but also his own mind and body. The way you live in your body impacts others around you. This is a reality that we need to face. Beloved, Christ says that we are better than this. He calls us to a higher standard to possess our bodies in sanctification. Sexual immorality is a sin that wields incredible power and destruction no matter how it finds expression in a person's life—not to mention the diseases that are spread as a result of promiscuity. Do you realize that sexual immorality is a sin against one's own body and is incongruous with union with Christ? And since you are in a one-flesh union with your spouse, if you sin in this way you also sin against your spouse because you are one flesh. Sexual sin is incompatible with union with Christ and the one-flesh union with your spouse.

The final question comes from 1 Corinthians 6:19, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price." Paul again highlights the high view of the body that God has and that we ought to have as well. Our bodies are temples

of the Holy Spirit. This body is where God delights to dwell. Have you ever thought about that? Let's meditate on the fact that the Holy Spirit, God, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, takes up residence in believers! God, who is infinitely holy, comes and takes up residence in people like you and me. He makes us His temple. And if this is His temple, then this is where He needs to be worshiped, not a place given over to all kinds of sinful desires. Let's get that into our understandings and then be wary of ever sinning again. God lives within me! How can I do this wickedness against God?

But then Paul emphasizes that not only are our souls bought by Christ on the cross, but also our *bodies* have been purchased. He calls you to a higher standard of living—away from engaging in sexual immorality. He calls you to purity of mind, thought, gesture; how you live with your spouse, with your children and in broader society. They have been purchased with an infinitely valuable price—the blood of Christ! He bled and died to redeem you, beloved, from the ravages of sexual sin. Let this settle into your heart and mind. He has come to redeem you, soul and body—the whole person—to redeem and take you to Himself that you may glorify Him. Shall I commit this body, which the Father created, the Spirit indwells, and the Son purchased and redeems, to uncleanness and sexual immorality? Let's destroy the fog-hazed ignorance that the world wants us to imbibe and follow. We need to saturate ourselves with the truth of Scripture and do violence to this sin that has so defined our culture and some of our lives! This not only means that God elevates our understanding of the value of the human body and how we are to glorify God in our bodies, but He grants us grace and power to glorify Him in that body. The gospel transforms our view of the body, but also grants us the power

to glorify God in our bodies. He calls us by that grace and power to care for Christ's purchase.

### **3. Glorify God by Caring for Our Body as Christ's Purchase.**

We glorify God in our bodies by bringing them under the loving authority of Christ, and by destroying the ignorance that surrounds the biblical teaching and understanding of the body. But we also glorify God in our bodies by caring for the body that Christ has purchased. And He calls us to do this in two primary ways from 1 Corinthians 16 today. We've already seen how our minds and understandings need to be transformed through biblical truth—a very practical directive. But then Paul gives two more practical commands to help believers keep the seventh commandment.

The first command to care for Christ's purchase is "Flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18). Flee sexual immorality in all its shapes, forms, and varieties of expression, no matter what the world tells you. Flee it in your mind, in your words, and in your actions. We have already seen how broadly the word "fornication" includes every form and expression of sexual immorality. Notice that Paul doesn't say, "Fight." No, he says, "Flee." Paul has a realistic view of life in a fallen world. Proverbs 7 tells us that even strong men have fallen prey to the power of Lady Folly, the personification of sexual sin. He doesn't allow anyone to stand and fight against sexual immorality. We are simply too weak. Flee then! Turn around and run from sexual immorality! Because of the power and grip of sexual sin, and our own weakness, you and I are counseled to flee sexual sin and leave it far behind. We are not to spread a feast for this sin and allow it to grow fat and flourish, as if we were allowed to do anything we want. We are not to treat this sin as some form of bodily appetite that can be satisfied at

every whim. We are not to let our emotions and feelings dictate what we do with our bodies and what we do to our bodies. God forbid! We must flee! We are to arm ourselves with the truth of how God views this sin against our own bodies and run away from it as far and fast as we can. There should be no justification, no rationalization, and no lingering when it comes to sexual immorality.

There are two examples from Scripture that help illustrate the necessity of this command. Children, you will know these examples. One is negative, from the life of David in 2 Samuel 11. David lingered over and rationalized his sin with Bathsheba, and he ended up paying the bitter consequences of that sin. What happened to David when he was standing on that rooftop? In the moments of temptation, he was an identity amnesiac—he forgot his identity in Christ and his union with Christ. He turned back to the old man, he listened to the lie, and he sinned. He stayed and flirted with sin and fell hard and fast. He fell and paid the price for his sin. The child born of that union died. His family was marked by conflict. Anguish of soul and mind followed as he tried to cover up his sin. There is a heavy price for failing to flee.

The other example is positive, from the life of Joseph in Genesis 39. Joseph was also confronted with temptation from Potiphar's wife. And in those moments of temptation, he remembered his identity in and union with Christ, and said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). In temptation, Joseph did not linger, but he ran! He knew his own proclivity to sin. He knew his own weakness and that, if he stayed, he would fall. He ran, and he too paid a price. David stayed and paid the price for his faithlessness. Joseph fled and paid the price for his faithfulness. Who paid the price that really mattered? What price will you pay? Will it be one of regret? Or will it be the price of faithfulness—committed

to prison, but then exalted, perhaps like Joseph? Flee then! Don't make any excuses for sin, but let today mark the beginning of a habit of flight from sexual immorality, running to Christ the Savior who embraces returning prodigals. This is the glorious good news of the gospel! He receives sinners, no matter what you've struggled with, no matter what you've done, no matter what the struggle is right now.

Therefore flee sexual sin to Christ and make an appeal for His cleansing blood. Flee sexual sin by confessing your sin. Flee sexual sin by guarding yourself against it and avoiding those areas that tempt you. Flee sexual sin by finding accountability. Flee sexual immorality by cultivating a heart of love for God and passion for His holiness. Flee sexual immorality by arming yourself against the lies of the devil as they meet you on the university campus, young people; as you read it in the news, and as it bombards you day-by-day in a wicked and debased culture's philosophies about sexual "freedoms" and expression. On that point, flee sexual immorality by being careful what you read and what you watch. Maybe you've heard the expression, "Garbage in, garbage out." That's true here as well, isn't it? Fill your mind with what is true, and pure, and honest and of good report (Phil. 4:8). Flee sexual immorality! You are better than this!

The second command is very similar and stated positively in 1 Corinthians 16:20: "Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." God's ownership is underscored again in this command. You are not your own but belong to God in your entire person, and you are called to worship Him in your entire person; thus, He is worthy of your body. He calls you to live out your identity in and union with Christ, believer. The only way to receive the strength to put sin to death and break the patterns and well-worn paths of sin is to live out of Christ. He gives

you the grace to change those neural pathways that have been carved through sin; He gives you the power to glorify Him with a renewed mind. That is what union with Christ does. This is so important to understand. You cannot live the Christian life apart from Christ. It's convicting, but it's also encouraging because those of us who are in union with Christ have everything we need, don't we? It not only elevates our understanding of the worth of our bodies, but it also strengthens us to glorify God and to live within the gracious confines of the seventh commandment.

In addition to these things, how do you glorify God in your bodies? Here are some practical, down-to-earth ways with which you can glorify God in your bodies. First of all, eat healthy. Get the sleep you need so that you are not physically and mentally vulnerable to temptation. Get the exercise you need so that you stay alert and refreshed and are ready to do battle and flee when the temptations come. Why are these practical directions about sleep and exercise important? Because these are God's basic front-line defenses to sin. When we binge eat, it affects the way we think. When we lack sleep, it affects our judgment. I'm not doing this to whip you into shape. These are simple exercises, designed to get you out of bed in the morning and combat laziness, both physical and spiritual laziness. These are basic things so that you stay alert and refreshed for when those temptations come. Let me paraphrase what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:25–27: Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable prize, but we, an imperishable prize. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. Self-control is what Paul is after. We are called to exercise self-control, to bring our bodies into subjection to Christ, through eating and sleeping and exercising. I realize that

we all might not have the same capacity for these things. But the point is that we need to be alert. We need to be equipped to glorify God in our bodies, lest we be disqualified. I'm not speaking to the elderly necessarily, but I'm addressing the young people, particularly the young men. It is a particular temptation for you to stay up late, gaming and binge eating and doing all these things. I'm calling you to the standard God wants for you in glorifying God with your bodies.

These are basic things, but in addition, read your Bible and pray in a principled way. On this point, Rosaria Butterfield writes, "If we rush through Bible reading and prayer time, we miss the blessing and the power. Often because of misplaced priorities, we unwittingly limp along on a starvation diet of Scripture, forgetting that we have an appointment with Satan, our deceiver and accuser, the minute we rise from our reading chair. Our time in the Word and in prayer should change us. Through it, we should be transformed, equipped, encouraged, and prepared."<sup>2</sup>

Use the weekly means of grace in weekly worship—the preaching of the Word, Bible studies, prayer meetings, and fellowship. They are means of grace by which God ministers grace to His people so that we can glorify God in our bodies throughout the week and so that we have the spiritual spine to stand and flee sexual immorality. Glorify God in your bodies by using the fellowship of the saints to provide accountability, confession of sins, and prayer together. Sanctification in the area of the seventh commandment rarely happens only on the individual level—we need each other for this one. It takes a community to become sanctified. Community life militates against the secrecy-loving

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2. Rosaria Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2015), 57.

nature of this sin that thrives in isolation and loves the cover of darkness. Lone rangers will become dead rangers!

Parents, speak to your children and teens about this important subject. It's challenging. Hold before them the glorious purpose as to why God created them—to glorify Him and to live in light of the Second Coming of Christ. You can do that from a very young age already. Speak to them in a way that does not suggest the topic of biblical human sexuality is a dirty thing or something to be abhorred, but something with which God may be glorified, a reflection of our relationship with Christ. Are you setting parameters for your children—even for your teenagers? Maybe you feel unqualified to do this. You say, "I have no idea as to how technology works. My children are far ahead of me." We are here to help. Come and ask for help. We'd be delighted to listen and give suggestions. You don't let your teenagers go out on a Saturday night without knowing where they are, do you? You say, "Call me when you get there, or when you go somewhere else." You want to know where they are. And so too, in the virtual world, we need to know where our children and young people are, don't we? Do you have accountability software? Are you challenging your children and young people when they are trying to hide something? Teach them the principles of purity and self-control, and equip them to live life in this world. Teach them about modesty in dress, which is increasingly becoming challenging. Are fathers and mothers talking with their children about what it means to dress modestly so as not to provoke others, even unintentionally, to sin? Let's engage our young people, let's know where they are and let's help them. It's only going to get more difficult for the next generation. Let's help them to glorify God in their bodies.

Beloved, you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's

(1 Cor. 6:20). Paul says it another way in Romans 12:1–2 “Present your bodies as a whole burnt-offering to God.” Let’s come to God and lay ourselves on the altar of worship unto God, leaving nothing behind. He calls for nothing less, and we should offer Him nothing less. In the gospel He says to you, because of your union with Christ, and because of the resurrection that awaits your body, “You are better than this.” Amen.

# Christ's Perfect Portrait of the True Christian

*Rev. Bartel Elshout*

Scripture: Matthew 5:1–20

*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

—Matthew 5:3–9

In Matthew 4 we read that Jesus went about all Galilee teaching in synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Neither before nor since has anyone preached the gospel in such an extraordinary fashion. After all, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the embodiment of the gospel—the glad tidings of the Living Word of God (John 1:1).

What a profoundly unique experience it must have been to be in His audience—to hear the Living Word of God expounding His own written word! Such was the privilege of the multitude that heard Him explain the Old Testament Scriptures that He had inspired by His Spirit, an exposition commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7).

Before we explore the opening verses of this sermon (Matt. 5:3–9), we need to recognize Jesus' intention and purpose for preaching it. We need to remember that the great mission for which His Father had sent Him into

the world was always foremost on His mind (John 3:17; 4:34). During His earthly ministry, He was profoundly conscious of the fact that He had come into this world to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10) and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).

The Sermon on the Mount derives its name from the location where Christ preached it, on a slight elevation on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Thus, positioning Himself so that His audience could hear Him well, the Lord Jesus Christ began to deliver this remarkable sermon, the lengthiest of His recorded discourses in the New Testament. Although it is commonly referred to as the greatest sermon ever preached, there appears to be a prevailing misunderstanding regarding His objective in preaching it. Some maintain that Jesus' only objective was to provide His audience with in-depth instruction regarding biblical morality. Although there is much instruction in this sermon about biblical morality (the spirituality of the moral law), Christ had a far more compelling motive.

As we stated earlier, "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Thus, when Jesus walked among men and addressed an audience, He was profoundly aware of being surrounded by perishing sinners who needed to believe on Him for their salvation. Sadly, the majority of His countrymen were oblivious to their need. They were unaware that their entire conduct failed to measure up to God's standard of impeccable righteousness.

To capture their attention, the Lord Jesus made a bold pronouncement in Matthew 5:20: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." This was a stunning statement indeed! The ignorant and misguided people whom He was addressing believed that their spiritual leaders—the Pharisees and

scribes—had achieved the highest level of spirituality and were the ultimate standard of righteousness. Now Jesus tells them that their righteousness falls short of God's impeccable standard. He confronts them with the unsettling truth that if they have nothing better than the flawed righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, they will not enter the kingdom of heaven. As Jesus progresses in the proclamation of this sermon, He begins to expound the law of God. He does so for one purpose: to confront these sons and daughters of Abraham with the fact that they were transgressors of the law. Why was this so necessary?

Unless they perceived themselves as transgressors, they would never understand their need of a savior. Jesus therefore goes beyond the letter of the law and sets before them the spirituality of the law. He did so, for instance, by saying, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27–28).

Having been taught erroneously by the scribes and Pharisees, these people believed that as long as one observes the letter of the law—as long as one's life is in order outwardly—all is well. The Lord Jesus therefore zeroes in on this erroneous teaching by saying (and I paraphrase), "Though you may have heard this from your teachers, let Me now tell you what the law really means." He wanted them to recognize that to be righteous before God, their inner motives and inclinations needed to conform perfectly to His law.

The Christ who is speaking here is none other than the Lawgiver Himself. As the Angel of the covenant, He spoke at Mount Sinai and gave the law to His people in Israel (Acts 7:38). As the Lawgiver, Christ is thus expounding His own law to these men and women, who

needed to understand that in their innermost being they were law breakers.

Only when we understand this experientially will we understand our need for a savior. Only then will we value a gospel that proclaims the glad tidings that we have a savior who, on behalf of law breakers such as ourselves, has obeyed His own law perfectly, has paid the full penalty for our breaking it, and has silenced its curse. His righteousness alone exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees! Only by believing on Him can law breakers be reconciled with God.

With these general observations in mind, let us now focus on the remarkable introduction of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins by describing and defining who the citizens of His kingdom are. Again, the ignorance of His audience moved Him to do so. These people had an entirely wrong perception of who the Messiah would be. They were looking for an earthly king, a Messiah who would deliver them from the bondage of the Romans. Yet Jesus had not come to deliver them from the Romans but rather to deliver His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). He wanted to teach them immediately that His kingdom is entirely different from any earthly kingdom—it is spiritual, and its citizens have spiritual rather than political qualifications.

Jesus therefore proceeds by describing the citizens of His kingdom in a way that was so contrary to any common understanding of what constituted blessedness. These people thought, “If only I could be either a Pharisee or a scribe, I would be blessed indeed. If only I would possess great wealth, I would be blessed indeed.” How many are there today who think, “If only I could have all the pleasure, all the leisure, or all the possessions I want. If only I could have power and prestige, I would be happy and blessed indeed!”

However, Jesus here tells us in dramatically different terms what real blessedness looks like. More than that, He says we cannot consider ourselves blessed or happy unless we match His description of the genuine citizens of His kingdom. In these opening verses, Christ is therefore defining for us the distinguishing traits of a true believer.

We will examine the traits of the composite portrait that Christ articulates in the first seven beatitudes, beginning with “Blessed are the poor” and ending with “Blessed are the peacemakers.” This comprehensive portrait (Matt. 5:3–9) is followed by a description of how an ungodly world will respond to the citizens of God’s spiritual kingdom. The ungodly will persecute genuine believers and will revile them and speak all manner of evil about them (Matt. 5:10–12).

Before expounding the first seven beatitudes in some detail, I briefly wish to highlight their remarkable arrangement. To use a common analogy, we first need to consider what the forest looks like (vv. 3–9) before examining the individual trees—each of the individual beatitudes. A remarkable structure emerges upon examining the inter-relatedness of these beatitudes. Regarding this structure, I submit that the fourth and central beatitude represents the heart of Christian experience—experience that revolves around the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus we will consider:

### **Christ’s Perfect Portrait of the True Christian**

1. The core activity of the Christian (hungering and thirsting after righteousness)
2. The internal disposition of the Christian (yielding such hungering and thirsting)
3. The external disposition of the Christian (the fruit of being filled)

## **1. The core activity of the Christian (hungering and thirsting after righteousness)**

And thus, as we first focus on the core activity of Christian experience as expressed in verse 6, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we will then consider the internal disposition of the Christian (vv. 3–5) that results in such hungering and thirsting: being poor in spirit, mourning, and being meek. Finally, we will examine the external disposition of the Christian (vv. 7–9). He who is filled with the righteousness of which verse 6 speaks will manifest this by the fruits of his life. We will see, as Scripture says, that such will be merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers.

Matthew 5:3–9 is the preeminent passage in all of Scripture to teach us what a Christian looks like. It is a flawless verbal portrait drawn by the Living Word Himself. It is not accidental that this portrait consists of seven components, for the biblical number seven is the number of perfection. We may therefore conclude that verses 3 through 9 set before us a perfect portrayal of every believer that ever has lived or will live until Christ returns.

Having said that, however, we need to understand that we cannot simply pick and choose the individual components of this spiritual portrait, saying, “Well, that pertains to me, and perhaps that also pertains to me.” Rather, we need to understand that these seven marks are true at all times and at all seasons in the life of every believer—although not necessarily to the same extent. In some believers we see the features of this portrait more clearly than in others—just as there may be both clear and blurry photographs of a given individual. Yet, when you look at a blurry photograph, you will still be able to determine who is being depicted. This spiritual portrait thus consists of seven components that constitute an organic whole.

We also need to realize that the order in which Christ gives us the components of this portrait is not arbitrary.

In other words, we cannot take these seven marks, juggle them, and then present them in just any fashion. Rather, Christ articulates these traits in a very deliberate, precise, and cumulative order: one beatitude presumes the previous one and anticipates the next.

Thus, they who are poor in spirit will mourn, they who mourn will be meek, they who exhibit all three will hunger and thirst after righteousness. Upon being filled with the righteousness they seek, they will be merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers.

The seventh beatitude therefore most appropriately concludes in verse 9: "They shall be called the children of God." Today we would say that this is the "bottom line." Jesus is saying, "Those of whom this is true, and thus exhibit all of these marks, they, and they alone, shall be called the children of God." The Greek word rendered as "children" in verse 9 is a word that means "They shall reflect the character of God." It is as though He is saying, "They will prove themselves to be the sons and daughters of the living God."

Let us first look, however, at the core experiential trait of the citizens of God's kingdom, for grasping its meaning is crucial to understanding the rest. Jesus says, "Blessed [that is, supremely happy, supremely blessed] are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." We all understand what it means to be hungry and thirsty. They are two of the most fundamental human longings, and God created us in such a way that we will be compelled to meet these basic needs. We cannot live unless those desires are met.

Jesus thus uses an analogy that is relatable to everyone. He is saying that the people of His kingdom, the children of God, will be men and women who hunger and thirst—not after physical things but rather after righteousness. In other words, a true Christian is someone

who cannot be satisfied unless he obtains that righteousness for which he yearns so intensely.

What does Jesus mean by the word *righteousness*? Its literal meaning is “that which is right.” God defines for us in His Word what is right and wrong. Jesus’ standard of that which is right is not measured by human standards. He therefore stated, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Therefore, righteousness is not what is right by human standards but rather what is right by God’s standard.

Christians yearn for that righteousness in a twofold way: they will yearn to be in a right relationship with God and to live a life that is right—one that conforms to God’s righteous standard. A true Christian cannot be satisfied unless he knows within his own soul that he is reconciled with God. However, since he loves God, he will also desire to live a right life—not to earn God’s favor but rather as an expression of love for God.

Can you identify with that? This inner yearning is absolutely fundamental to true Christianity. Do you understand in some measure what it means to hunger and thirst after righteousness—that is, to yearn to be reconciled with God and to live a life that is pleasing to Him?

Jesus here brilliantly merges these two fundamental aspects of the Christian life: a yearning for *imputed* righteousness and for *imparted* righteousness. Imputed righteousness is that righteousness which God credits to the bankrupt account of a sinner—namely, the righteousness of His Son. However, we also need imparted righteousness. We need the work of the Holy Spirit enabling and equipping us to live a life that is pleasing and honoring to God. Or to put it differently, a true believer longs to be redeemed by and conformed to Christ: to be united to Him and be like Him.

That is the essence of the Christian life! To put it in theological terms, the Christian hungers and thirsts for justification and sanctification. Both of these foundational components of salvation are combined in this word *righteousness*.

And this is not something a Christian desires only once. Rather, he yearns for this his entire life. It is significant that the Beatitudes are written in the present tense, which in Greek expresses an activity that is ongoing, continual, and/or repetitive. In these beatitudes, Jesus is therefore saying, “Blessed are they who are continually poor in spirit, who continually mourn, who are continually meek, who continually hunger and thirst after righteousness, who are continually merciful, who are continually pure in heart, and who are continually peacemakers.” This is descriptive of a Christian’s disposition during his entire lifetime.

## **2. The internal disposition of the Christian (yielding such hungering and thirsting)**

The question now needs to be asked, “What produces this spiritual hunger and thirst? What causes sinners to seek righteousness?” Naturally we have no such desire. By nature we seek for our blessedness in everything other than this righteousness, and we are ignorant of our need of it. Therefore, the very first thing Jesus mentions is being poor in spirit. He says, “Blessed are they who are spiritually poor.” As we will see when we examine this beatitude in depth, the poverty that Jesus describes here is a radical kind of poverty—the state of a man who literally does not have a penny in his pocket.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Why does Jesus begin here? He does so for the simple reason that without an experiential awareness of our spiritual poverty, we will never hunger and thirst after His righteousness. This

prompted Jesus to say, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Matt. 9:12). He therefore posits that blessed or happy are they who recognize their spiritual bankruptcy before God. How happy are they, indeed, because they realize that they need an alien righteousness outside of themselves—they need a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ! When the Holy Spirit works savingly in the heart, He will always begin by confronting us with our spiritual bankruptcy. If you cannot relate to that, you are missing the most foundational mark of a Christian.

Christ is saying here that this is always true—even for a man like the apostle Paul, who groaned and said, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24). He was deeply conscious of his spiritual poverty, which resulted in experiential mourning. As stated earlier, these beatitudes are cumulative, and this mourning represents the Christian’s emotional response to his spiritual poverty. In other words, recognition of one’s spiritual bankruptcy is not something that a Christian takes lightly. It causes him to grieve deeply.

Again, Christ chooses His words carefully, for the word *mourning* used here describes the grief over losing a loved one. It is reflective of a loving disposition. The reason the Christian grieves and mourns over his spiritual poverty is because the love of God has been shed abroad in his heart (Rom. 5:5). When that happens, sin becomes so ugly and vile! What a grievous matter it then will become to us that we are indeed poor in spirit! The psalmist says, “I am poor and sorrowful” (Ps. 69:29). The two are connected. Thus, there will never be such a thing as a Christian who boasts of his poverty. Rather, a true Christian grieves over it.

And that leads us to the next beatitude, “Blessed are the meek.” *Meekness* is a rather difficult word to define, but you can think of it as the disposition of a person who knows his proper place before God. Thus, a Christian is

humbled by his poverty of spirit, and that painful recognition will cause him to bow and surrender before God and to realize who he is in His presence.

We frequently encounter that meekness in Scripture. For example, Moses had an explosive temper, but after forty years of dwelling in the wilderness, his fiery spirit was broken. God dealt with him in such a way that he became the meekest man on earth. In Ephesians 4:1–2, the apostle Paul also speaks of that meekness: “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness.”

Thus, a meek person is someone who sees himself as God sees him, prompting him to take his proper place before God and to humble himself in dust and ashes. A meek person recognizes the gravity of his sin and that he is deserving of God's displeasure and disfavor. We hear this meekness in the confession of David in Psalm 51:4: “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.”

A recognition of one's spiritual poverty, the mourning and grieving over that poverty, and the humbling of oneself before God will culminate in a hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Such experiential awareness will cause us to realize that as spiritually bankrupt sinners, we cannot be made right with God with anything that comes from ourselves. We need a righteousness outside of ourselves. That realization will cause the Lord Jesus Christ to become, and continue to be, so very precious.

These spiritual realities are present at the beginning of one's spiritual life and will continue until death. A believer never gets beyond being a poor sinner in himself—never. As long as we live, we will mourn over sin. As long as we live, we will need to humble ourselves before God. However, that will lead us time and again to the remedy—the

Lord Jesus Christ—and that will make Him increasingly precious to our souls.

All of this is implied when we say that the Holy Spirit *makes room in our hearts for Christ*. This is what it looks like! The Holy Spirit engages in this emptying work throughout the life of the believer. When a believer by renewal takes refuge to Christ, what is it that propels him to go to Him, look to Him, and rest in Him? It is the experiential realization (not just intellectually!) that he is poor in spirit, and he mourns over that. He humbles himself before God, looks outside himself, and yearns—hungers and thirsts—after the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All who have such a hunger and thirst for righteousness will also “be filled.” The word *filled* is rich indeed. Christ says that when you hunger and thirst after righteousness, your soul shall be filled to overflowing. We know that those who believe in, trust in, and are united to Christ become like Him. That affirms the genuineness of our Christianity. Our faith is not real unless in some measure we begin to resemble Him in how we think, speak, and behave. Thus, there is an inseparable connection between imputed and imparted righteousness—the righteousness that renders me acceptable to God and the righteousness by which I demonstrate that I am righteous. God’s Word therefore declares that “he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous” (1 John 3:7).

### **3. The external disposition of the Christian (the fruit of being filled)**

Christ then proceeds to describe how this grace manifests itself, highlighting the essential components of a Christian life. The citizens of His kingdom are a merciful and compassionate people because they themselves are the recipients of God’s mercy. When we have become acquainted with our own spiritual need, we will have a

burden for the spiritual needs of others. For instance, when the Lord saves fathers or mothers, they will be burdened with the spiritual need of their children as never before. Why? Having learned what their own spiritual needs are, they now understand their children's spiritual needs. Being the recipients of mercy makes us merciful and compassionate toward others.

One striking feature of the structure of the Beatitudes is the direct parallel between the external and internal disposition of the Christian. If you were to take a sheet of paper and list the first three beatitudes on the left side, then place the fourth (hungering and thirsting after righteousness) in the middle, and finally list the last three beatitudes on the right side, doing so in parallel fashion with the first three, you would discover the obvious connection between the internal and external marks of grace: the merciful will recognize their own spiritual poverty. They will understand this experientially, and that makes them merciful and cognizant of the spiritual poverty of others.

Jesus then posits that the citizens of His kingdom are also pure in heart, thereby teaching that the moral purity of a true believer's life proceeds from within. In other words, a true Christian is not a Pharisee who cares only about keeping the outside of the cup clean. Keeping the outside pure was all that mattered to the Pharisees. Christ confronts this by teaching that the citizens of His kingdom have hearts that have been made pure by the work of the great Sanctifier and Purifier, the Holy Spirit.

Again, there is a parallel with the inner disposition of true Christians. They who mourn over sin are also pure in heart. These two marks are inseparable. We thus observe that one's inward disposition will manifest itself outwardly. Those who are pure in heart will take sin seriously, grieve over it, and yearn after holiness. A true believer is therefore not satisfied by having his act together outwardly.

A true believer will wipe away many tears about matters that others will never have any knowledge of. They will grieve quietly and secretly about their sinful inclinations and desires—matters that no one will know except God. Why? Because they have been made pure in heart.

Christ also says, “My people, the citizens of my kingdom, will also be peacemakers.” This is the culmination of Christ’s description of the Christian, for He significantly describes the peacemakers as the children of God. What a remarkable truth this is, for, by nature, we are troublemakers! Because of our fallen nature, we are naturally inclined to hate God and our neighbor. Because of our fallen nature, our natural disposition is to live in hostility, and our world is filled with wars and rumors of war.

What a remarkable fruit of grace it is when a sinner, naturally inclined to be warlike, becomes a peacemaker! Only the transforming and renewing grace of God will produce such fruit.

Please note also that Christ does not say, “Blessed are the peace lovers.” Rather, He said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” He clearly implies that God’s children distinguish themselves by taking the initiative to live at peace with others. Thus, a peacemaker does not wait for the other person to make the first move; rather, he will make the first move himself.

Paul expresses this in Romans 12:18: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” As Christians, we are called to do everything in our power to have harmonious relationships with our fellow men. Therefore, should any relationship not be harmonious, we must have a clear conscience that we have made a prayerful and diligent attempt to make peace. We are called to be peacemakers.

Again, there is a parallel with the inner disposition of the Christian. The meek, those who know their proper

place before God, will also be peacemakers. We can readily see how the two belong together. Why are so many people troublemakers? It is because of a proud spirit. We are inclined to think too highly of ourselves and easily become offended by others. As a result, we live in discord with others.

But when we take our proper place before God, all pride and arrogance will be gone. We cannot be peacemakers unless we are willing to take the lowest place. I have a wonderful little book about living the Christian life by the German author Georg Steinberger. How striking is his opening statement: "On the cross, our Head took the lowest place, thereby giving us, His members, the lowest place. The 'brightness of [God's] glory' (Heb. 1:3) became 'despised and rejected of men' (Isa. 53:3). Since then we have but *one* right, namely, to be the lowest and the least. If we believe ourselves to be worthy of more, we have not yet understood the cross."<sup>1</sup> Think about that!

Peacemakers are willing to take the lowest place. Years ago, a godly man taught me an unforgettable lesson. He said, "When you are involved in conflict, the best way to resolve it is to act as if you are 99 percent at fault and the other person is 1 percent—even if in reality it is the other way around. Take the lowest place."

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." The apostle articulates this in Hebrews 12:14: "Follow peace with all men." Paul speaks

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1. Georg Steinberger, *Kleine Lichter auf den Weg der Nachfolge* (Stuttgart, Germany: Christliches Verlagshaus, GMBH), 5. The original text: "Am Kreuz hat unser Haupt den untersten Platz eingenommen und hat auch uns, Seinen Gliedern, den untersten Platz gegeben. Der 'Abglanz des unsichtbaren Gottes' (Heb. 1:3) wurde der Allerverachtete" (Jes. 53:3). Seitdem haben wir nur *ein* Recht, nämlich der Unterste und Letzte zu sein. Wenn wir auf etwas mehr Anspruch machen, haben wir noch nicht das Kreuz verstanden."

the same language: “God hath called us to peace” (1 Cor. 7:15) and “Be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11).

Since God Himself is the great Peacemaker, Jesus is saying, “They who are peacemakers manifest something of the character of their heavenly Father.” Peacemakers resemble their Father, the great Peacemaker, who sent His Son into the world to bring peace on earth. Rather than waiting in vain for us to take the initiative, He took the initiative by sending His Son to reconcile sinners unto Himself. This prompted the angels to sing in the fields of Ephrata, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

### **Conclusion**

In summary, God’s children will have an internal disposition of being poor in spirit, mournful, and meek, causing them to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Then the righteousness for which they yearn will spill over into their lives and cause them to be merciful, pure of heart and life, and peacemakers.

The manifestation of such fruits will provoke an ungodly world to hate us. The world has no problem with nominal Christianity, but it is offended by true Christianity. Therefore, in this eighth and final beatitude, Jesus also pronounces as blessed “they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” True Christians do not seek to provoke the world, but their genuine godliness provokes the ungodly, who would love to eliminate such Christianity. Jesus tells the children of God that a hostile world will say “all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.” But He then adds, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:10–12).

Thus, we have attempted to give you a global overview of Christ's portrait of the Christian. We have taken a look at the whole forest before examining the individual trees. In the Beatitudes, Christ defines true blessedness. Only in proportion to our experience of these beatitudes will we experience biblical happiness or blessedness. To put it simply, God's children will experience this genuine happiness as they yearn for Christ, come to Christ, and follow Christ.

The opposite is also true! Cursed are they who are not poor in spirit, who do not mourn over their sins, and who are not meek. Cursed are they who do not hunger and thirst after righteousness. Cursed are they who are not merciful, who are not pure in heart, and who are not peacemakers. What a profoundly troubling reality it is to be accursed of God! They who are and remain subject to that curse cannot escape the execution of God's wrath. And thus we must take self-examination in light of Christ's portrait of the Christian very seriously.

We are either blessed or accursed. We are either a child of God or we are not. To which category do you belong? There is no other alternative! Do you recognize yourself in the portrait of the Beatitudes? Do they in some measure describe your inner disposition, your soul's yearning, and your walk of life? If you do not recognize yourself at all in this portrait of true spirituality, you do not yet belong to God's kingdom. You need to take refuge in the Christ who has provided us with this portrait. You need to cry out that He would instruct you by His Spirit, so that the distinguishing marks of the Beatitudes will also become an experiential reality for you.

Our only hope is therefore in this Christ who, at the cross, was made a curse for sinners who are subject to the curse of the law, so that all who believe in Him may become the recipients of God's blessing and favor (Gal. 3:13-14). God the Father "hath made him to be sin

for us, who knew no sin; that we [who know no righteousness!] might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21). That righteousness is offered freely and unconditionally to us in the gospel (Isa. 55:1–3), and the promise of the gospel is that whoever (even the vilest of sinners!) believes in the Lord Jesus Christ will become a partaker of the righteousness God demands and we need. Do you hunger and thirst after that righteousness? If so, you shall be filled indeed!<sup>2</sup>

Amen.

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2. This sermon, with slight changes, has previously appeared as “Introduction” in *Christ’s Portrait of the Christian: An Exposition of the Beatitudes* (Grand Rapids: Biblical Spirituality Press, 2019):1–21. Used by permission.