

5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Verse 7 focuses on a believer's action toward others. Mercy and grace often have the same meaning. Both grace and mercy treat people in terms of what they need rather than by what they deserve. But when they differ, the difference is this: Grace is a loving response when love is undeserved (Carson, Sermon, 24-25). Grace deals with sin and guilt itself. Grace extends pardon. It cleanses and reinstates. Mercy is a loving response toward someone who is in misery or helpless (Carson, Sermon, 25). It deals with what we see of pain, misery, and distress (the results of sin). It extends relief. It cures and heals. It is compassion for those in need (Stott, 47). The merciful come to the aid of the needy.

Only those who show mercy will receive mercy from God. This is similar to Matthew 6:14-15 ("if you forgive other people for their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive other people, then your Father will not forgive your offenses") and James 2:13 ("judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy"). This does not mean that God's mercy is contingent upon ours, nor is Jesus suggesting that men can earn God's mercy by being merciful; rather, those who truly recognize their need for mercy identify with others who need mercy; they are therefore merciful to them.

Typically, people can empathize with others who have had the same experiences that they have had. Those who are not merciful demonstrate they have not come to understand mercy. They are like the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14 and John 8:9-11, or the evil slave in Matthew 18:23-35 who by refusing to forgive others, demonstrated that he did not appreciate the forgiveness of his own debt. The same ethic is expressed in the golden rule: "do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt. 7:12).

"Nothing moves us to forgive more than the wondering knowledge that we are forgiven. Nothing proves more clearly that we have been forgiven than our own readiness to forgive" (Stott, 48; Matt 6:14; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). To be meek is to acknowledge that we are sinners. To be merciful is to have compassion on others, for the merciful are sinners, too (Stott, 48).

5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

It is the believer's hope that someday he will see God face to face, stand in His presence, wonder at His glory, and enjoy Him forever. Yet, it is clear that only those who have pure hearts will. As Psalm 24:3-4 says, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully." The writer of Hebrews tells us, "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

In the Bible, the heart is pictured as the center of the personality, It "stands for the whole of our inner state, thoughts and will as well as emotions: 'in a psychological sense, the seat of man's collective energies, the focus of personal life, the seat of the rational as well as the emotional and volitional elements in human life, hence that wherein lies the moral and religious condition of man'. This beatitude thus leads us to purity at the very center of our being . . . To be pure in heart is to be pure throughout" (Morris, 100). Proverbs 4:23 says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life."

However, the Bible paints a bleak picture of the heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Genesis 8:21 says that "the intent of man's

heart is evil from his youth". Jesus said, "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders" (15:19; cf. Jer.17:9,10; Ro.1:21; 2:5). Nevertheless, Jesus insists that a pure heart is an indispensable prerequisite for fellowship with God (Ps. 24:3-5; Deut. 10:16; Heb.12:14).

The pure in heart will be blessed by seeing God.

"Virtually, all of our spiritual sight in this life is mediated to us through the Word of God or the work of God in providence. We "see" images and reflections of his glory. We hear echoes and reverberations of His voice. But there will come a day when God Himself will dwell among us. His glory will no longer be inferred from lightning and mountains and roaring seas and constellations of stars. Instead, our experience of him will be direct. His glory will be the very light in which we move (Rev. 21:23)" (Piper). When the Kingdom of God is consummated there will be a new heaven and new earth, and righteousness will abound. The Christian will be set free from the desire to sin. John says that the believer should begin to prepare for that day by purifying himself now (1 Jn. 3:2, 3). Even so, most can identify with the words of Solomon all too well: "Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?" (Proverbs 20:9) The truth of the matter is that none of us will ever completely cease from sin while alive on this earth; nevertheless, our values are expected to be the same as those of the Kingdom. Our desire should be to be pure.

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

Like being merciful, this focuses on our relationship to others.

There are many reasons why men lack peace, but the basic reason is that they are separated from God, the source of peace (Ro.15:33; 1 Thess. 3:16). Christ removed the barrier of sin making it possible to have peace with God and others (Eph. 2:13-18). Therefore, He is the great Peacemaker (Isa. 9:6; Col. 1:20). It also follows that the greatest peacemaking message is the message of salvation, and the Christian who proclaims it becomes a peacemaker (Isa. 52:7; Ro. 10:15).

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

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

On the one hand, Jesus is saying that we should actively strive for peace. As far as it depends upon us, we are to live peaceably with all men (Ro. 12:18; 1 Cor. 7:15; 1 Pet. 3:11; Heb. 12:14), but this does not mean that our lives will be completely free of conflict. If we are to be worthy of Christ, we are to put Him first and love Him most – even above our nearest and dearest relatives. Conflict, therefore, is the inevitable result of being His disciple. To proclaim, "Peace, Peace" when there is no peace is the work of a false prophet, not a disciple of Christ (Jer. 6:14).

Peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and those who are peacemakers shall be called sons of God.

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

In sum, our heavenly Father is the supreme peacemaker; He is called the “God of peace” (Ro. 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb.13:20) who has made peace by the blood of the cross (Col. 1:20). What Jesus is saying in Matthew 5:9 is that insofar as we make peace, we are imitating God. People who have become sons of God are to function like children who reflect the character of their heavenly Father. Those who like to quarrel and cause strife do not reflect God’s character and therefore are not sons of God, or are disobedient ones. God is a peacemaker, and so the disciple of Christ should be one, too. Galatians 3:26 tells us how to become sons of God: “we are all sons of God through faith.”

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

5:11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

5:12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The final beatitude does not say, “blessed are those who are persecuted because they are objectionable, or because they are right wing conservatives.” The blessing is restricted to those who suffer for righteousness. The believers in this verse are persecuted because they have decided to live as Jesus did (1 Pet.3:13-17; 4:12-16; Jn. 15:18-20).

There is a basic principle that appears over and over again in the NT. If a Christian displays righteousness in a sinful world, those who see it will either be repulsed or drawn to it - there is no middle ground (Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Thess. 3:3; Jn. 3:16-21).

Verses 11 and 12 expand upon verse 10. Persecution could result in physical harm, but according to verse 11 could also take the form of insults, false accusations, and being spoken of with hostility. This was the same way that the world persecuted the prophets. Those who suffer like this will find that their “reward in heaven is great” so they should **rejoice and be glad**. In Acts 5:41, the apostles rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer for Christ. All disciples of His should likewise receive suffering for righteousness with joy, knowing that they are living out the ethos of those who enter the kingdom of God.

The peacemaker and the merciful cannot expect peace and mercy from the world. Jesus says that persecution is to be expected. In fact, if a person doesn't experience persecution, they need to ask why. Is it because righteousness is not being displayed in his life? Has the believer's “light” been hidden under a bushel? (Matt. 5:14-16) If it is not being displayed, one wonders, “How then, can such a person be someone who enters the Kingdom of God?”

There is a progression of thought from verse 3. The one who enters the Kingdom is the one who sees his own sin (5:3) and grieves over it (5:4). Because he identifies with other sinners, he is gentle toward them (5:5). Having recognized that he has received mercy, he extends mercy to others (5:7). However, he also hungers and thirsts for righteousness (5:6), is pure in heart (5:8) and does what he can to be at peace with all men (5:9). Such a person pleases God, but will not be welcomed by the world. He will be persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

Anyone who reads the Sermon on the Mount should sense how much we fall short of the standards of a perfect and holy God. This makes us realize how spiritually bankrupt we are and drives us back to the beginning of the Sermon (5:3). We will not be gentle, merciful and have pure hearts until we are first broken people.

Although the Sermon does not clarify how these things are achieved, the full revelation of the NT does. One by one the beatitudes tell us that the blessings of eternity will only be given to those who have become new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). *Being* merciful and *being* peacemakers describe what we are *to be* as people, not just what we are to do. Though “being” will result in “doing,” those who enter the Kingdom of God must have both; we must *be* new creatures inside and out.

External righteousness is not enough. Jesus told His followers in Matthew 5:20: "Unless your righteousness *exceeds* that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." He was not teaching that people needed to do more good works than the Pharisees in order to enter the kingdom of God, but that every righteous act must have a corresponding inward component to be true righteousness. This can only happen if one enters into the New Covenant inaugurated by the blood of Christ (Lk. 22:20), for it is in the New Covenant where God promises to give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.