

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

Yves I-Bing Cheng, M.D., M.A.

Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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THE BEATITUDES AND THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (part one)

Matthew 5:1-12

We have now studied all the Beatitudes individually. Today, we want to consider them together and see whether there is an internal relationship between these Beatitudes. Is there some kind of order, some kind of unity, some kind of direction in these Beatitudes?

Searching for an internal unity

Many suggestions have been put forward to explain how the Beatitudes might relate to each other. Some of these descriptions are excellent. I won't repeat them but I will try to show you how I view the unity of these Beatitudes in relation to other parts of the Scriptures.

The gospel of Matthew gives us 9 Beatitudes. Each one is introduced by the word 'blessed', followed by the reason for such blessedness. Let's review them.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
3. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
5. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
6. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
8. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
9. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you ... for great is your reward in heaven.

Some people consider the 9th Beatitude as part of the 8th one. For the purpose of our study, I will view it as a separate Beatitude. So we have these 9 Beatitudes. What is the internal unity of these 9 Beatitudes?

Paul, a commentator of Jesus' teaching

First of all, I have to talk to you about the writings of Paul. As you study more and more the Scriptures, you begin to realize that Paul is the commentator 'par excellence' of the teaching of the Lord Jesus. What I mean by this observation is that much of what Paul wrote in his letters is an exposition and an application of the words of the Lord Jesus. The meaning of Jesus' words is often well explained in the teaching of Paul.

We have these 9 Beatitudes. We can ask ourselves this question, ‘Did Paul touch on the Beatitudes in his writings?’ Think about something that has a ninefold application in Paul’s teaching. What can that be? I am sure that you already have the answer. It is the fruit of the Spirit. In Galatians 5:22-23, we find a list of 9 qualities which, together, are called the fruit of the Spirit. To my knowledge, there is nothing else in Paul’s writings, except for the fruit of the Spirit, that has this ninefold application. The 9 Beatitudes; the 9 qualities of the fruit of the Spirit. Is this a coincidence?

When you put the 9 Beatitudes and the 9 elements that constitute the fruit of the Spirit side by side, there doesn’t seem to be any correspondence. One starts with the statement, *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, and the other has *The fruit of the Spirit is love*. Let’s not be too quick to come to a conclusion here. Remember that Paul is a commentator. He doesn’t simply repeat the Beatitudes. He will describe the content of these Beatitudes. That is quite different.

Now notice this. In Galatians 5, the apostle Paul speaks of the works of the flesh. He writes in Galatians 5:19, *Now the works of the flesh are evident*. What are they? Here is the list: *adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like*. And Paul goes on to say, *Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God* (Galatians 5:21). This kind of person, no matter what kind of Christianity he professes, will not inherit the kingdom of God. Take note that this passage has to do with the kingdom of God, and it is also a primary concern of the Beatitudes. The 1st Beatitude begins with the statement, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is **the kingdom of heaven***. Again, the 8th Beatitude has, *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is **the kingdom of heaven***.

So Paul speaks about the works of the flesh, and he mentions 15 categories. Where did Paul get these 15 categories? Could they also come from Jesus’ teaching? Let’s try to work that out. When we think about the works of the flesh in the teaching of the Lord Jesus, the passages in Matthew and in Mark immediately come to our mind. Let’s look at the list in Mark 7:21-22. This is what Jesus says, *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness*. How many items do we count? Thirteen. And you say, ‘Ha, Paul has 15 items in Galatians. So 2 are missing.’ Well, not so fast. You have to look also at the parallel passage in Matthew. The same passage is repeated in Mt 15:18-19, with 2 differences. And if you add these 2 differences to the list in Mark, you get a list of 15 elements.

What are these 2 things in Matthew that are not mentioned in Mark? If you compare the 2 lists, you notice that the term ‘false witness’ does not occur in Mark’s list. The second distinction, you will miss it if you depend on an English translation. In v. 19 of Matthew, we have the words ‘evil thoughts.’ We also have this term in Mark, but in Greek, it is not the same word. In Matthew, it is the word *poneros*, whereas in Mark, it is the word *kakos*. And yet, they are both translated as ‘evil thoughts’ in our English Bibles. Even though *poneros* and *kakos* have much in common, they are not interchangeable.

‘These words may be used with very little distinction of meaning, but often the difference is marked.

Kakos frequently means *evil* rather negatively, referring to the absence of the qualities which constitute a person or thing what it should be or what it claims to be. It is also used meaning *evil* in a moral sense.

Poneros is a word at once stronger and more active, it means *mischievous-making*, delighting in injury, doing evil to others, dangerous, destructive.

Kakos describes the quality according to its nature, *poneros*, according to its effects (Strong's Greek Lexicon).'

We observe then that the 2 lists relating to the works of the flesh have both 15 items, 15 in Paul and 15 in Mark and Matthew put together. We also noticed that Paul, in Galatians, is talking about the kingdom of God. And the Beatitudes are talking about the kingdom of God too. This is all the more significant when you know that Paul does not use the term 'kingdom of God' very often. It occurs only 9x in Paul's letters. And thirdly, we saw that both the Beatitudes and the fruit of the Spirit have 9 items. We begin to realize that all this cannot be just a pure coincidence.

Connecting the Beatitudes with the fruit of the Spirit

Having established this, let's return to the Beatitudes, and let's try to search for an internal unity that would connect all of these 9 Beatitudes. What could it be? I have already mentioned that if we put the 9 Beatitudes side by side with the fruit of the Spirit, the 2 lists do not seem to correspond to each other.

THE BEATITUDES		THE LORD'S PRAYER
Poor in spirit	◀ ▶	love
Those who mourn	◀ ▶	joy
Meek	◀ ▶	peace
Those who hunger for righteousness	◀ ▶	longsuffering
Merciful	◀ ▶	kindness
Pure in heart	◀ ▶	goodness
Peacemaker	◀ ▶	faithfulness
Persecuted for righteousness	◀ ▶	gentleness
False statements about you	◀ ▶	self-control

But let's go beyond what our first impression tells us. I would like to invite you to take note of this. When you look at the list of evil things in Galatians, what do you see? How is that different from what Jesus says? Jesus says, *From **within**, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts*. Jesus is talking about the heart, the attitude of the heart. That is not what Paul is speaking about. He says, *The **works** of the flesh are*, and then 15 categories follow.

Do you see what is happening? When Jesus says, 'out of the heart,' He is talking about the inward thoughts of man. Paul, as an expositor, is explaining what will be the consequences of those evil thoughts. That is why the 2 lists do not correspond directly to each other. The Lord Jesus is describing the inner attitude of the natural man, whereas Paul is talking about what happens when these evil thoughts become works, the works of the flesh. It is important to bear this distinction in mind. One is talking about the thoughts of the heart, the other is talking about the works of the flesh.

The tree and its fruits

Let's go back to the Beatitudes and see how we can work this out. When we look at the Beatitudes, we see that it is talking about the inner attitude. Blessed are the poor, where? In spirit. Blessed are the pure in heart. The Lord Jesus is talking about the internal attitude of the spiritual man. But Paul is not speaking about that. He is talking about the fruit of the Spirit. A fruit is something that has come forth from the tree. It is a manifestation of the life of the tree. It is something that you can take from the tree without affecting the tree itself. And Paul, when he talks about the fruit of the Spirit,

is expounding and explaining what happens when you have the inner attitude of the heart described by Jesus in the Beatitudes.

Now, let's try to apply this and see whether our observation is correct. The first Beatitude says, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*, and the first fruit of the Spirit is love. There is an order in the Beatitudes and the first one constitutes the foundation from which all the other Beatitudes derive. Being poor in spirit is a fundamental characteristic of the Christian and in that sense, all the other characteristics are the result of this primary quality. If you are not poor in spirit, then neither will you mourn for sin. Neither will you hunger and thirst for righteousness. Neither will you be part of the kingdom of God.

The same thing is true of the fruit of the Spirit. The first fruit, love, is in a way a fruit that contains all the other 8 elements within itself. Without love, there is no point talking about joy, peace, or patience. A faith that does not find its expression in love is dead and worthless.

One reason why Paul has such a profound insight into the meaning of the Word of God is because he knows from experience what God will do with him when he applies the Word of God to himself. And when he speaks about the fruit of the Spirit, he is drawing forth the consequences of applying the Sermon on the Mount into your life.

Poverty of spirit and love

Take the first Beatitude. It declares that the kingdom of God is given to those who acknowledge their spiritual bankruptcy before God. And so, you come to God with a sense of utter dependence and knowing that you deserve nothing but the judgment of God. You confess that you have nothing to offer, nothing to plead that would change the situation. 'I come to You, Lord, like a spiritual beggar. I have nothing in myself. Have pity upon me as you would have upon a beggar.'

Do you know what God will do? He will pour forth His love upon you. You will experience the love of God being poured into your life. And then you understand that being poor in spirit means that God's love is being poured into your heart. Paul says in Romans 5:5, *the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*. Paul is speaking from experience. And he is saying that if you come to God as a spiritual beggar, you will experience His generosity, His kindness, His love.

Mourning over sin and joy

Do you see now how the first Beatitude is related to the first item of the fruit of the Spirit? The same is true for all the other Beatitudes. Let's look at the second one. What happens to those who mourn over their own sins, who mourn over the sins of other people, who mourn over the sins of the church? God will pour forth His forgiveness. And what happens to you when there is forgiveness? You are filled with joy.

That is exactly what the parallel passage to the 2nd Beatitude says. In Luke 6:21, we read, *Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh*. 'You shall laugh.' You will be filled with joy. And joy is the 2nd item of the fruit of the Spirit. The 2nd item of the fruit corresponds with the 2nd Beatitude, i.e., with the inner attitude of the disciple who mourns.

Being meek and peace

What about the 3rd Beatitude? 'Blessed are the meek.' Again, let's look at this Beatitude from our own experience, rather than academically. What would happen if I come before God in meekness, in humility, with a contrite heart? You will experience a peace that you never had before. God will fill

you with His peace. That is what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-29 where He links meekness and peace. We all know this passage. ‘Come to Me all you that are weary and heavy-laden. I am meek and lowly in heart. Come to Me and you shall find rest,’ i.e., peace unto your soul. And peace, let me remind you, is the 3rd item of the fruit of the Spirit.

Hungering for righteousness and longsuffering

Now, the 4th Beatitude. ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.’ What happens when you hunger and thirst for righteousness, when you hunger and thirst for God? Notice the present continuous tense. You keep on hungering and thirsting for spiritual food. What happens to you when you do that? It gives you spiritual endurance. God gives you the spiritual energy to face the difficulties of life and to stick to Him during those times. You experience the victorious aspect of our new life in Christ. Paul says that God always gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1Corinthians 15:57). The corresponding fruit of the Spirit is ‘patience’, which is also translated by the terms constancy, perseverance, or steadfastness. So you see that in both cases, we have this idea of endurance.

Being merciful and kindness

Let’s go to the next Beatitude. ‘Blessed are the merciful.’ The corresponding fruit of the Spirit is kindness. We can see right away that these two words are very close in meaning. In the NT, we often find them together. Take for example Titus 3:4 where Paul speaks about the ‘kindness of God.’ Then in the following verse, we read that God saved us according to His mercy. Or take Ephesians 2:7. It is a verse about God’s kindness toward us. And in Ephesians 2:4, we are told that God is rich in mercy. In 1Peter 2:3, Peter speaks about ‘tasting the kindness of the Lord.’ And a few verses later, in v. 10, he says that ‘the people of God have obtained mercy.’ There is obviously an internal connection between the words ‘kindness’ and ‘mercy.’ One is simply the consequence of the other.

Purity of heart and goodness

The 6th Beatitude is, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart.’ And what is the corresponding fruit of the Spirit? Goodness. Goodness is defined as the ‘uprightness of heart and of life.’ The pure in heart is someone who has a pure conscience, a good conscience. The connection between ‘pure’ and ‘good’ is quite explicit in 1Timothy 1:5 where the two words are found side by side. *Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a **pure** heart, from a **good** conscience, and from sincere faith.* If we are to obey God’s command to love, our heart must be pure and we must maintain a clear and good conscience. ‘Pure’ and ‘good’ are here closely related. In the same way, the ‘pure in heart’ in the Beatitudes is linked with the word ‘goodness’ in the fruit of the Spirit.

Being a peacemaker and faithfulness

We come now to the 7th Beatitude, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers.’ The corresponding fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness. The peacemaker is someone who can be described as faithful because such a person is one who is walking faithfully in the footsteps of His Master. Why did the Lord Jesus take up the cross? In order to be a peacemaker, to reconcile us to Himself. Why does the Lord Jesus call us to take up the cross? So that we follow Him in His footsteps, reconciling man to man and man to God. As Paul says in 2Corinthians 5:18, *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.* We have been reconciled to God through Jesus and we are now given the ministry of reconciliation. The disciple who does the work that Jesus did, being a peacemaker, expresses his faithfulness towards his Master.

Being persecuted for righteousness and gentleness

Let's look at the 8th Beatitude. 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.' The corresponding fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. If you have ever been persecuted for Christ, I am sure that you can easily see the connection. How should the Christian respond when he is persecuted for righteousness' sake? Should he shoot back? Should he revile back? Should he be as aggressive as his aggressor? No. His attitude should be one of gentleness. Peter says in 1Peter 2:23, *When He (Jesus) was reviled, (He) did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten.* That is gentleness. And Peter says that the Christians are to be like Jesus. When you are mocked, you don't revile back. When they scream at you, you don't shout back. Be like Jesus who was gentle and lowly in heart.

Enduring falsehoods and self-control

The first part of the 9th Beatitude is similar to the 8th Beatitude. But the second part is quite different. 'Blessed are you when they say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.' And the corresponding fruit of the Spirit is self-control. You see, when false stories are being told about you, when people seek to ruin your reputation by spreading all kinds of lies about you, that is when you need self-control. We can still take it when we are correctly accused. We can still be gentle when the facts are true. But we can't accept it when people slander us and say false things about us. We are angry and we just want to strike back. Remember the fruit of the Spirit. That is the time when you most desperately need self-control. Don't let your anger get out of control. Don't lose your temper. None of this will be glorifying to God. Ask God to give you self-control so that your behavior may show forth the beauty of Christ.

Let's conclude. We have seen in this lesson that there is a clear connection between the Beatitudes and the fruit of the Spirit, and we described the nature of this spiritual connection. The Beatitudes have to do with the internal attitudes of our hearts. On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit has to do with the work of the Holy Spirit in us when these internal attitudes are found in us.

If this view is correct, then it raises a question. If the Beatitudes talk about our inner attitudes and if the fruit of the Spirit deals with what the Holy Spirit does in us, does that mean that you have to have one in order to have the other? Which comes first in the life of the Christian? The Beatitudes or the fruit of the Spirit? This will be the subject of our next lesson.