

Followers of the Way: "Sermon on the Mount" – August 7, 2016
By Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria

FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY: "Sermon on the Mount."

St. Matthew 5:1-2

One day Jesus walked up to a knoll, the crowd following him, and he sat down. The interested ones crowded around Jesus as Jesus began to speak to them.

Do you ever wonder what Jesus was asking himself regarding what he was going to tell the crowd? Could it have been how to arrange all that he had been previously teaching? Perhaps his thoughts had coalesced into a form that he believed the people could understand and remember.

His desire was to articulate the heart of his passion, which was to live in such a manner that God received glory. In spite of all of his teaching, Jesus was unsure people understood that the coming Kingdom depended on upon changes in their hearts and lifestyles, and not in defeating the Romans.

So, what we have in the "Sermon on the Mount," are Godly virtues that are the marks of "**Followers of the Way.**" Jesus begins with, "Blessed are the poor," and then follows with seven other virtues that the Church has called "Beatitudes," and someone has called "The Beautiful-attitudes." Some have translated 'blessing' as 'happiness', but I don't believe that Jesus is promising happiness; I cannot see him asking us to be '**happy, happy, happy!**' It is we who seem to create happiness.

Being a good Trinitarian, the blessing Jesus promises is three-fold: First, if we live by these virtues we are granted God's seal of approval. Second, we will rejoice and be glad. And third, we will have joy in heaven.

What is this Godly seal of approval? Do you remember Good Housekeeping magazine's seal of approval? It's guarantee promised that the product was the real deal;

that it works, and you can count on it. When God gives us a blessing, he places his reputation on how we live. When we do not live up to these virtues, his reputation suffers in the world.

The church universal also suffers when we do not live in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is when non-"Followers of the Way" rightfully call us hypocrites. When we refuse to show forgiveness and mercy toward someone who has offended us or hurt us, we earn that nametag.

If I reach a point in my life where I claim to be in love with Jesus, but I am so set in my ways that I refuse to change, or will not seek wisdom, or do not show meekness, then I have marked Jesus with a blemish.

This applies to all of the beatitudes! Apply it to Jesus' call to compassion for the poor and marginalized. Place it on the passion for following Jesus. It goes with the virtue of seeking a pure heart. And it certainly fits in the call for peace among all of God's children.

When we ignore Jesus' instruction, we rip jagged holes in God's seal of approval and shame Jesus. Blessed, however, is everyone who lives by the teaching.

Second, there is the promise for all those who live the life as Jesus lived, we will rejoice and be glad! And this joy can never be destroyed, never erased, never devalued. Joy, unlike happiness, does not require that we do or receive anything. The ego never need be involved. This joy originates deep within even in the middle of our exasperation and disenchantment. Joy and contentment come because someone else has experienced peace or safety.

This may not show me being grammatically correct, but "Happiness is getting and joy is giving." I believe this is what Jesus had in mind when he said: "**Rejoice and be glad.**" Blessed are those who live by the teaching of Jesus.

The third aspect of the blessedness is the hope of heaven or life in the Kingdom. The Beatitudes end with "***Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me because great is your reward in Heaven.***"

If we are willing to live by these virtues, to live as Jesus did, we are assured of life beyond physical death. This is my credo; this is what I believe. Blessed are those who live by the teachings of Jesus.

These "Beatitudes" are the core of Jesus' teaching. The remainder of his instruction is a commentary on these blessings with one exception. After the Beatitudes Jesus says this, "***I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ... Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect.***"

Doing these commands because someone said 'do it!' is not what God wants. It requires something more. It takes . . . love. Unconditional love. In a word, it needs grace. Grace ignores the law of cause and effect.

We cannot do mercy if first, we demand repentance before we will forgive. We cannot seek peace if we do not first give up the 'if-onlys'. I can't desire to be compassionate if I demand the other person first meet some condition that I decide is necessary.

Only grace allows us to act on the teaching of Jesus. And grace by nature is free because God is its source. Only unconditional love enables us to be perfect as God the father is.

Does all of this seem impossible? It certainly would be if we forget that God loves us no matter what. This is how we consider the "Sermon on the Mount," the method by which we come near to perfection that God calls us to. For it is by grace we are saved and sustained. Alleluia. Amen.