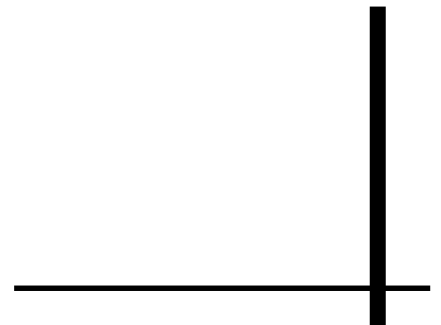


# Blessings in the Bible

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# 1. What are Divine Blessings?

In the midst of anxiety, uncertainty and an unpredictable future, most people are hoping for a large measure of good luck and blessing to bring about positive outcomes in their lives. This is particularly true of those who have no spiritual anchors, and who may feel that their destiny is decided by outside forces. In the troubled waters of human existence, wishing people well has become a very common practice – especially when a person enters a new period or phase in his life, applies for a job, is subjected to some or other test, embarks on a long journey, is undergoing medical treatment, etc.

The lack of spiritual security is the single most important problem which humans are faced with, and also the source of many other problems. We are all sinners from the day of our birth, and therefore without true spiritual life (Rom. 5:12). The Bible has a message of hope to people who are alienated from God because of their sinful nature. The door has been opened to the lost to return to the Lord and receive the salvation (spiritual blessing) which He has promised to those who repent and turn to Him by faith. All that is asked of them is the willingness to forsake their evil ways, establish a relationship with God, and thus enter into His kingdom of righteousness.

People who do not respond to this friendly invitation and prefer to lead their lives away from the Lord and in conflict with His righteousness are not among the blessed of the Lord. They render themselves enemies of God who will be judged by Him (Acts 17:30-31). But those who do repent are forgiven, cleansed from sin, and accepted by the Lord as His children. In this way they receive a special blessing and divine peace in their hearts, as well as the assurance of further blessings as followers of the Messiah.

There are many different blessings in the Bible, which are bestowed upon God-fearing people. The Hebrew word which is commonly used in the Old Testament to denote the blessings of the Lord is *esher*. It is sometimes translated as “happiness”. The Greek equivalent of this concept in the New Testament is *makarios* – to be happy or blissful. Christ’s Sermon on the Mount is one of the core messages on blessings in the Bible. In the eight beatitudes, the profound blessings are mentioned which disciples of Christ will enjoy when their lives reflect divine characteristics which are foundational to Christianity. These blessings certainly merit a more thorough investigation.

Christians are physically mortal people who are living in a sinful world which is hostile towards their faith, and are therefore constantly in need of divine intervention in the form of sustenance and other special blessings. It is a common tradition in Christian churches to pronounce a benediction. This is a short invocation for divine blessing and guidance at the end of a worship service. The worship leader usually raises his hands and recites a benediction. The words of the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24-26 are sometimes used: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.” Other scriptures which are also used for this purpose are Psalm 29:11, 121:7-8, 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13, Philippians 4:7, 19-20, and 23.

We all wish to be blessed by God – so much so that many people often pronounce blessings on others, such as: “God bless you.” This is frequently done on or before certain religious festivals and New Year celebrations, by saying: “Happy (or Blessed) Christmas”, “Blessed Easter”, “Happy New Year”, etc. In many cases these “wishes” are little more than vague invocations for good luck, good health, and prosperity, which are devoid of any real spiritual content.

It should be clearly stated that the divine blessings of the Bible are only given to true believers and are aimed at enhancing their relationship with God. The Lord gives various instructions in His Word on what divine blessings are and how a blessed person should behave. There is not a more exalted purpose to live for than to be in the right relationship with God and to enjoy His blessings.

In the following chapters, various forms of divine blessings are discussed so that believers may know exactly how to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, how to correctly determine their priorities, and how to act in accordance with God’s will under different circumstances. The serious implications are also indicated to those who refuse the salvation and blessings which the Lord offers to all people.

## 2. Blessings in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the Lord has laid down basic guidelines on the nature of the relationship which individuals and nations should maintain towards Him if they wished to be part of His kingdom and wanted to be sure that they would enjoy His blessings. If they desired to be completely happy and blessed, they had to conform to the basic spiritual conditions which the Lord determined. Many of these virtues are mentioned in the Psalms, in which the authors rejoiced in the mercies of the Lord and also in the rich blessings enjoyed by the righteous.

### All whose sins are forgiven

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ... I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the LORD, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Ps. 32:1-2, 5).

There is only one cause for the spiritual alienation between God and man, and that is their sin: “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). Only those who confess and forsake their sins (Prov. 28:13) will find mercy in the eyes of the Lord, serve Him, follow Him, and share in the blessings which He bestows upon the redeemed. They are blessed.

The Israelites were often confronted with the choice of whether they wanted to enjoy the blessings of the Lord (Deut. 28:1-14) or suffer under the curses that would follow persistent sinning and apostasy (Deut. 28:15-68; cf. Deut. 11:26-28). The final destination of those who are blessed is heaven, while the wicked will suffer everlasting punishment in hell.

### Blessings upon Israel and all nations who serve the Lord

In the Old Testament, various blessings are promised to nations who serve the Lord: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD and the people whom He has chosen as His own inheritance” (Ps. 33:12). Unfortunately, the Chosen People, Israel, only enjoyed the blessings of the Lord for relatively short periods. Even after He liberated them from Egypt to serve Him in the Promised Land, He was not pleased with most of them (1 Cor. 10:5).

The same rule applies to New Testament times, when nations will also be blessed if they serve the Lord. In practice, however, they don't serve the Lord but rather compromise with the works of darkness: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). It is obvious that nations will only serve the Lord during the coming Millennium, during which time they will enjoy abundant blessings (Isa. 2:2-4; Zech. 8:20-22).

The offer and invitation to be blessed is nevertheless still extended to all nations: “Blessed are the people who ... walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance” (Ps. 89:15). Israel had the ideal opportunity to serve the Lord in the Promised Land, to be protected against all attacks from outside, and to be prosperous in all their ways: “Happy [blessed] are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places” (Deut. 33:29).

However, because of Israel's apostasy they were often delivered to their enemies, and for extended periods they shamefully lived as exiles far from their land. The Lord is still waiting for Israel to return to Him as a nation so He can completely restore them to His favour: “For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength. But you would not. ... Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him” (Isa. 30:15, 18).

Israel will only be blessed when their sins have been forgiven and they are all gathered and united around the Messiah: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ... No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity,

and their sin I will remember no more” (Jer. 31:31, 34).

It will also be well with other nations who serve the Lord with all their heart: “Happy [blessed] are the people who are in such a state; happy are the people whose God is the LORD!” (Ps. 144:15).

### **Reconciled with God through the Son**

Why is the whole world so far removed from a happy and blessed state? Spiritually and morally, the nations are without foundational principles, on a path leading away from the Lord and His righteousness. They have widely opened the door to everything that is immoral and dishonourable, while even promoting the worship of every known idol. All these things are done under the banner of human rights, freedom of belief and freedom of speech. However, the truth of God is resisted because it cannot enter into association with any form of the lie. The truth compels people to make a choice between right and wrong. No nation is prepared to make the right choice at this stage, and consequently prefer to reject God, His Son and His Word in favour of unbridled freedom:

“Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel. Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him” (Ps. 2:1-12).

The global rebellion against God and His Son is futile and self-destructive. Soon, all those who rose against God and His supremacy will perish in the end-time judgements of the day of the Lord. They will fully realise that the wrath of the Lamb has been unleashed against them, become panic-stricken and flee to the mountains and say to the mountains and rocks: “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Rev. 6:16-17).

They will then realise that it is far better to serve and honour the Son, than to reject Him and try to fight against Him. Blessed are all who put their trust in Him!

### **Delight in the Lord’s Word**

The much more excellent way is to remain true to the Lord and His Word, to meditate upon it, to walk in accordance with it, and to honour Him with all your heart. That is the only way for happy living, and is sharply in contrast with a sinful existence:

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous” (Ps. 1:1-5).

This blessing upon people who have a love for the Word is often repeated in the Psalms: “Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments” (Ps. 112:1; cf. Ps. 94:12). The entire Psalm 119 reflects on the law (or Word) of the Lord, as well as the blessings which follow upon its observance: “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart! They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways” (Ps. 119:1-3).

The following are some of the pronouncements in this wonderful Psalm, by which different blessings are promised to those who honour and fear the Lord’s Word: “How can a young man

cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word” (v. 9). “With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!” (v. 10). “Your Word have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (v. 11). “Your testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors” (v. 24). “I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart” (v. 32). “Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to covetousness” (v. 36). “I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life” (v. 93). “I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your Word” (v. 101). “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (v. 105). “The entrance of Your words gives life; it gives understanding to the simple” (v. 130). “Direct my steps by Your Word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me” (v. 133). “Make Your face shine upon Your servant, and teach me Your statutes” (v. 135).

### **Trust in the Lord**

One of the clear indications of blessedness is that it refers to a life which is safe because the believer lives in the presence of the Lord and daily enjoys His care and protection. He is in a safe place against all the dangers that threaten him: “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” (Ps. 34:8). “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe” (Prov. 18:10). We should learn to call upon the name of the Lord during times of distress and anxiety: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear” (Ps. 46:1-2). “Happy [blessed] is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God” (Ps. 146:5).

When one trusts the Lord and He is your refuge you should no longer harbour feelings of fear or evil in your heart. The Lord knows our thoughts afar off; His Holy Spirit will convict you of any crooked ways in you and guide you to walk along the straight path of God’s righteousness: “Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. ... Blessed is the man who trusts in You!” (Ps. 84:5, 12).

### **The showing of mercy**

The Lord’s blessings are clearly evident in the lives of all who reach out to help the poor, the sick and strangers who are destitute: “Blessed is he who considers the poor; the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness” (Ps. 41:1-3).

The Lord committed Himself to the caring and comforting of the poor, the hungry and the desolate, and for this reason He will bless those who do charitable work of this nature: “He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given” (Prov. 19:17). God will also bless kings and governments who perform this basic humanitarian duty and support the cause of the poor: “The king who judges the poor with truth, His throne will be established for ever” (Prov. 29:14).

The most important requirement for acts of charity is that a person should maintain a close walk with the Lord, as that would ensure that his relations with other people will be honourable, and that he will have empathy with those in need: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8). Such a person is blessed, because love for one’s neighbour is a direct consequence of love towards God. Charitable service which is not motivated by love for God is no more than humanitarian aid which only addresses people’s outward need without offering a solution for their spiritual poverty and needs.

### 3. Blessings in the Sermon on the Mount (Part 1)

The beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount were in the first place given to Israel with a view to enlightening them on God's standard to obtain entry into the kingdom of heaven. At that stage the Chosen People, who had been living under the law for 1 500 years, were under the impression that they were much better than the Gentiles and were assured of a place in heaven. However, through this sermon the Messiah demonstrated to them the standard with which they should comply if they wished to be members of His kingdom. Most of them did not live up to this standard.

Since this service was delivered before the crucifixion of Christ, it only contains broad spiritual principles and standards without any reference to the gospel of the cross. In the further teachings of Jesus to Israel He clearly stated to them that only He can forgive sins (Matt. 9:2; Luke 7:47), and that He Himself is the door to the kingdom of God: "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved" (John 10:9).

After we have been saved by virtue of the gospel of the cross, our lives must still conform to the general standards and spiritual principles set out in the Sermon on the Mount. These eight characteristics are indicative of the fact that we are truly saved (2 Cor. 13:5), that we have the witness of the Holy Spirit about salvation in our hearts (Rom. 8:16), that we were renewed in our minds (Rom. 12:1-2), and are of service to the Lord in His kingdom (Matt. 3:8, Jas. 2:14, 26).

#### **Poor in spirit**

The first blessing in this sermon of Christ fixes our attention on the point of entry to His kingdom. Of what nature should our disposition be when we enter into His kingdom through the narrow gate? He said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

Spiritual poverty refers to the fact that in your human nature there is nothing that is of any value to God, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23; cf. Isa. 64:6). When you glory in any of your own attributes or achievements, you still do not realise your spiritual poverty and have not yet reduced yourself to nothing in the sight of the Lord.

Paul was an educated and very religious man who thought he walked blameless according to the law, but he discovered the futility of all these things. He said: "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Phil. 3:8-10). Paul had to stop trusting in his own virtues and become nothing before the Lord – fully prepared to die with Christ as a precondition to walk with Him in newness of life.

The message of spiritual poverty is so important that the Lord Jesus further explained it in a parable: "Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank You that I am not like other men; extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess. And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner! I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14). Self-exaltation and self-justification stand in the way of true repentance and a change of heart.

That was the same message as the one given to Nicodemus: "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). He first had to abandon everything that he had done and achieved in life to become poor in spirit before the Lord, as only then he would be able to walk with Christ in a new life. The old things must first be reckoned as worthless and pass away before everything can become new by way of a spiritual rebirth.

Have you become spiritually poor to the point of fully abandoning your own abilities to save

yourself? Only then will you be able to enter in through the narrow gate (Luke 13:24). However, many people prefer not to follow this way and continue to boast in their own achievements, e.g.: "I am baptised and confirmed in a Christian congregation, I have believing parents and try to live as upright as I can." Such a person has not become poor in spirit and has no testimony of rebirth, which is the beginning of a completely new life.

The Lord Jesus, in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom, knowledge and spiritual riches, laid down His glory, humbled Himself and became utterly poor to the point of dying on the cross as a lowly servant – all with a view to saving our souls: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that You through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9; cf. Phil. 2:5-8).

If we become poor in spirit by dying to our religious self-justification and have nothing to glory about, then alone the Lord Jesus can save our souls by grace and make us co-heirs of His heavenly kingdom. We will then gain spiritual riches which no one can take away from us. The filling of the Holy Spirit will strengthen the consciousness of these spiritual riches, thus enabling us to share it with others while serving the Lord.

### **Those who mourn**

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). The condition of mourning suggests that the person is fully under the impression of the hopeless situation from which he cannot save himself, while the comforting refers to God's intervention to change the situation for the better.

The Lord wishes us to fully realise the lamentable condition of spiritual and mental depravity in which the world has been for thousands of years. Because of the Fall, all people are on a path leading away from the Lord and His righteousness (Rom. 3:10-12). However, not all of them are mindful of the dark situation in which they find themselves, and for that reason they do not really look for a solution. Those who do realise their serious predicament and mourn because of their lost state, will be saved and comforted by the Lord. They are blessed! The others ignorantly persevere on their way to perdition.

Have you been convicted of your sin and mourned about it? Then alone the Lord will change your fortunes, bring you up out of the horrible pit and comfort you (Ps. 40:1-4). David prayed to the Lord: "Hear my prayer, O LORD and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears" (Ps. 39:12). After the Lord has saved and comforted a sinner, there are songs of praise on his lips: "For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling" (Ps. 116:8).

It is only the Holy Spirit who can convict a person of his sin and lost state, as well as the fact that the Lord Jesus alone can save him. But it is important that a sinner will have a broken heart and contrite spirit – under full conviction of the seriousness of his problem – as then only will he trust the Lord in faith to be merciful towards him and save him: "The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as has a contrite spirit" (Ps. 34:18).

The same principle of remorse over sin applies to New Testament times: "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Cor. 7:10). Sorrow according to the will of God produces tears because of your sinfulness and lost state. However, the Holy Spirit does not only convict you of your sin, but also of the mercy of Christ, and enables you to appropriate His gift of grace by faith. The divine conviction of sin therefore leads to repentance and the confession of sin, as well as the sure promise of salvation by the Lord. A deep and perpetual comforting is experienced by all who have confessed and forsaken their sins under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Worldly-minded people who have not yet been confronted by the gospel message, also have sorrow because of difficult circumstances which may weigh them down; but they are seeking other solutions to their problems because they do not know the way to the Lord's throne of grace. However, no person can be delivered from the power of sin and depravity without Christ, which accounts for the fact that the sorrow of the world produces death. There are no techniques



which a person can apply to free himself from the power of Satan, or to renew his heart and attain eternal life. No matter how hard he tries – he ever moves closer to eternal death.

Only the Lord Jesus promises full salvation, “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). Only then, the tears for sin will be replaced by the praises of the redeemed: “You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness. ... You shall surround me with songs of deliverance” (Ps. 30:11, 32:7).

When a Christian yields to temptations and starts sinning again, he must go through the same process of conviction of sin and repenting with tears. The evening before the crucifixion of Jesus, Peter denied Him under the pressure of hostile people. He then remembered the warning of Jesus: “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times. So he went out and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:75). He obtained the forgiveness and comforting of the Lord and was completely restored spiritually.

What happens to those who have not come to the Lord with tears of sorrow? Many of them wilfully belittled and rejected His grace, and go through life without Him. Such people continuously resist the calling of the Holy Spirit, while some of them not only grieve Him but even blaspheme the Spirit of God by their actions. He then departs from them. The consequence of such people’s choice is that they forfeit the Lord’s comforting and will only fully realise their problem when they are struck by the judgements of the Lord.

The spiritually hardened rich man only came to his senses in Hades, when he wanted to warn his family but then it was too late (Luke 16:23-25). Esau disregarded his birthright by which he would have inherited the blessings of the Lord, and sold it for a pot of lentil soup. He also discovered his serious mistake when it was too late for tears: “For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears” (Heb. 12:7). There cannot be true sorrow over sin without the Holy Spirit’s work of convicting. Esau’s tears were prompted by a worldly, emotional reaction when he realised what he had lost. During this late stage of his life he merely suffered from self-pity, and that does not lead to the salvation and comforting of the Lord.

### **The meek**

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). This characteristic alludes to the fact that a person has a tender and teachable spirit, which induces him to be receptive to instruction on the spiritual and moral principles of the kingdom of heaven. Those who react positively to instruction of this nature will be co-heirs with Christ when He reveals His kingdom on earth during His second coming (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12). They will rule with Him on earth (Rev. 5:9-10; 20:6).

Christ’s kingdom is not expanded by might, nor by power, but by means of spiritual conviction and free choices by lost people who hear the gospel and are invited to enter in. Those who are prepared to humble themselves before the authority of God’s Word and to be instructed by it, become members of this kingdom. Proud and arrogant people who are engaged in establishing their own kingdom on earth and to promote their own, selfish interests, are not meek and can therefore not inherit Christ’s kingdom.

The Jews practised a self-exalting and self-justifying religion based upon law observance, and for that reason were not appropriately predisposed to receive Jesus as Messiah and King, and to become part of His kingdom. He said to them: “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). Their hearts were hardened (the opposite of meekness) and because of their erroneous theology and humanistic self-image they rejected the Messiah and His gospel.

Today, many people still practise a traditional form of godliness which is fraught with doctrinal errors, and then declare people saved in terms of their own views and formalistic traditions. Three of the most common errors in deceived churches are: (a) the denial of the virgin birth and deity of Jesus, (b) denial of the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, and (c) baptismal

regeneration (the erroneous assertion that people are saved by the rite of baptism). They disregard Christ and His Word while exalting themselves and imposing their distorted views upon their members: “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:8-9). All such efforts are in vain.

When we are confronted with the pure gospel message of the Bible there is no room for denominational or theological arrogance – only for the unconditional acceptance of what the Bible says on salvation: “Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 1:23). We should also proclaim this message to others with meekness and gentleness. Christ said: “... learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:29; cf. 2 Cor. 10:1; Eph. 4:2).

A gentle and teachable spirit is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and therefore a characteristic of a sanctified life (Gal. 5:22-23; 6:1; Col. 3:12; 1 Tim. 6:11-12). A person who is not humble and meek has a hardened heart and cannot understand or accept the Word of God (Mark 6:52; Acts 19:9; 2 Cor. 3:14). We are admonished not to harden our hearts against the gospel: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do no harden your hearts” (Heb. 4:8).

The moment a person again allows sin into his life, his heart gradually becomes hard, insensible and apathetic towards the Bible and the righteousness of the Lord. While that happens, he will lose his meekness, receptiveness to teaching, and willingness to honour Biblical precepts: “But exhort one another daily ... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13).

### **Hunger and thirst for righteousness**

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). God’s attribute of righteousness emerges from His holiness and commits Him to act in a fair, caring and righteous way towards all people. Because of this, He offers His saving grace to all who trust Him in faith to deliver them from their unrighteousness and sin. But God’s righteousness tolerates no sin, from which it inevitably follows that He will judge unrepentant sinners.

Righteousness among people implies in the first instance the full acceptance of God’s provision for salvation and a just life, as well as a character and lifestyle that are in accordance with God’s will. To such people, God will reveal Himself and enable them through His Holy Spirit to live according to the dictates of His righteousness.

When we accept God’s righteousness we fully associate with the following facts about His Person and character:

- God is holy, being Himself the personification of everything which is true, just, good, honourable, pure and orderly. It is His desire that people who were created after His image will also demonstrate these characteristics. That is the reason why He says: “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16).
- God’s righteousness causes Him to hate sin and judge sinners. “[God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31). When Christ returns to earth as Judge and King of kings during His second coming, He will judge and make war in righteousness” (Rev. 19:11).
- God’s grace demands the redemption of all repentant sinners, but His righteousness demands the death penalty upon sinners. Both these demands were met through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross. He bore the punishment for our sins, and now His righteousness and holiness can be imputed to us by way of rebirth and the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Saved people do not glory in themselves but in the righteousness of God which His Son has given to us as a gift of grace. Only such people become sons and daughters of the heavenly Father as there is no other way to be reconciled with the Father. Without the Lord Jesus, not even the best person on earth, neither the most law-abiding person in Israel, can comply with

the standard of God's righteousness. That is why nobody can come to the Father but by Him and by virtue of His atoning death.

Most of the orthodox Jews did not know God, and tried to fill the spiritual void in themselves by human efforts of law observance. Because of their deceptive form of righteousness they rejected faith in Christ, despite the fact that the latter was the only way to receive God's righteousness: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:3-4).

"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, ... even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe" (Rom. 3:21-22). Paul himself had abandoned all efforts to base his righteousness on his good, law-abiding life, and instead trusted solely on faith in Christ (Phil. 3:8-10). In this new life he became conformed to the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and in Him he pursued the upward call of God in his spiritual life (Phil. 3:14).

Many members of Christian churches make the mistake of trusting in their good lives and church membership, thinking that these things will render them acceptable to God. In the process they establish their own righteousness without a clear testimony of rebirth and a new life in Christ. Such people do not hunger for the righteousness of God and are consequently never filled spiritually. They are absent from Bible study meetings and do not show serious interest in further acquainting themselves with the righteousness of God. They do not understand the doctrine of salvation, and usually also reject the doctrine on sanctification. Like Israel of old, they build their lives upon the sand of self-justification and doubtful experiences (Matt. 7:21-23).

A hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ is the mark of a true Christian. To people like that, the Lord reveals Himself and He also uses them in the expansion of His kingdom on earth.

## 4. Blessings in the Sermon on the Mount (Part 2)

The following are the last four beatitudes in Christ's Sermon on the Mount:

### The merciful

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7). Mercy can be described as help in need – regardless of what nature a person's needs may be – without expecting anything in exchange for it. The giver does an undeserved favour to the receiver.

One of the characteristics of a member of the Lord's kingdom is that he is merciful to others. He forgives, helps, cares and loves people because he himself received mercy from the Lord. Should he not be inclined to do to others what the Lord has done for him, he will be a failed witness for Christ and an unworthy follower of Him.

We are living in a world in which people generally are hard, unforgiving and unapproachable, and in which you will receive very little if you don't pay for it. However, the Lord does not expect His children to show attitudes of selfishness, heartlessness and vindictiveness as these have no place in His kingdom. An unforgiving person cannot expect to be forgiven by the Lord (Matt. 6:15).

The same principle also applies to the showing of mercy in other spheres of life. In the parable of the unforgiving servant we are told of a person whose large debt was cancelled by his master, but subsequently the servant mercilessly prosecuted his own debtor without having compassion on him. "Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses" (Matt. 18:32-35).

Mercy can be shown with regard to both spiritual and material needs, and of these two spiritual needs are by far the most important. The biggest need of lost humanity is of a spiritual nature, and that is what the Lord in the first place has mercy on. David prayed: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. 51:1-2).

The only condition which the Lord attaches to a prayer request of this nature is that the person must confess and forsake his sins (repentance): "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Prov. 28:13; cf. 1 John 1:9). The Lord saves a sinner by regenerating and completely renewing him through His Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5).

The Lord's tender mercies are endless on all who approach His throne of grace in prayer: "His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50). "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

The second area of human needs is on the material level, and should also be prayed for because the Lord provides in all our needs. That does not mean that all our problems will vanish miraculously, but the Lord does come to our help – even if He only gives strength to bear our cross and to remain steadfast in the midst of adversity. We have to pass through the sweet *and* sour of life together with the Lord while entering into the kingdom of God through many tribulations (Acts 14:22; cf. 2 Cor. 11:24-27).

Always remember that the spiritual need of people is vastly more important than their material need, and is therefore the main concern in the showing of mercy. The parable of the Good Samaritan was in the first instance used to answer a question to Jesus on what a person should do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25-37). The first requirement to obtain this life is love towards God and love towards your neighbour. The second question was aimed at a clarification on who our neighbour is. In the parable it is vividly demonstrated that any person who is in dire need should be helped to survive the crisis in which he finds himself.

The unfortunate person who was lying next to the road is a description of all the people along life's journey who have been attacked by the great Robber, Satan, and then left to their fate. The passers-by who only had a form of godliness (the priest and the Levite) were not inclined to helping the unfortunate victim. The Samaritan, a member of a group who were despised and regarded as outcasts in Israel, helped the dying man, nursed his wounds and assisted him to continue his journey and reach his destination.

The priests and Levites in Israel did nothing to alleviate the spiritual need of their own people. Still worse: they rejected the Messiah who is the Saviour of Israel and the whole world (John 1:29), and treated Him as an outcast. But He was the One who offered deliverance and salvation to all people who are captives of Satan. The wine and the oil which He used to nurse their wounds, refers to His blood by which He cleanses people of their sin (1 John 1:7), and to His Holy Spirit who was given to regenerate lost people, care for them and comfort them.

If the scribe who asked the questions to Jesus was himself a follower of the Messiah, he would have been able to go out and proclaim the mercy and saving grace of our great Saviour to people who are blinded captives of the kingdom of darkness. However, this scribe was unsaved and himself in need of the Good Samaritan to deliver him from the power of darkness before he would have been able to help others.

When we proclaim spiritual mercies to the lost, we should also try to meet their material needs as far as possible. The Lord has blessed us and we have the obligation to also meet other people's secular needs: "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17). Help others as far as possible, but first and foremost the fellow-believers: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). If any member of the body of Christ suffers, then all the members are suffering: "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also" (Heb. 13:3).

### **The pure of heart**

"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). When a person comes over from the darkness of being lost, into the kingdom of God, his sins are not only forgiven but his heart must also be cleansed and filled with the Holy Spirit. We should, therefore, not only strive to become believers but also saints (Spirit-filled believers). There are certain steps of dedication that should be taken if we wish to honour the command to holiness. Complying with this command will enable us to play a positive role in promoting the peace of God in society, and also give us boldness to appear before the Lord in a worthy state: "Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

The most important command which God gave to Israel in the Old Testament is: "I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44). This command also applies to us in the New Testament: "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). True holiness which reflects the image of God, can only come from inside, from a sanctified heart, when the principles of God's righteousness have been written on the tablets of a believer's heart. It determines the norms of your life, it changes your personality and way of life for the good, and transforms you into a true disciple of Christ.

Holiness cannot be artificially instilled from the outside by the learning and mimicking of certain patterns of behaviour, and then trying to observe them in an association with a carnal heart: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17). In a full surrender, the old fleshly nature must first be delivered to be crucified, and then only will we be spiritually fully renewed in our mind. The Holy Spirit will then enable us to put on the new man which is created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:22-24). This deeper work of sanctification is also described as "complete sanctification" (1 Thess. 5:23).

Have you seriously considered the command towards sanctification? Please note that this

command is only given to believers who have already become professing members of Christian churches. Paul says to the Ephesians: "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). To the Thessalonians he says: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification. ... For God did not call us to uncleanness, but to holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 4:3, 7-8). To the Corinthians he says: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). Sanctification should become a way of life: "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

If we really wish to see God spiritually, all stumbling-blocks must first be removed: "Therefore, ... let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2). Only after we have overcome all these hindrances will we really be able to see. David realised this important fact long ago, and gave the answer to his own question: "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. ... He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation" (Ps. 23:3-5).

David fully realised that if a believer is tempted and again falls into sin, he grieves the Holy Spirit and also loses his pure heart. He himself was in such a situation but prayed earnestly for forgiveness: "Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:9-11).

We must flee away from the lusts of sin and rather strive after purity of heart. The young Timothy was encouraged to "flee youthful lusts, but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22). While engaged in this way of life we should prepare to appear before Christ without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27). God wants to sanctify you but your full cooperation is needed before it will become a reality in your life.

An active expectation on the second coming of Christ is an important part of a Christian's motivation to take further steps of dedication in order to appear before the heavenly Bridegroom in an unblemished state: "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3).

### **The peacemakers**

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). We are living in a hostile world which has become alienated from God because of the Fall. The sinful state in which all people are born explains the fact why they are at enmity with God. However, the Lord calls all lost people back into His kingdom by making peace with Him by virtue of the atoning death of Jesus Christ. All the children of God are called to be peacemakers who should actively be engaged in proclaiming the good news that sinners can make peace with God, because He is our peace (Rom. 15:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9).

All who have been reconciled with God experience His peace in their hearts: "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). This is a kind of peace which the world cannot give to anyone; that is why the Lord Jesus said: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). His peace, which follows upon the forgiveness of sin and being born again, is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace ..." (Gal. 5:22).

Divine peace is the result of no longer having to run away from God for fear of His judgements on sin, because the sins which have previously condemned us are forgiven and atoned for: "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of

reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18-19). We have been commissioned to further proclaim the message that sinners can make peace with God.

Many people make the mistake of thinking that the peace which we promote as Christians renders us secular pacifists who are not supposed to offer resistance to anything or anybody. That is not the case at all. Our Christian convictions are at variance with a depraved world which lies in the sway of the Evil One. Because of this situation, we must stand firm spiritually and resist all the evil by which we are confronted. Jesus said about this situation: “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). Divisions even occur within families, and that places a responsibility on us to defend Christian principles without any compromise, because the honour of the Lord Jesus is at stake (Matt. 10:35-37).

With a view to this conflict, our spiritual defence should be increased: “Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). False doctrine should be resisted, regardless of who proclaims it and what the consequences of our opposing views may be: “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:2-5). It is inherently part of our commission “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

Misguided pacifists are those people who interpret the promotion of peace as a command not to offer any resistance to anything, including the non-Christian religions, and to view humanity as inherently good and peace-loving. They do not recognise the mutual hostility between the kingdoms of God and Satan, and try to establish a form of world peace which is based on compromise. The false prophets in Israel also proclaimed a false peace of this nature: “They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, Peace, peace! when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14).

There will only be visible peace on earth after Christ has returned as Prince of Peace, destroyed His enemies and established a government of righteousness: “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever” (Isa. 9:7).

In the meantime, we should continue unabated to lead people from the darkness of sin into the light of Christ’s kingdom, so they can also receive the peace of God in their hearts. As for our relations with people in a deceived and divided world, we should continue with our role as peacemakers but without any compromise on Christian principles: “Repay no one evil for evil. ... If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:17-18). Should people reject you because of your convictions, then so be it. Biblical principles should never be thrown overboard for the sake of good relations with enemies of the cross.

### **Persecution for the sake of the truth**

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:10-12). This eighth and last beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount is repeated to emphasise its importance, and also to elaborate on it a bit more.

The righteousness of God’s kingdom is contrary to the unrighteousness of a depraved world which is under the authority of the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2; 6:12; 1 John 5:19). Most people love darkness rather than the light (John 3:19), and that is the reason why the minority of Christians who find themselves on the narrow way, are persecuted.

By this clear warning against the persecution and negative reactions which all true Christians can expect, the Lord Jesus draws our attention to a very important dispensational fact, i.e. the

continued rejection of His kingdom on earth. The entire dispensation between His first and second coming is characterised by the antagonism and hostile reactions of the deceived and unbelieving majority. The rejection with which Jesus met during His first coming would continue towards Himself and His minority of true followers right throughout the church age. He often warned them against it:

“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me” (John 15:19-21).

Christ informed His disciples about these things so that they could learn to find their peace and joy in Him, despite the fact that they would be persecuted in the world: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

The fact that Christ has overcome the world means that on the cross He has broken the spiritual power which the devil and his kingdom had over fallen humanity. Christ became man, “that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14-15). In this way the possibility of the spiritual deliverance of all people was ensured – that is the reason why all who received Jesus Christ as Saviour are no longer slaves of sin; they are free.

However, that does not mean that the devil and his kingdom ceased to exist during the first coming of Jesus. To the contrary – although he is a defeated foe, he still “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8-9). We must put on the full armour of God and resist him. The devil is still “the ruler of this world” (John 14:30) because he controls the vast majority of the world population.

As long as this state of affairs prevails, the Christian minority will remain under pressure and even be openly persecuted. “All who desire to lead a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). We should therefore not expect a carefree life in which we reign as little kings over our inheritance, while devoting all our energy to becoming as wealthy, prosperous and happy as possible in this sinful world. The prosperity gospel is completely erroneous and is in actual fact used by the devil to destroy people’s faith (1 Tim. 6:7-12; Luke 16:13).

During the church dispensation we should not pursue power, high positions and a trouble-free life (Mark 10:42-45). At present, the kingdom of heaven functions in a hidden form in the midst of an apostate world. When Christ comes again, the situation will drastically change. Those who now suffer with Him by being rejected by the world, will then reign with Him: “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ... If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He will also deny us” (2 Tim. 2:3, 12). To the Christians in Rome, Paul says that if we suffer with Him we also will be glorified with Him (Rom. 8:17; cf. Phil. 1:29).

Peter likewise emphasises the fact that during the church dispensation the kingdom of heaven will not be revealed as a visible structure of government on earth, but as a spiritual reality it will be strongly resisted until Christ comes again. During this period we must be prepared to share in His sufferings, humiliation and rejection, to ensure that we will reign with Him when He returns as King of kings: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Our character is not formed by prosperity, miracles, wealth, power and the measure of influence that we have over other people, but rather by trials, testing and the way in which we react to hostility, adversity and problems. In this way we learn steadfastness, perseverance, and the need of waiting on the Lord for deliverance, thus becoming partakers of His holiness (Heb. 12:10).



Do you understand the principles on which the kingdom of heaven functions during the church dispensation? Do you have the attributes, characteristics and spiritual power to be a worthy disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you guided by the Holy Spirit and are your priorities correctly determined? Then alone will you be complete as a man of God, “thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17).

## 5. Further Teachings on Blessings by Christ

The importance of the eight beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount is confirmed by the fact that God's salvation, as well as other manifestations of His grace, is the source of all blessings in the Bible. During His earthly ministry the Lord Jesus often referred to divine blessings, and gave specific examples of people who are blessed by God.

### **The blessing of divine revelations**

God revealed Himself to humanity through His Word. All who hear it, accept it, and walk accordingly, are described as blessed. In the Old Testament, God's Word was proclaimed by Moses, the prophets and God-fearing kings of Israel. In the New Testament, God revealed Himself in His fullness through His Son. One of His names is "the Word of God" (Rev. 19:13). John says: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus also described His disciples as blessed because they had seen and heard Him, a privilege which the prophets desired to have (Luke 10:23-24).

Mary was called blessed because she believed what the Lord had said to her before the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:45, 48). What a privilege of having been used in this way by the Lord! Peter was called blessed when he received a revelation from the Father that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16-17).

After the ascension of Christ, new revelations from God were received and proclaimed by the apostles, until the full revelation of God's will for humanity was completed with the writing of the book of Revelation. After that, the Bible as God's Word is proclaimed by all Christians under the guidance of the Holy Spirit: "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2). The blessings of the Lord Jesus still rest upon everyone who hears and accepts His Word: "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28).

The words of the Lord are spiritual food by which people are built up in the most holy faith: "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (Luke 14:15). All Christians are called witnesses of Christ, who have been sent out to serve the bread of life to people everywhere. Many people will, to their own detriment, refuse this spiritual food, but to many others it will be a heavenly feast (Luke 14:16-24).

### **The blessing of salvation is of the Jews**

Israel played a vital role as a special people of God from whom the Messiah and Saviour of the world was born. Jesus said to the woman at the well in Samaria: "... salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). With this statement He did not mean that the Jews lived exemplary lives religiously, but that He Himself (the Saviour) was born as a Jew from the house of David. John the Baptist said of Him: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Paul said that Israel is a people among whom God was incarnated as Jesus Christ (Rom. 9:5).

Salvation (the highest spiritual blessing) is in the Messiah Himself; that is why He said to the woman at the well: "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). During the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, He said: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive" (John 7:37-39).

The fact that the Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah, directly gave rise to the Great Commission in which Jesus sent His disciples with the message of salvation to every people, language, tribe and nation (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). In this way, Israel's blindness was to the advantage of the Gentile world. Paul said about Israel: "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:11). Because we have received the blessing which was in the first place meant for Israel, we have the obligation to win them back for the kingdom of God. We should make them jealous by the way in which we serve the Messiah through the God of Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob. Israel is destined to awake spiritually when they will all be gathered around the Messiah (Rom. 11:25-26); Zech. 12:10). Only then will they be blessed as a nation.

### **Our duty to obey the Word**

A special blessing has been pronounced upon those who do not only hear God's Word but also obey it by ordering their lives according to it and by proclaiming it. Jesus led his disciples from the darkness of spiritual ignorance and moral depravity into the full light of the knowledge of God and His righteousness. Subsequently, He further instructed them in God's Word to make them a living testimony of His righteousness. He declares His disciples blessed if they follow His example: "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. ... If you know these things, happy [blessed] are you if you do them" (John 13:15, 17).

James says: "Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas. 1:22). If the people of the world are to receive the blessings which God has in store for them, disciples of Christ should not only be passive listeners of the Good News but active witnesses. They have a very important role to play in God's programme of changing the destiny of a lost world. Jesus said:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:13-16).

A fully transformed life should bear the likeness of Jesus Christ, be conducted in the power of the Holy Spirit, and be sufficiently skilled in the Word to be able to properly portray and proclaim its truths. Only that will make a difference in the world and help people to obtain the blessings of God. The faithful disciple must first be blessed before he can introduce others to the blessings of the Lord. This important principle applied right through the long history of God's revelations: "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God" (Deut. 28:2).

After the coming of Christ, the door has been opened widely to all nations to share in these blessings. God "has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13). Christ is the living Word of God and His disciples are to follow His example by proclaiming it. Salvation and deliverance from sin is the first blessing, but that will be followed by many more blessings to those who truly obey the Word.

### **The blessing of a firm belief**

The Lord declares us blessed if we believe in Jesus Christ and maintain a relationship with Him. We should believe that He comes from the Father, as man was born from a virgin, is Himself God and one with the Father, died for our sins and rose from the dead, ascended to heaven where He intercedes for us, and will come again to take us to heaven. We accept all these facts by faith without having seen Jesus as the Son of Man. Initially, Thomas would not believe that Jesus is God who rose from the dead. However, after he had seen Him he said: "My Lord and my God! Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:28-29).

The disciples had to proclaim the message of faith in Jesus to the entire world: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). The blessing of the great Saviour rests upon all who believe. Those who don't believe are under the judgement of God.

Shortly before His ascension, Jesus gave all believers the blessed hope of an eternal home in heaven: "In My Father's house are many mansions. ... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" John 14:2-3).

## 6. Teaching on Blessings by the Apostles

The apostles proclaimed the message of Jesus Christ's saving grace everywhere. It was the glad tidings that all people can obtain salvation through faith in the Name of Jesus. However, there are conditions attached to receiving this blessing, as well as certain implications and commitments of which believers should be mindful. These implications and commitments, however demanding they may be, do not weigh up against the everlasting glory which will be revealed to us.

### **The necessity of faith**

Faith in God is the critical factor in the salvation of man: "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). We must have changed hearts and lives, together with the prospect of eternal life in heaven with the Lord. Peter says the ultimate purpose of faith is the salvation of our souls (1 Pet. 1:9).

The message of the apostles on faith in Jesus was clearly conveyed, as in the fearless testimony of Peter before the Jewish Council: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). There is only one source of salvation and blessing, and that is faith in Jesus Christ.

Our faith in Christ should not only be confined to our salvation but be the driving force of our entire earthly life, from which it follows that everything should be done by faith: "The just shall live by faith" (Heb. 10:38). Faith in Christ is a shield to protect us against unbelief and other attacks by the enemy (Eph. 6:16), but it is also a weapon for victory: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5). Such a person is indeed blessed.

### **The blessedness of the forgiveness of sins**

Already during Old Testament times, the works of the law were the consequences of a relationship of faith, and did not have saving power in themselves. Paul confirms that this situation still applies to New Testament times: "Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin" (Rom. 4:6-8).

What a wonderful privilege! "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23-24). This salvation, or blessing, cannot be earned – it is too precious and can only be appropriated by faith.

### **Suffering for the sake of faith**

Since the salvation of the Lord is so profoundly different from the values and ideals of an evil world, it is continuously questioned and rejected, and its supporters even persecuted. However, persecution of this nature should not discourage Christians but rather give rise to feelings of joy and blessedness because they are worthy to suffer for Christ (Luke 6:22-23).

The Jewish Council severely persecuted the apostles, but they were not deterred by it: "And when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:40-42).

The same principle also applies to us: "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:14-15).

Temptations and testing are experienced by all Christians. If we carry our cross in a worthy manner we are called blessed: “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (Jas. 1:12).

## **Blessings in Revelation**

Christians should also entertain and proclaim the correct teaching with regard to their future expectation. Knowledge about the future will help them to be prepared for what is coming. It is so exceedingly important to pay attention to biblical eschatology that the Lord often calls us blessed if we look ahead and prepare to fulfil our future role in His kingdom. The following seven blessings are mentioned in Revelation:

**1. The truth of biblical prophecies.** “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Rev. 1:3).

The Lord does not want us to entertain wrong prophetic expectations since a person’s preparations for the future are determined by his understanding of biblical prophecies. The following reactions are typical of four different expectations:

- Some people expect the manifestation of a Christian kingdom on earth before the second coming of Christ, and exert themselves to promote it. They ignore prophetic warnings on a great falling away in the last days, and try everything in their power to foster ecumenical ties with a view to establishing a global movement for Christian unity.
- Other people expect a worldwide tribulation under the reign of the Antichrist, and are of the opinion that the church is destined to pass through this period to suffer under the tyranny of this dictator. Many of them are engaged in preparing safe places of refuge for Christians. In their end-time orientation, they have an Antichrist expectation and not a Christ expectation. According to them, Christ will only appear at the end of the tribulation period; consequently, a meeting with Him does not feature in their preparations for the immediate future. Their actions have a wrong focus and are not in the interest of a better relationship with Christ.
- A large number of people have no clear biblical expectation of the future and only live for the things of this world as if there will be no end to it. Because of their lack of insight they will accept any world leader – also a religious one – who promises peace, unity, and economic prosperity to all. They will eventually find themselves among the deceived masses of people who will follow the Antichrist in amazement (Rev. 13:3). What a serious error!
- A relatively small group of believers are correctly informed on the future and realise that there will not be a transformation to a Christian kingdom right now, but rather a major falling away which will culminate in the revelation of the Antichrist. However, they accept the promise that we are not destined for the coming tribulation and divine judgements, and therefore prepare to be caught up by the heavenly Bridegroom (Luke 21:36; John 14:2-3; 1 Thess. 4:16-18). They are called blessed because they heed the prophetic word and live like people who expect their Lord any day. This understanding of the prophetic word has a positive outcome since “everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). Through sanctification they prepare to depart with Him to heaven, fully confident of the fact that they will not remain behind to try and flee away from the Antichrist.

It is critically important to correctly understand biblical prophecies, and for that reason Paul says: “Do not despise prophecies” (1 Thess. 5:20). Blessed are all who pay attention to this important matter.

**2. Prepared for a certain future.** “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works follow them” (Rev. 14:13).

This blessing is specifically meant for the martyrs of the great tribulation, as death will save them any further persecution and suffering (cf. Rev. 6:9-11). Their works – among which will also be the willingness to die for their faith (Rev. 2:10) – will follow them and lead to rewards of grace before the judgement seat of Christ. They will also rule with the Lord Jesus in His reign of peace,

which will be established shortly after the tribulation period (Rev. 20:4).

In a more generalised sense, this blessing also applies to all Christians, since all who die in Christ are blessed and will be resurrected in glorified bodies during the resurrection of the just (1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:51-53). Subsequently, we will all receive rewards of grace before Christ's judgement seat (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

**3. Readiness for Christ's sudden coming.** "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he should walk naked and they see his shame" (Rev. 16:15).

The coming of the Lord Jesus will be suddenly and unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. At that moment it will be too late to prepare for His coming, and that is why we should always be in a state of readiness for His coming. Salvation and sanctification are often metaphorically likened to a garment: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts" (Rom. 13:14).

In Matthew 22:1-14, our uniting with Christ is likened to a royal wedding feast. During biblical times, kings provided wedding garments to be worn by the invited guests. Sometimes there were people who thought that their own garments were appropriate (self-righteousness) and then failed to put on the king's garment. We read about one such case in this parable:

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:11-13).

There are today also many people who think that they are Christians because they lead a good life and also belong to a church. However, their spiritual "nakedness" will be revealed when the Lord comes, as they will be thrown out (left behind) at that moment when Christ comes for His bride. That will be a big embarrassment and shame to them.

If we wish to be blessed, we should ensure that we not only have a wedding garment which the Lord alone can give to us, but we should also be watchful by preserving it in a clean and spotless state. At the moment when we appear before the Bridegroom we must be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

**4. The bride of the Lamb.** "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" (Rev. 19:9).

The invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb does not only imply that believers have put on the Lord Jesus (imputed righteousness), but also that they have done works under the guidance of the Holy Spirit by which they have beautified their garments (cooperative righteousness). In Revelation 19:8 it is said: "And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints." It was given to her by the Holy Spirit to do works that are acceptable to God because His Son is glorified in this way and His kingdom on earth is expanded. These works are the gold, silver and precious stones with which we build upon the Rock, Jesus Christ, after repentance (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

What an honour to be invited to the illustrious occasion of the marriage supper of the Lamb, what a privilege to be empowered and motivated by the Holy Spirit to do works that are in keeping with repentance and in harmony with the garment of righteousness, and how prudent to watch and pray to be worthy for this wonderful appointment.

**5. The certainty of the first resurrection and our position as kings together with Christ.** "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6).

All who have already been saved by Christ are receiving with it the most wonderful promises to look forward to. After our earthly life with all its challenges, which can only be surmounted by the

power of the Holy Spirit and the mind of Christ, follows the unspeakable blessing of eternal life. It will all start during the resurrection of the just at the end of the church dispensation. Over all these believers the second death has no power – that is why they are called blessed. The first death is the death of the body at the end of our earthly life – we are all mortal people. But the second death is eternal death in the lake of fire, and that will be the destiny of all the unsaved people who will be resurrected after the Millennium to appear before the great white throne and receive their judgement (Rev. 20:5, 11-15).

The first resurrection occurs in phases and includes all believers who lived prior to the beginning of Christ's millennial reign. This resurrection started with Christ's own resurrection, and all who believe in Him will also share in it:

“For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterwards those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father” (1 Cor. 15:16-24).

Those who will be resurrected when the Bridegroom comes to take His congregation away before the tribulation period, will already be in heaven before the first seal of God's judgements upon the unbelievers is broken. They will look forward to returning with Christ to the earth after the tribulation to reign here as kings (Rev. 5:9-10).

The martyrs of the tribulation represent the after-crop and form part of the first resurrection as they will also be resurrected before the start of the Millennium. They are also blessed and will be co-rulers with Christ and the other saints during the reign of peace. John says: “Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4).

The reiteration of the promise on the first resurrection in Revelation 20:6 has specifically been done with a view to those who will not be part of the rapture and will only be born again during the tribulation period. Although they are saved at a very late stage they are still of Christ's kingdom and will also share in its blessings.

**6. The sureness of Christ's public coming.** “Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:7).

The repeating of the first blessing in this prophetic book (Rev. 1:3) is done for a very specific reason. Revelation starts with a review of church history (Rev. 2 & 3). It was (and still is) important that all believers of all time have a strong expectation on the coming of Christ. The blessed hope on His coming helps us not to become overly involved with the things of the world, and to prepare ourselves on eternal life by doing things that have value for eternity. In this way we are laying up treasures in heaven.

Believers who spend all their time, attention and money on secular things, are spiritually poor and will appear before the Lord with empty hands (1 Cor. 3:15). If we are thus inclined, we are spiritually wretched: “If *in this life only* we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Cor. 15:19; emphasis added).

The repeating of Christ's imminent coming is specifically done for the sake of those who will only be saved during the tribulation period. At the end of this ominous time Christ will come again – this time in public so that every eye shall see Him. Many people from Israel and the nations will only then be saved (Zech. 12:10; Matt. 24:29-30).

**7. Obedience to His commands.** “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:13-14).

The statement: “Blessed are those who do His commandments” (v. 14) should be properly understood. In various other translations, this scripture is rendered as follows: “Blessed are those who cleanse their garments” (Amplified Bible; cf. NIV and RSV). This statement is closely associated with what is said about the martyrs: “[They] washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14).

When the concept “commandments” is used it should be interpreted in a New Testament context with a view to doing God’s will with regard to the Lord Jesus (Matt. 7:21). That involves, among others, to be reconciled to Christ through cleansing by His blood (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19) and also to observe His New Testament law of love (John 13:34). The final request in the High Priestly prayer of Jesus was that His disciples would be filled with His love: “I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26).

Can you imagine a more blessed existence than this? Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians was:

- that they would be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man;
- that Christ will dwell in their hearts through faith;
- that they will be rooted and grounded in His love;
- that they will be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height of the love of Christ which passes knowledge; and
- that they may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Blessed is everyone who can testify about this.



## 7. The Source of all Blessings

When we read in the Bible about blessings it mainly refers to spiritual blessings which God alone can bestow upon people. They are aimed at restoring, strengthening and maintaining fallen man's broken relationship with God, and to ultimately ensure him about his eternal existence in heaven. The more a person becomes part of God's plan for his life by striving to reach higher levels of dedication in his Christian calling, the more he will be blessed and established in the truth of God's Word.

To be blessed implies an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, since He is the source of all blessings. The essence of the Christian faith is rather a personal relationship with the Saviour, than a religious system which is based upon certain rules and rituals. Christ is everything to us – our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30) – in short, our entire life. He delivers us from sin and gives us new life, new principles of living, as well as the power of the Holy Spirit to give expression to it. We are not the slaves of a set of rules and laws according to which we should live. A blessed person is somebody in whom the mind and typical actions of the Lord Jesus can be seen.

Since the birth of Jesus He was introduced as the Saviour of Israel and the world. The angel said to the shepherds of Bethlehem: "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). Zechariah said that Jesus came "to give knowledge of salvation to His people" (Luke 1:77).

The name "Saviour" (Gr. *Soter*) is derived from *sozo*, which means to save, deliver, protect, heal, preserve, do well, make whole (Strong's Concordance: 4982 and 4990 in the Addendum: Greek Dictionary). These actions include all the aspects of divine blessings which one can think of. The great Saviour has indeed come to bless broken people by redeeming them and making them whole, as well as protecting them against the adversary of our souls.

The role of the Lord Jesus as Saviour is not confined to Israel as His saving grace is offered to all people in the world. He is indeed "the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). During Old Testament times, God already said that His Son would come for the salvation of the entire world: "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:6).

Since only God can bless and save people, and Jesus Himself as God the Son is equal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, His deity should explicitly be recognised. This fact should also be evident from the way in which we address Him – not only as "Jesus" but as the "Lord Jesus". Peter describes Him as "our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1), and adds to this: "... for so entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11).

Unfortunately, there were many people in Israel, particularly among the scribes, who refused to recognise the deity and Messiahship of Jesus, and took offence because He described Himself as God. "Jesus answered them, Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me? The Jews answered Him, saying, For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (John 10:32-33).

Because of their ignorance and wrong beliefs a large number of Israelites, and particularly their spiritual leaders, did not obtain the blessing and salvation which the Lord Jesus in the first instance offered to them. His blessings are not for those who reject Him. He said: "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me" (Matt. 11:6).

For those who abide in Christ, there is the prospect of a fruitful existence here on earth, as well as the blessed expectation on Christ's second coming: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and

glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11-14).

The blessed hope to which Titus refers, is the rapture. The blessedness of this event is not only due to the fact that we will go to heaven when Christ comes, but also that we will escape the wrath of the coming day of the Lord (the tribulation period): “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:9). We already experience the blessedness of salvation and sanctification, but we also expect the untold glory in a glorified body, as well as eternal life in the New Jerusalem into which no unrighteousness will ever enter (Rev. 21:1-7, 27).

While we are waiting on the fulfilment of promises on our future blessedness, everything possible should be done during our earthly lives to achieve the full purpose for which the Lord has placed us here. We should lead holy lives to the honour of God, while being dedicated witnesses of Christ for the salvation of souls and the expanding of His kingdom. Our usefulness may be hampered by sin, fleshliness, passivity, ignorance and worldliness. To what extent do you seriously regard the command towards holiness and serving the Lord?

The qualitative nature of our blessedness depends upon the degree to which we identify with Jesus Christ, are obedient to Him, and grow up to spiritual maturity in Him. Paul says we should grow up to “the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:13-14). Peter confirms this admonition and says: “But grow up in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Blessedness is not in the law, not in a set of rules, not in a church, and not in human efforts towards a good life – it is in Jesus Christ alone, in whom we can grow up towards all the fullness to which a merciful God has called us.