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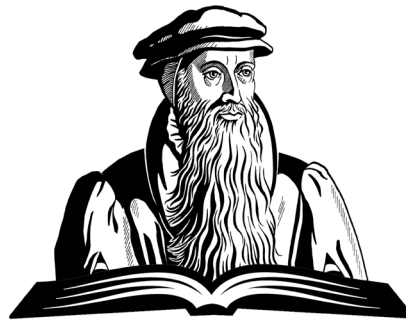
The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst



Lecture 9

Blessed Are the Peacemakers



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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The Beatitudes

10 Lectures

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

1. General Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount
2. General Introduction to the Beatitudes
3. Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit
4. Blessed Are They That Mourn
5. Blessed Are the Meek
6. Blessed Are They Which Do Hunger and Thirst After Righteousness
7. Blessed Are the Merciful
8. Blessed Are the Pure in Heart
9. Blessed Are the Peacemakers
10. Blessed Are They Which Are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake



The Beatitudes

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Lecture #9

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Dear friends, welcome again to this study of the Beatitudes, as we find in Matthew 5:3–12. This session is devoted to the exposition of the seventh Beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” I hope and pray that at the end of our series, we may share something of what the original hearers of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount experienced, for we read that they were astonished. Why did it have this effect on them? It is not just because Jesus’ teaching was just novel or new, though it was in some ways definitely that also; but His teaching was so entirely opposed to how we are used to think or trained to think.

Let’s take again these Beatitudes to where He has put them. We envy the rich, the joyful, the assertive, the satisfied and successful person. But Jesus’ eyes rest in favor upon a group of people that we won’t favor so much at first view, those who are of a humble mindset on account of feeling guilty as a sinner before God. He sees those who aspire to be devoted in genuine love to God and their fellow men and have no other agenda but to serve God. His eyes are on those who respect His law as their delight, even though it may be costly to obey; and to the Lord of Heaven and earth, these people are not only blessed. No, if we look back further in the Sermon, notice what Jesus does in verses 13 and 14, He exalts these people—the Beatitude people—with two very significant statements. He says, “Ye are *the* salt of the earth:...Ye are *the* light of the world.” Now both of those statements are emphatic—the words *the* salt and *the* light. Though you may not count much in the eyes of the world, according to Christ’s estimate, you are the most valuable of all people *if* you live and *if* you are like the Beatitude woman or man or girl or boy.

So this brings us to the concluding description of the citizen of Jesus’ kingdom. The seventh one is the peacemaker. The more each Christian lives out this aspect of the new birth, the peacemaker, the greater the value of genuine Christianity will be understood. It’s exceedingly sad that this Beatitude often is not lived out as it should [be]. So in exploring the meaning of this declaration of blessedness, let me draw attention to, first, the nature of the peacemaker, and then secondly, the dignity of the peacemaker, because it says they shall be called the children of God.

So first, the nature of the peacemaker. Now to grasp the meaning of this last characteristic Jesus uses to describe the new man, let’s go back to Genesis 1. When God made man, what did he look like? Or better, who did we resemble? I don’t mean physically, but I mean spiritually, mentally, emotionally. We reflected the image of our Creator, and we carried with us the reflection of the attributes of Him that we are *able* to reflect. Genesis 1:27 reads this, “So God created man in His own image,” in the likeness of God, or “in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.” So in extension of that, my second question is, when God renews a sinner, what will he or she look like? The answer is similar. He will be conformed back to the image that we were originally created in. Paul writes in Romans 8:29 about this. He says that His people that He

foreknew, that He predestinated, he says they will “be conformed (transformed) to the image of His Son.”

Now as we have studied the Beatitude man or woman, you have noticed that the number of them are clear reflections of the Lord Jesus Christ, of His glory and of His Father. Let me recall again. The meekness, that was one of the first ones—Jesus is meek; followed with righteousness—Jesus was righteous; merciful—how merciful, how pure in heart; and now the concluding likeness, the peacemaker. It is therefore undoubtedly very intentional that Jesus adds to this final statement, “They shall be called the children of God.” The greatest glory of God is that He is called in the Scripture the God or the Lord of peace. The Scripture reveals that from all eternity He had thoughts of peace, and this revelation of His character continues to shine through the entire Scripture and course of time. Go back to Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve have rebelled against God. How did God approach Adam and Eve? With a fist? Or in the spirit of peace? “Where are you?” Like a Shepherd seeking for His lost sheep. Isaiah prophesies about the coming Messiah, Jesus, and what is He called? The Prince of *Peace*. As we hear the story of Jesus’ birth, we read the angels singing about Jesus’ birth. What do they sing? *Peace* on earth. As God’s ambassadors are sent out into this world to preach the Gospel, what are they called, and what are they to bring? The Gospel of *peace*. Matter of fact, if you go through the New Testament, you’ll notice that God calls Himself seven times the God of peace or the Lord of peace. I’ll give you two examples. Romans 15:33, “Now the God of *peace* be with you all.” Hebrews 13:20 contains a lovely phrase, “Now the God of *peace*, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep...” Notice the emphasis—*peace*. So the conclusion is inevitable. God Himself is the foremost peacemaker, and to make this peace possible, He was willing to sacrifice His own Son, as the heavenly peace-child to restore the relationship of peace and harmony. So though at first it may appear contradictory, yet it is true that to make this spiritual peace will include warfare. That doesn’t seem to match—peace and warfare. In Romans 16:20, we find this remarkable combination of peace and warfare in these words, relating it back to Genesis 3:15, “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”

This revelation of God’s warfare against Satan and sin is also the revelation of the mission of God’s peace; and understanding this will help us also to understand the nature of this seventh Beatitude, the peacemaker. The peacemaker, who he is and how he does, does also include warfare, but a different kind. So it equally will help us to understand this very curious saying which Jesus seems to make and which seems to contradict this Beatitude and the song at the birth of Jesus. Jesus says in Matthew 10:34: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” Why that is and how that will happen will be clearer when we grasp the nature of the peacemaker in the seventh and the final Beatitude.

So who or what then is the peacemaker that Jesus declares to be blessed? First of all, friends, He’s not speaking about people who are merely peace *lovers*. There is some difference between peace lovers and peacemakers. Peace lovers are those people who prefer peace above what is right or what is truth. A peace lover will minimize, will ignore sin, stuff it under the carpet type of thing, all for the sake of peace; but that’s not peacemaking. That’s not a peacemaker according to God’s heart. Notice God Himself is the supreme peacemaker, but He never, never ignores or never trivializes or tolerates sin or covers it with the carpet. Likewise His children. The peacemaker, who is filled with the love and the zeal for God’s glory and the well-being of their neighbors, will pursue peace in a holy war type of manner. Oh, not violent, not at all, but he will not let sin be uncontested. Jesus is speaking about people who do what their name tells them. They are *peacemakers*. They will do all to promote, all to secure peace, and all to live in peace, if at all possible, with all men, but never without confronting the sins that harm genuine peace, that break it, that strain it.

For what is now real peace or rather, what is Biblical peace? Biblical peace, friends, is not just the absence of war, or it’s not just the absence of discord. You find that in most of our neighborhoods.

We live in peaceful and quiet neighborhoods. Is that the peace Jesus speaks about? Or we live in a nation at peace with each other. Is that the peace Jesus speaks about? No. Biblical peace is the condition of a perfect harmony between God and us and between man and all his fellow man around him—harmony. This is the peace that existed in the universe before sin tore apart the flawless unity and the harmony that existed among all men and between God and men. This brought separation, this brought brokenness, disharmony, destruction. That peaceful neighborhood is full of separation, full of brokenness, full of disharmony, full of destruction. There's no peace. No, this harmony and this close relationship between God and men, as well as between men and men, can be completely absent even though people dwell together in an amiable neighborhood, or in a larger or smaller family setting. So the Beatitude peacemakers are persons who are engaging in a spiritual warfare against all that breaks the real peace, which is sin, Satan, and all what they do, all what causes disharmony, all what brings separation. They will fight against that. Their goal is not more war, their goal is not more disharmony, not "I'll be right and win"—that's not their goal. Their goal is peace in a restored harmony of love with fellow man, with each other and above all, with God their Creator. So by the peacemakers are meant those who not only seek peace and avoid quarrels as far as lies in their power, but are those who labor hard, do everything necessary to settle the differences among others to bring them together, who advise all men to live at peace and show how it is needed to be done, and who take away every occasion of hatred and strife. This is somewhat quoted of John Calvin. But above all, the peacemakers are those who seek to lead men and women to Christ for the true and spiritual peace that's only found in Him.

So it must be clear now that the peacemaker isn't fighting for his own rights. The peacemaker doesn't seek revenge to get even. He doesn't, even when he's wronged, even when he faces injustice, he's not seeking to get right. No, God's peacemaker, God's kind of peacemaker is the one who is meek, the third Beatitude—he turns his other cheek to someone who offended him rather than getting even. That's what the other cheek means—I'm not getting even. He will not pay back each injustice done to him if this will help to restore peace. The peacemaker, as fruit of self-discovery—think of the first and the second Beatitudes—and in the painful awareness of his own personal sinfulness and unworthiness, while he's yet tasting the love of God and His kindness to him; that peacemaker is meek, he's willing to love and to give up his rights to win the other person's heart, though of course, he *will not* ignore sin. The peacemaker is the one that Jesus speaks about later in the chapter. They will go the second mile after having been forced to do the first mile—why?—so that they can send a message of love and kindness in the face of injustice in order to make peace and a peaceful relationship, and to lead the other person to the peace of God. The peacemakers are the ones that Paul writes about who heap coals of fire on the head of their enemies. Coals of fire means acts of love; they seek to overcome evil with good. That's the peacemaker. In that mindset and in those actions, that peacemaker resembles their God and Father, their Lord and Master, "for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

Now lastly, the peacemaker shows a great tolerance towards the faults and failures of others. He is the person who covers a multitude of shortcomings, and even sins done out of weakness, out of infirmity—sins that are things that are said or done wrong, but are not done so with an intention, but are done because of either ignorance or immaturity of the person, or just weakness—he covers them. Therefore, the peacemaker is peaceable, he's not quarrelsome, he's amiable like Jesus. Friends, can you see that if all Christians would live like this, truly what a different world would ours be if it would be inhabited by these peacemakers? How blessed and how beautiful would every marriage and every family and every church family and society and work environment be, if we would be peacemakers, where all are meek about "my own rights" and where all are desirous to honor God and His rights above anybody else's?

That leads me then to the second part—the dignity of these peacemakers. "They shall be

called the children of God,” it says. The peacemakers, they shall be known—that’s what it means, “called”—they will be owned, they will be esteemed, they will be recognized—that is the child that resembles God. That’s what that means. This promise is at the same time again a declaration of an exceeding great privilege. I personally count myself very privileged because I had an awesome father, a godly father who owned me and treated me like his child and sacrificed everything for me as a child. What a privilege to be owned by God as His child, and every child of God may count himself exceedingly privileged, for they shall be called, they shall be owned, they shall be cared for as the children of God the Father. Notice that Jesus said that they shall be *called* the children of God. By whom shall they be called the children of God? Don’t count on the world to necessarily call you a child of God. People in the world may even disown you or disdain you or, as we will see in the last part of these Beatitudes, persecute you. Why is that? Well, for a variety of reasons, but sometimes your godliness, your example, they just kind of prick their conscience. So don’t count on even your own families always to own you as a child of God. Sometimes the enemies will be those of your own household, your own family. Even though you may be a genuine peacemaker, a meek person, a loving person among them, they may reject you as a troublemaker. So count on it, you will be called *by God* a child of God, God owns you and calls you His child. Even if the whole world disowns you, He owns you as His. How sweet is the testimony, and that Spirit of God “beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ,” that Paul points out in Romans 8:16–17.

With that truth from Romans, this heir of God, we’ve come full circle in the Beatitudes, because, notice how the first one started—“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the *kingdom of God*. The privileges of grace always bring the obligations of gratitude. So let therefore all God’s children strive to be Biblical peacemakers. If that is habitually absent in our life, or if we live as quarrelsome, judgmental, arrogant, proud, unforgiving people, or if we can just live on with broken relationships, without having tried all things to make peace, or if our religion is full of friction and full of discord, while we’re feeding on rumors or gossip or slander—all then in our confession to be a child of God is a falsehood. Thomas Watson again, in his book on the Beatitudes, said it well; he says, “Let men either lay down their contentions with their neighbors or lay down the coat of their profession to be a Christian.”

So in conclusion, friends, as we’ve looked at these seven Beatitudes, Jesus has in these seven Beatitudes outlined the born-again and the blessed soul. If you can’t deny that these Beatitudes are the ones that are found in your heart and in your life, even very immature, very weak, even if they’re only like the dawning of the early morning, then please give thanks daily unto the Father which has made us fit, meet, fitting to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, for it is He who has delivered us from the power of darkness. The presence of darkness will always be there till the end, but the power of darkness is broken, and He has translated or has transferred us into the kingdom of His dear Son. So does that mean that the born-again soul will perfectly reflect this portrait in this life? The answer sadly is no. Even the best of God’s children, the farthest advanced, remain imperfect in this life, not always will they be consistent in their mercy or their sincerity or in their peacemaking efforts. No, sadly, not always will they mourn their sins as they ought to, not always will they be so meek as not to fight for their own name or their own rights. So this reality of the abiding, indwelling sin, which often clouds the heart, and which often even takes the overhand in times of weakness or inattention, that will keep us meek, that will keep us mourning. That will keep us poor in our own strength, but it also will keep us hungering and feeding on the righteousness as provided in Jesus Christ. Mostly it will keep us feeding. It will keep feeding the growing longing for the new Heaven and the new earth wherein dwells perfect righteousness and everlasting peace. Yet before it is so far, we need to be prepared to bear the cost of being the disciple of Jesus Christ—to be a Beatitude man is costly. Now the cost of that is what the Lord speaks about in the next two Beatitudes, which in some ways are one. That’s why I added

the two statements in verses 10, 11 and conclusion in 12, which we will consider in our next and final installment. Well, thank you, and may the Lord bless you to be a blessing.