

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 5:9 - 5:12 (Beatitudes 7 - 8)



### Sermon on the Mount - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg focuses on the seventh and eighth Beatitudes found in Matthew 5:9-5:12. He emphasizes the importance of being peacemakers in a world filled with conflict and division. Gregg notes that peacemaking involves reconciling with others, even those who may hold a grudge. He also discusses the concept of endurance in the face of persecution and rejection, encouraging listeners to find their identity in Christ rather than in external groups or movements.

### Transcript

We have come to the point where we have only two Beatitudes left to consider of the eight Beatitudes that are found in the opening of the Sermon on the Mount. These are in Matthew 5, verses 9 and 10. In Matthew 5, verse 9 says, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

Now, this makes it very clear that God is concerned about relationships. He's concerned about peaceable relationships. And those who are called his sons are the ones who are not only advocates of peace, but those who promote it in practical ways, and particularly, I think, in interpersonal relationships.

So when you think of peace, obviously that word has a variety of meanings. There is such a thing, of course, as peace of mind, or tranquility, inward peace. There is geopolitical peace, where there's no war.

Of course, there isn't any, really. There's the concept of geopolitical peace. There never has really been an extended period where that was a reality.

But with many people, peace means the absence of war. It's hard to know exactly what is meant in this case, because the Jew had a very full concept of peace, which was represented in the Hebrew word shalom, which was more than just the absence of war. It had to do with general well-being and probably other things, prosperity and health and freedom from invasion and all kinds of things.

Shalom was a much broader term than I think any of our uses of the word peace itself

would mean. And it's hard to know whether Jesus used that word in connection with this passage and what exactly he meant. But I will have to move on the assumption that by peace, he means interpersonal, relational peace, that people are at peace with one another.

And there are reasons for my making this decision. It has to do with what the rest of the Scripture says in relation to this parable, or this beatitude. And it also has to do with some of the expansion on it that occurs later in the book or in the Sermon on the Mount.

Peace internationally, of course, is simply a breakdown of relationships on a large scale of two national entities. But even when there is no war, there is always much failure in the area of personal relationships and much lack of peace and much need for peacemakers, much need for people who know the way of peace. As Paul said in Romans chapter 3, quoting from, I guess he was quoting from the Psalms in that case, he said, the way of peace they do not know.

Well, that is true of most people. They don't know the way of peace. Jesus, however, is the prince of peace and might be expected to have taught his disciples the way of peace, and indeed he did.

But the way of peace has to do with your behavior in relationships, both in the relationships that you have with another person where peace might be challenged by offenses, by misunderstandings or by sins committed against a person. These things often disrupt the peace of a relationship and the unity between two people. Or it might be that a peacemaker is involved in reconciling external parties, people other than himself.

He may not be one of the parties in a contest or in a dispute, but he inserts himself, he or she, as a mediator or as one who knows how to reconcile others. It's interesting that Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. And while he doesn't say who it is that will be doing the calling, whether it is God who calls them his sons or others who will say, these people are the sons of God.

I mean, just like the centurion said of Jesus, surely this was the son of God when Jesus was on the cross. There may be, and there probably are times when Christians behaving as Christians ought to be in their capacity as peace promoters, peacemakers, that people will look and say, surely these are the children of God. But I suspect that it is not to be an either or.

It's not simply that God will recognize them as his children or that the world will, but simply that they will manifest themselves to be children of God by being peacemakers. Now, how would being a peacemaker manifest someone to be a child of God? It is simply in this that a father and a son in scripture are so often regarded as having traits in common. Abraham is the father of those who have faith.

Why? Because he had faith. And his sons exhibit their relationship to Abraham by their faith. We are the children of Abraham because we have the faith of Abraham.

It is not always the case that children bear a great resemblance to their fathers, but it is often enough the case to make it almost axiomatic. When Jesus said to the Jews, the Pharisees and the scribes, you woe unto you because you say, you embellish the tombs of the prophets and you say, if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have done what they did to the prophets. He says, therefore you testify against yourselves that you are the sons of those who killed the prophets and go ahead, fill up the measure of your fathers.

In other words, you are indeed their sons and you will bear their murderous characteristic. You will kill me just like they killed the prophets. And you admit that they are your fathers and that is an admission that you have their blood and their corruption in your veins.

Remember Jesus said in John chapter 8, we have one father, even God. He said, if God were your father, you would love me because I came forth and proceeded from the father. But he says, you are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do.

He was a murderer from the beginning, you are going to murder too. Father, son, father, son. The characteristics of the father are in the son.

Not always. I mean, children often resemble physically their parents. Some resemble their mothers more than they resemble their fathers.

And it's not always the case that a child resembles either parent very much. But it's, as I say, a common enough phenomenon as to become sort of a proverb. That he is this, you know, the apple never falls very far from the tree or whatever.

The son is not very different from his father. And this is certainly the concept that is mine when Jesus says, if you are a peacemaker, you will be called, you will be recognized. You will demonstrate yourself to be the children of God.

Why? Because the implication is that God is a peacemaker. And not only is it implied, it is stated plainly in scripture that God is a peacemaker. Let me show you two passages in particular that will show in what ways we, as children of God, are to be peacemakers.

One is in 2 Corinthians, and this is really about God, not about us. But it is about us too. Because we are his children.

And where God is a peacemaker, we exhibit his peacemaking tendencies as well. If you look at 2 Corinthians chapter 5, it says in verse 18 and following, 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. Now this is what God has done.

He has had enemies. We were them. His enemies are those who are in rebellion against him, and who have sinned.

But he has chosen not to impute their sins against them. And was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. I imagine you know that the word reconcile means to bring into a peaceable relationship.

A friendly relationship. Again, persons who were once alienated. That is where the re in reconciliation comes from.

It happens again. It is not the case that you never were on good terms, and then you were made to be on good terms. But it is that you were perhaps on good terms.

Then you fell into disfavor because of some behavior, and there has been animosity and alienation. And then somebody intervenes or something happens to bring a good relationship again out of what was a bad one. Now we can see that God as a peacemaker, his first order of business is to make peace between himself and his enemies.

To reconcile the world to himself and not impute their sins against them. Now if peacemakers are the children of God, and if peacemaking is a characteristic of God, to be exhibited as children, then this defines at least the first task of being a peacemaker, and that is our relationship with others. That is the first thing.

Actually, we should say the first thing that suggests our relationship with God, of course. I mean, we are the world. We are the ones that he had to reconcile to himself.

That is first. But in exhibiting his reconciling tendencies, it suggests that those who were his enemies, he has brought into peace with himself. That is us.

That means that if we would imitate him, we must bring into peace with ourselves those who would be our enemies. So the first task after being personally reconciled to God is that we be reconciled with those who have something against us. So that Jesus said later in the Sermon on the Mount, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there at the altar and go and make peace with your brother.

Go be reconciled with your brother. And then come back and offer your gift. It is made very clear that if we are not committed to having peace between ourselves and those who would be hostile toward us, then God is not interested in our worship at all.

He does not want our gifts offered to him if we are neglecting something so important in his sight as our relationships with others. And there are people, no doubt, who dislike you. Some of you are so wonderful people, it is hard to imagine how that could be the case.

But believe it or not, there are even people who dislike me. There aren't very many, I don't suppose, but there are some. And I have attempted reconciliation with most of them and in many cases have been successful.

One thing though, the Apostle Paul makes clear in another passage, is that reconciliation between yourself and another party is not always possible. Even if you know the way of peace, you cannot guarantee 100% success in reconciliation with somebody who is hostile toward you. Paul makes this clear in Romans 12, verse 18.

He says, if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Now what this is saying is that there should never be a time when you are not at peace with another person and you have neglected to do something that you ought to do to make peace. As much as depends on you, and that is wherever any part of the responsibility for reconciliation is on your shoulders, make sure that you bear that responsibility and that you go and be reconciled.

If somebody is alienated from you because you have wronged them, you've spoken evil of them and they know it, you haven't paid them on time, you've in some way or another offended them and you've done wrong to them, then it's incumbent on you, in order to restore peace in that relationship, to go and repent to them, to go and make right to them. If it's a tangible damage that has been done, to physically make it right with them. Repay them with interest or whatever it is.

It requires that you humble yourself and you go and say, I was wrong, I desire to be at peace with you, please forgive me. And then of course maintain a relationship with that person that avoids offense. And if you are doing all of that, in most cases, you will not find very many people who will hold a grudge forever.

You will not find very many people who will remain alienated and angry at you, if you are behaving in a truly Christ-like manner. But sometimes you might, still. In 1 Peter chapter 3, I think it is.

Let me see if I find the passage I'm thinking of. Well, I think it is, yes. 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 13, Peter said, And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? The question is rhetorical, the assumption is not many.

If you only do what's right by people, if you only follow what is good, there's not many people who are going to want to hurt you. Now, when he asked the rhetorical question, the answer is not no one, because there are some who will still want to hurt you even if

you do good. And he acknowledges that in the next verse.

He says, But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you're blessed. And that of course is what Jesus says in the next Beatitude that we have not yet come to. That you're blessed if you're persecuted for righteousness' sake.

But the peacemaker is the one who does everything he can to make sure that he's not persecuted for unrighteousness' sake. You can be persecuted for righteousness' sake, but you can also be persecuted for unrighteousness' sake. That is because you have not done all that you should in a relationship.

You have not acted justly or kindly or faithfully towards somebody else. And furthermore, having neglected to do what is right, you have not gone back and humbled yourself and repented to them. If you do those things, in all likelihood, the average person will be reconciled to you and appreciate the fact that you've made the effort in the relationship.

But not everyone will, and that is why Paul says, If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with everyone. Because there will be people who simply refuse to be reconciled. Just like God himself has done so many things to reconcile the world to himself, even sending his son, yet there are people who will not be reconciled with God.

It can be said of God that as much as depends on him, so long as you're not a Calvinist you can say this, that as much as depends on him, God has done everything in his power to reconcile the world to himself. And by the way, this is a very good argument against Calvinism, because we're supposed to be peacemakers as God is. And Paul suggests that there will be cases where we can't be at peace with people, although we will as much as in our power.

If God in fact had the power to turn people's hearts around unilaterally, by something called irresistible grace and unconditional election, then God could make everyone be his friend. But he doesn't, and therefore he does not, as much as depends on him, live at peace with everyone. There are some cases where he withholds what he could do.

Well, let's not get off on that. Anyway, the point is, as God has made great strides toward reconciling the world to himself, and yet some people still refuse to be reconciled with him, so also there will be times when you've done all that is in your power, all that depends on you, and some will still not be reconciled with you. But at least you will have a clear conscience in the matter.

In Psalm 120, this is the circumstance bemoaned by the writer, whoever he was, it's one of the songs of degrees, and he says in Psalm 120, verses 5-7, Woe is me, I sojourn in Meshech, and that I dwell among the tents of Kedar. My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war.

I don't know if you've ever been in a situation like that. I have. As I say, there are a few

people I know who are not at peace with me, but it is not because of my neglect of trying to reconcile.

There's one person who has hated me for many, many years, and I did probably do him wrong, and I'm not so sure I did him wrong, but if I did, I went ahead and repented to him as if I had. And there's been some extended correspondence, not recently, but I lost touch with him for 12 years, after having apologized and tried to make everything right with him, and tried to make restitution as much as possible as he felt it was required. And I didn't hear from him, and then 12 years later, I got a letter from the guy, and he was as hostile as ever, just as condemning and everything, and it started a whole new correspondence, and many letters back and forth, and just trying to reconcile the guy, he just won't.

He's implacable. He does not love peace. He loves conflict.

And there aren't very many people I know like that, maybe one or two others. But in most cases, people will be at peace with you, because people need peace too. Most people don't feel comfortable with hostility.

Some of them enjoy a little bit of a grudge, but most people realize that they need other people, and they don't need any extra enemies. And a lot of people, probably most, will be relieved if you take the step. Now, it's possible that they may be more guilty than you of whatever is the rift in the relationship, and they may not be virtuous or humble enough to take the steps they should, but you can at least repent of your part, and you can make sure that as much as depends on you, everything in the relationship is as peaceable as it can be from your side of the view.

And that is what God has done. This has to do with the peacemaking enterprise of one's self toward those outside of himself. God has done this.

He has reconciled the world to himself in Christ. And that is one part of what it means to be a peacemaker, to be like God, to be one of his sons, to show yourself to have his family trait of being a peacemaker, that when somebody has wronged you... Now, see, that's the thing. God never wronged anyone in this relationship, but the people who are hostile toward God have done all the wronging themselves.

But he bent over backwards. He did not impute their sins against them, but instead came and paid the whole price for reconciliation. This is peacemaking.

This is one part of peacemaking. It's God-like peacemaking. You know the old saying that the error is human, but to forgive is divine.

It's a divine act. It's a God-like act to say, well, I'm going to forgive that person. They may have wronged me.

They may owe me. I may have suffered a great deal at their hands, but I'm just going to forgive them because I just as soon not be alienated with them. I just as soon have a nurturing, positive relationship, if any at all, with them.

And that is how God has done it. And Christians need to learn to be peacemakers in this sense. But there's another sense in which God is a peacemaker.

And that sense we need to be also. If you turn to Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 2, we find God in the role of peacemaker again in this passage. In Ephesians 2, 11 and following it says, Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by what is called circumcision, made by hands, made in the flesh by hands, that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Now, there was an alienation here. This alienation that he refers to, first of all, is between us as Gentiles and those who were not Gentiles, namely the Jews, the commonwealth of Israel. There was an alienation between Jew and Gentile.

We were Gentiles in the flesh. Those who were called the circumcision called us contemptuously the uncircumcision. We were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.

But, verse 13, now, in Christ Jesus you who were once afar off have been made near by the blood of Christ. Now, I understand this to mean Gentiles and Jews who were alienated and far off from each other have now been made near to each other by the blood of Christ, because he goes on to explain that. For he himself is our peace, who has made both, that is Jew and Gentile, one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself one new man from the two, that is from the Jew and the Gentile, thus making peace.

He's a peacemaker. He thus made peace. But this peace does not refer to the peace that God has made with us between himself and us, but between us and others who were alienated from us, Jew and Gentile in this case, a racial difference.

There are other ways in which people divide themselves from each other in classes, as opposed to individuals who've done personal offenses. There are people who divide racially, and therefore we have what's called racism. People divide over gender, and therefore we call that sexism.

People divide over political party differences, over social status differences, and so forth. Some people won't associate very much with somebody from a different social status. There's all kinds of categories of people who, in the flesh, they have nothing to do with



one another.

Jews and Gentiles were once that way. But in Christ, at least, those who are in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, are now one with each other. God has made peace between us.

We were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, but no longer. We're now in it. We're now it.

We are now included in the commonwealth of Israel. Now, of course, it is no doubt impossible for the Christian to make it his goal to bring all non-Christians into peace with each other. Even God has not attempted to do that.

It is in Christ that peace is made between persons of different status, but it means, of course, that where we find, in the Church, in Christ, persons alienated from each other, if we are to be like God, peacemakers, then we will wish to take steps to intervene to break down the middle wall of partition between those hostile parties and reconcile them. This is the work of a mediator or a counselor or just a friend or a pastor or something. But peacemaking should be not only a matter of making sure that I personally, as much as depends on me, am at peace with other people, but that my influence in the society where I am is toward reconciliation of parties who are not at war with me, but are at war with each other.

Now, I think it's asking probably too much to say that Christians ought to try to bring world peace, at least in the sense that most people would think of doing that, going on marches against nuclear weapons and things like that. I'm against nuclear weapons. Of course, I'm a pacifist when it comes to war, and therefore my sympathies are somewhat with those who are trying to put an end to war, because I hate war.

War is hell. And people are hurt and killed and lives are ruined who aren't killed because of war. It's a horrendous, horrendous thing.

I hate war, but I don't necessarily believe that the task of the Christian is to go out and try to stop all war. I remember when we moved to Bandon, which was, our school started in Bandon, and it's a New Age kind of a town, and a lot of anti-war and different kinds of New Age kind of liberal groups. Some hippie guy came and visited me one day in my office and said, we're setting up some kind of a booth at the county fair, an anti-nuclear weapons booth or whatever, and we wondered if you guys wanted to participate with us in it, and, you know, manned the booth and they put some literature in there and so forth.

And I said, well, I don't think so. I said, I want you to know we do share your abhorrence for nuclear weapons, but the reason that I don't feel that we can join you is because we're motivated very differently than you are. I didn't tell him that the real reason is that Paul said don't be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, because they were certainly

unbelievers, but what I explained to him was that, I said the reason you are opposed to nuclear weapons is because you're afraid to die, and you're afraid of nukes.

I'm not afraid of nukes. I'm not afraid to die, and even the people who I wish wouldn't die from nukes will die one way or another, from nukes or from some other means. I happen to be a realist.

All people are going to die. My concern against nukes or against war in general is that I don't want to disobey the commands of my ruler, Jesus Christ, who's told me, you know, not to kill and not to hate and not to do harm to people, and for that reason, I am opposed to war, and I'm opposed to, you know, weapons of mass destruction and so forth, but not at all for the same reasons. With me, it's simply a matter of wishing to do the will of the Lord, and with you, it is more a matter of fear of death, and I wouldn't want to give the impression that I share your motivations.

I don't fear death for myself or for others, even those who are unprepared to die, because war and weapons of war do not increase the human mortality rate by 1%. The human mortality rate does not increase by so much as 1% as a result of war, because the human mortality rate is 100% with or without war, and it's simply a matter of whether one dies in war or dies another way. We need to be prepared to die.

That's the point. But I don't know that Christians are fulfilling what Jesus is talking about. They may think they are, and I wish them well, and they could be right and I could be wrong, when they go out involved in war protests and so forth.

I mean, I think Christians should speak up against any kind of injustice, including injustice in war, but it's not the defined task as peacemakers, I believe, to try to stop the heathen from killing each other. It might be nice if we could persuade them to stop killing each other, but even God, the ultimate peacemaker, has not tried to bring people who hate him into agreement with each other. In fact, that seems to be what the devil is interested in doing, trying to unite the unsaved world against the people of God.

There is a sense in which the disunity of the anti-God forces may work in favor of the kingdom of God. Jesus said, if Satan casts out Satan, his kingdom won't stand, and there's a very real sense in which that does happen. You know, you've got Iran and Iraq fighting it out against each other.

You know, I mean, I don't like that. I don't like them to fight. I don't like war.

I don't like to see children and women and innocent people and even guilty people die. I don't like that. At the same time, I don't really see that it's part of my mission as a Christian to try to get this Muslim nation to be friendly with this other Muslim nation.

If they do, that's fine. If they don't, it's not really the task. The task is to bring people, first of all, to be reconciled with God, and once they have done that, in Christ, I have a

very real interest in their reconciliation.

When parties in the church, when parties who are both professing to be Christian, are at odds with one another, this to me is a scandal. The Apostle Paul was scandalized when he heard that there were Christians who would take other Christians to court. He discusses that in Romans chapter, excuse me, 1 Corinthians chapter 6. 1 Corinthians 6, one says, dare any of you, he's talking to Christians, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world, and if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more than the things that pertain to this life? Now, he goes on and tells that they are going before the judges and bringing the church's dirty laundry and the wrongs done by Christians against other Christians being settled in a pagan court.

And he says in verse 6, now brother goes to law against brother and that before unbelievers. He says, now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourself be defrauded? What a thing to suggest.

Let yourself be defrauded? Who ever heard of such a thing? Well, people who read the Bible, especially those who read what Jesus said. Jesus said, if your brother takes you to court and wants to take your coat, give him your cloak also. And although Jesus didn't say, don't take your brother to court, it's obvious that if you love your neighbor as you love yourself, you don't want to do him injury.

In fact, even if he wants to do you injury, you would rather absorb the injury than inflict a like injury or whatever. Now, there are times perhaps when love, you know, love must be tough or whatever. And that there may be times when some kind of protest or some kind of resistance to certain kinds of behaviors is appropriate even for Christians to follow.

But in general, Christians are not supposed to be fighting back with those who attack them. But see, they shouldn't be attacked by other Christians either. If one Christian is attacking another Christian, that should be settled.

And Paul did not treat the situation in Corinth as if there should be no arbitration made. He said, is there not a wise man in the church who can handle this matter? In other words, don't take it before the courts. There's two things he said.

The ideal thing would be if you could just absorb the wrong and don't worry about it. Don't fight it out. The secondary thing, if you don't feel like that's the right thing to do in this case, is take it before, you know, some tribunal or some wise man in the church.

And let them settle it. But the point is that Christians need to be at peace with each other. And Paul was astonished to find Christians suing each other.

Well, of course, unity in the church was one of Paul's frequently expressed concerns. And he seemed to be aghast every time he heard of disunity among Christians. Because if you follow what Jesus said, it doesn't really... If all parties in the church follow what Jesus said, there's really not going to be any occasion for hostility or alienation.

Because everybody's going to be forgiving, everyone's going to be bending over backwards to serve the other, and everyone's going to be absorbing injuries rather than inflicting them. I mean, where's there going to be a room for there to be hostility? But the problem is, of course, in the church that not everyone does follow the teaching of Jesus. And therefore the peacemaker must be able to go into a situation where two people are hostile to each other and you come in as a third party, and you must be prepared to teach them what Jesus said.

To make disciples of them. To teach them how to absorb the wrong done, as Paul said to do, and as Jesus said to do. And in doing so, you promote peace.

Now, there are people who are trying to promote peace and unity in the church today in various ways. There are, on the one hand, there's what's called the ecumenical movement, which is seeking to kind of bring all groups that call themselves Christians under some umbrella of cooperation. And I must confess I have mixed feelings about this.

On the one hand, I believe there are true Christians in almost every group that calls itself Christian. And I do believe that true Christians should be at peace with each other, and they should not have hostility. They should not divide, at least in their hearts, they should not divide from other believers over issues like denomination.

However, my concern is that the ecumenical movement perhaps does not necessarily reconcile on biblical terms. I think basically it's just forget about the differences, just be acceptant and tolerant of everybody, and then we'll have peace. And I don't know that that's really, I don't think that's biblically how peace is made.

You don't make peace by just being tolerant. You have to be tolerant in one sense. You have to be able to tolerate and forbear one another in love, but you also have to be able to confront damaging behaviors and damaging beliefs and say these are not acceptable, something has to be done about this.

And the church has to, in wisdom and maturity, has to handle differences among believers in such a way as to not let damaging beliefs and practices persist unchallenged, and yet not condemning the believers who are sincerely following the Lord, whatever denomination they may be in. That's a difficult thing. In the charismatic movement in the past 30 years, there's been a tremendous move toward unity.

Some of this is in the same sense as the ecumenical movement, but in another sense, I

know back in the 70s, those who were seeing the outburst of the charismatic movement kind of predicted that this was going to bring an end to all denominations because the charismatic experience, which really began among Pentecostal denominations, began in the late 60s to kind of jump over the walls of Pentecostalism into the Episcopalian church and the Presbyterian church and the Baptist churches and all kinds of churches. In fact, that's the difference between what we call the Pentecostal and the charismatic movements. The Pentecostal movement is particular denominations that arose out of a revival in Los Angeles in the year 1900, and the charismatic movement is, generally speaking, the same kind of phenomena occurring in other denominations that are not Pentecostal.

And almost every denomination has experienced some of this, and I remember some of the early charismatic leaders and observers thought that this would someday bring an end to denominationalism and that the work of the Holy Spirit would unite all Christians. Well, I think they missed the prediction, although the work of the Holy Spirit does unite all Christians. In fact, well, at least the presence of the Holy Spirit does, because there's one Lord and one Spirit that all Christians have, and that is our unity.

It's not always visible in terms of structures and churches and organizations, but I personally am of the opinion that for the church to be unified does not require a dismantling of all structures. You know very well that I don't consider the church in institutional terms primarily, but I'm not against institutions, I'm just against institutionalism. I think institutions may need to exist, and if they don't need to, I don't think it does any harm in some cases that they do.

And if it does some harm, I don't know if it does any mortal harm. All I know is that institutionalism, where the church is defined in terms of its institutions, is going to lead to the view that the only way the church can be united is if there's only one institution. And if all the organizations would dismantle and come under one head, whether it be the Pope or some Protestant leader.

I simply don't believe that. I believe unity already exists among Christians of all denominations, if they are really Christians. I believe that unity exists in the mind of God, and I believe it exists in the mind of those who really love God.

They love all others who love the Lord. And so I don't know that the institutions have to vanish, although it wouldn't bother me too much if they did. But anyway, the fact is, peacemaking is something that we need to define as our task because it is God's activity.

And those who do it show themselves to be the sons of God because they show his activity, they show his characteristic. A peacemaker is maybe not so much a description of people who do a certain thing as it is a description of a character trait. God is a peacemaker, and we see things he has done in peacemaking, in reconciling the world to

himself and in reconciling the Jew and the Gentile and Christ and so forth.

But he does those things because of what he is. He doesn't do that because he decides someday, I think I'll try something new, I think I'll be a peacemaker for a while. He did those things because it is his nature.

He loves peace. He hates discord. We read this in Proverbs chapter 6, and any Christian whose heart is like the Lord's will also hate what he hates and love what he loves.

But it says in Proverbs chapter 6, verses 16 through 19, These six things the Lord hates, yes seven, are an abomination to him, a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren. God hates one who sows discord among brethren. And he does so because he hates discord among brethren.

Now discord among pagans, God has sometimes been the promoter of that. You know when Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14, God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches. He means in the churches.

Outside the church, God has often promoted confusion. The Tower of Babel is a good notable incident, you know. And there are other times where God threw the enemies of Israel into confusion so that they began to kill each other.

God is not against confusion and discord among the wicked. But he is, he finds horribly offensive to him, discord among brethren. And even hates, it says, those who promote such.

In the Psalms, Psalm 133, I believe, it says, Behold, this is a short Psalm, 133, Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious oil upon the head running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments, is like the dew of Hermon descending upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, life forevermore. So, God commands blessing where brethren dwell together in unity.

To him it's like the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head, and it ran down from his head down onto his garments, to the skirts of his garments. You know, I think that if we would desire to see the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the manner that it was in the early church, it is possible that God holds out as a prerequisite that the church be in unity. You will recall that one of the things that says descriptive of the 120 before the Spirit fell upon them is that they were all in one place and in one accord.

In other words, they were in unity, and the Spirit came upon them. Here, it says that brethren dwelling together in unity is like the oil poured over Aaron's head. Aaron was the high priest, Christ is our high priest.

The anointing oil that came down over the high priest's head also anointed his whole body. And the anointing oil, the anointing of Christ, our head, is to come down and anoint the whole body so that we share in his anointing. But this cannot be if we're not all standing together.

If Aaron's body, if part of it was over across the room from where he was, if the feet were in different towns or whatever, the oil that ran off his head wouldn't run on them. Of course, I don't believe Christians ought to be in one geographical place, but I do believe it's desirable that Christians be in one place spiritually, having one thing needful that they seek. And that is to be fully following Jesus Christ.

And when believers begin to give up petty differences and cease to be enamored with their peculiarities and their distinctives and thinking themselves better than others because of whatever those distinctives may be, when that ceases to happen, I think there's a better hope and better chance of some of that oil anointing the whole body that comes down from the high priest's head. It is there that God commands the blessing. God is pleased how pleasant, how good it is in the sight of God and also the human participants when brethren dwell together in unity and how offensive it is to God when one sows discord among brethren.

So we see Jesus saying, Blessed are the peacemakers. There's a blessing on that. If you live in unity with others and you promote unity among others by your actions, by your behavior, this is a good thing.

By the way, it is possible for a Christian to neglect to promote peace, but at the same time they're not promoting anything contrary to peace. They're just not promoting anything in terms of relationships with other people. But it's also possible for Christians to do the opposite of promote peace.

They can promote discord by ways that they may not even dream that they're doing. A loose tongue, gossip, tail bearing. This is a horrible, horrible thing.

We have seen just unthinkable rifts between Christian brethren who had a great deal in common but over some small thing where one person had an offense against one other person and began to chat, began to talk to others who had nothing against that person, but because of the gossip circle, that other person was excluded from them all. And this I've seen done many, many times. And we need to be very careful about gossip because the Bible makes it clear that that is a terrible sin.

And God hates those who sow discord among brethren, and gossip is very much a leading offender in the promotion of discord among brethren. Matthew chapter 5, a little later in the same sermon, gives some idea of what it means to be a peacemaker. Jesus teaches on it.

And in my opinion, in Matthew 5, verse 38 through 48, and especially the latter part, verses 43 through 48, Jesus, I think, is deliberately expanding on the beatitude we're talking about because he tells them to be peacemakers as the Father is. In fact, specifically he says, well, let's read the passage, verse 38, You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you not to resist an evil person.

But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him too.

Give to him who asks you. And from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away. Now, we'll comment more thoroughly on these verses when we come to them later in this series, but I just want to say this, does this not look like a kind of behavior that would promote peace with other people rather than strife? If you do not fight, you do not fight back, you yield.

Now, when we talk more specifically about these verses, I'll point out that these are not absolutes. Each of these statements is made in an absolutist sounding way, but I believe that Jesus tended to talk that way. He'd make an absolute sounding statement, but in other places the exceptions and the qualifications and so forth are brought up.

There are times when turning the other cheek is not what Jesus did or what the disciples did or what we should do if we're talking about literally turning the other cheek. But there are times when that is exactly the thing to do. But in all cases, we are to exhibit the same spirit.

And if you did literally these things that Jesus said, you certainly would be promoting peace. At least you would not be escalating the hostility. But read on, verse 43.

You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. Now, some of those lines are not found in the Alexandrian text, but they are found, all of them, in Luke's parallel, Luke 6, 27 through 28.

So if somebody wonders whether Jesus really said a few of these lines in verse 44, since they are absent from the Alexandrian text, you can rest assured they were there. Luke records them and even the Alexandria text admits that. Verse 45.

That you may be the sons of your Father in heaven. There you go, you see. That peacemakers shall be called the sons of God.

Why? Well, because they do what God does. Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. Why should I do that? Well, so that you will be like your Father.



So you will be sons of your Father. He does that. And Jesus expands on it.

For He makes His Son to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. So God is not only good to His friends, He also brings benefits on those who are His inveterate foes, the unjust and the evil. He still sends the sun on their homes, on their heads.

He still sends the rain on their crops. God is good to all people. God is better, in the larger scheme of things, much more kind and much more generous toward those who are His children than those who are not, eternally at least.

But in the scope of His dealings with man in history, He sends blessings indiscriminately, to a certain extent. Some blessings. We would call these common graces.

And so, if this is so, this is what your Father is like, that's what you must be like, so that you will be sons of your Father. In other words, He's a peacemaker. He does not escalate the hostilities between Himself and others.

They may hate Him. They may be evil, but He still causes the sun to rise on them. They may be unjust, but He still causes the rain to come to them.

As much as it depends on Him, He is at peace with them. They may not be at peace with Him, but He is demonstrating Himself to know the way of peace. He is a promoter of peace.

And you must do exactly the same thing to be sons of your Father. The peacemakers should be called the sons of God. It says, if you love only those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors the same.

And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Even tax collectors do so. This is not being like God. If you're only friendly toward your friends and your enemies, or those who are not your friends, you are not good to them, then you are not like your Father.

You're not a peacemaker. Okay? So this is what is meant, I believe, by this beatitude. There's one other beatitude here in this list, in this opening to the Sermon on the Mount.

And as I said earlier, I really think that the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount tends to simply be an opening up of these eight beatitudes and application of them to various circumstances of life, just as what is sometimes called the Book of the Covenant in the Old Testament, Exodus chapters 21 through 23, are sort of an opening up and application to ordinary life of the Ten Commandments. This final beatitude says, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And then he makes, after he gives this particular beatitude, he makes a personal application, because in verse 10, the beatitude is generic, just like the others in

this chapter.

Those who are persecuted. But now he says, And you, not just those, but you. 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. Now, if I were to take you on a combing of the Bible to draw from it all the things the Bible says about persecution, it would be a very long journey.

There is very much there. It would go all the way back to Abel and Cain. In fact, Cain and Abel are given as an example of sort of the prototype of relations between Christians and the world in 1 John 3. John says, Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.

And he gives the example of Cain and Abel. If you want to have a look there, or you can just trust me on it, it's up to you. It's in 1 John 3. It says in verse 10, In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest.

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain, who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his own brothers were righteous.

Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. So, just as Cain hated his brother, do not marvel if the world hates you. As you progress through the Old Testament, you find persecution of the righteous a common phenomenon.

Ishmael mocked Isaac. And, of course, Paul brings that up in Galatians 4 as an example of the Jews persecuting the church. The children of the flesh persecuting the children of the promise.

Paul talks about that, uses the illustration of Ishmael and Isaac there. So, we see that many of these individual cases of one person persecuting another person in the Old Testament, the New Testament writers bring up this sort of prototypes of a pattern, of categories of people. And so Jesus said in John chapter 15, let me find it here, verse 18, John 15, 18, Jesus said, If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.

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 also

keep yours. Now, Jesus makes it plain that the basis of persecution arises from the fact that we are different.

We are not of the same stock as the world. We were, but Jesus called us out of the world. He says, If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but because I have called you out of the world.

Now, you are not of the world. You've got different stock. You're regenerated.

You've got a totally different life, a different character, a different direction. You're on a different road. You're in a different army.

And they are in the other army. And there's war between the armies of a spiritual sort. Sometimes it breaks out into physical violence in the form of persecution.

But why do they hate us? When you read of the persecution of Christians in the early centuries of the Church, you wonder why would anyone persecute these nice people? These were friendly people. These were loving people. They did good things.

Peter said, Who is he who will hate you or harm you if you do be followers of that which is good? But some did and some do. And Peter tells us the reason why in 1 Peter 4. In 1 Peter 4, beginning with verse 1, Peter said, Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind. For he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. Now what Peter says here that's of interest is the reason they speak evil of you and think evil of you is because you aren't running with them anymore.

That first verse in 1 Peter 4 says, Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind. For he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. That last line, he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, has been variously interpreted.

Some people think it means that if you suffer, you will become sinless, so that suffering in the flesh is actually the cause of ceasing from sin. Others have suggested that it's referring to Jesus himself, that he suffered in the flesh, and he ceased from sin, but he couldn't have ceased from sin because he never did sin. He can't cease from an activity he never began.

I understand it in the context of saying this. The reason you're suffering in the flesh is

because you've ceased from sin. Because you're not running with them anymore in the same flood of dissipation, they speak evil of you.

Because you have come to the end of your time of pleasing them. The time of our past will suffice us to have fulfilled the will of the Gentiles. We don't do that anymore.

It says in verse 2, We no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. So we can see that what Peter is actually talking about is that persons who cease from sin, people who cease running in the same flood of dissipation with their former compatriots, that person is going to be hated by them. They're going to be misunderstood.

And he's going to suffer in the flesh because he has ceased from sin. Because his friends who are persecuting him didn't cease from sin. Now, why should that bring about persecution? Why should that have any effect on the way they treat you? Why shouldn't they just congratulate you? Say, well, good for you.

You're glad you got over your drug habit. You're glad you don't drink anymore. We're glad that your family is in order and you gave up your adulterous affairs.

That's a wonderful thing. We're so proud of you. It seems like they should congratulate you.

Or it certainly seems like they should be tolerant. Does it not? Doesn't it seem like they should say, well, that Jesus stuff isn't for me, but hey, teach his own. Everyone's welcome to have his own way that he goes.

But this is not the way that all sinners react when their friends become Christians. And there's a couple of very good reasons. One is that human beings are insecure.

And one of the ways that they try to redress this insecurity is by feeling a part of a solidarity with a larger group. If I feel like it's just me against everyone in the world, I feel very small and very weak and very insecure. But if I feel like I'm part of this growing movement, part of this great group, part of this mass who think the way I do and who agree with me and who would recognize me as part of themselves and one of their own, then I feel this combined strength, this combined identity that makes me feel more secure.

This is the way human nature is, I'm sure. And that's why people, they want to be identified with some kind of a group. They want to be a Republican or a Democrat or a Libertarian or an Independent, or they want to find some solidarity with the people of their race or with their gender or with their occupation, to join unions.

This is their strength in union. And this is true in less tangible ways, just in the sense that a lot of people don't know whether they're right or wrong. But if they have enough

people who agree with them, they feel secure in what they believe.

Whether they're not, it may be right or it may be wrong, but they don't have to think about it much as long as there's a lot of people affirming it. As long as there's a lot of people affirming that what they believe is the right thing, they feel much better about it. But as soon as somebody leaves their group, there's two things that does.

One, it makes their group smaller. And the other is, it confronts them with the fact their group may not be right. It's basically a rejection of what that group does and stands for.

Or why else would they leave the group? Now, on the one hand, making the group smaller is scary. If you're part of a small church and you're loyal to that church, you really desperately want more people to come to that church. Part of the reason might be that you think it's a wonderful church and a lot of people would benefit from being there.

But another is that when you come to church and you see twice as many people there as there were the week before, you feel like we're growing. I'm part of a movement that's happening. Something's happening here.

We're a growing minority. People who see it our way and worship our way and think our way. There's something that does to carnal security.

And I know that's true because you see it especially when people start to leave your group and you've got a small group or your group is becoming significantly smaller, suddenly you begin to worry. It doesn't matter if these people are going somewhere else where they're equally spiritually safe as they were when they were with you. It's the fact that they're not with you anymore.

Suddenly there's this feeling of, but what if everyone left? What if they did? Big deal. Well, if your security is in Christ, it's no big deal. If your security is in the group you belong to, then seeing people defect from the group or leave the group, even on good terms, gets a little bit scary.

It hurts the area of one's sense of security. And this is true of various groups people join, whether they join a bike club or whether they identify themselves as surfers or jocks or skateboarders or whatever it is. They take on the dress, they take on the language, they take on all the manner and the behavior of those in the group.

Well, because they feel like they're more secure if they have more people that they feel a solidarity with and they find their identity in these things. Now the Christian, of course, shouldn't need to do that. And really a mature Christian doesn't do that.

A mature Christian just says, well, my identity is Christ. Let the whole world hate me. Let my mother and my father forsake me.

The Lord will take me up. No big deal. I don't have to have anyone who agrees with me.

If it's me against the world, it's the world against me. That's fine. Remember at the Council of Nicaea, at one point Athanasius arguing for the Trinity almost looked like he was going to lose the debate.

And the Arians seemed to be winning the debate. And someone came to him during one of the intermissions and said, Athanasius, it looks like the whole world is against you. He said, well, then it's Athanasius against the world.

He didn't care. No one has to agree with me. I know I'm right.

That might seem arrogant. But if you have God on your side, I mean, it is arrogant, actually, if you say that my opinion is right no matter how many people think it's wrong. But if you say God is with me no matter how many people are against me, I feel secure.

Then you're not going to have the same problems that the world has in these areas. The world finds their security in being affirmed by the largest possible number of people. That's why the gays, for the longest time, were in the closet.

It was a shame to be called a gay because it didn't appear they were a very small minority. But now, politically, things are changing. The general consensus of our society is changing a great deal.

It's not all so bad. There's a lot more of them out there than we knew. And eventually, they've got this huge movement.

And they feel quite confident. They have gay pride now. Now that there's a lot of them that are saying who they are, they feel secure about saying who they are.

And I'm not saying they should or whatever. I'm just saying that that is a phenomenon of human nature. And so one reason that people persecute you when you stop sinning with them and go into a righteous life is, A, you're not in their group anymore and their group has just gotten smaller by one.

And they find their security in being part of a group. And the larger the group, the better. And, of course, their security comes from believing that their group is right.

And that's the second thing. When you stop sinning, you are saying that sin is no longer right as far as you're concerned. You're giving it up.

You're voting against them. You're not just not being in their group. You're voting against it.

You're rejecting it. You may not be, in fact, rejecting them as persons or even as friends. But you're rejecting their way of life.

You don't run with them anymore. And therefore, they speak evil of you because you've stopped doing so. Why? Because they think of you as a threat to the validity of their way of life.

Sinners always love company. Well, righteous people do too. But sinners want everybody to be sinners.

And one of the reasons for that, I think, is and this brings in more of a theological than a sociological consideration, and that is that I think sinners know they're sinners. And that God is God. And I think that they know they're not right with God.

But they can kind of numb themselves. They can mask the pain of that realization if they simply associate only with people who are as bad or worse than themselves. If everybody in your society, everyone around you, is at least as bad as you are, you feel reasonably good by comparison.

As long as you're not using the Bible or God's standards to judge by, you can feel reasonably good about yourself in a very imperfect life. Even a sinful life. Because if you think, well, everybody does that.

Or, I'm not as bad as some people. I mean, so many people say, why should I go to hell? I never killed anyone or robbed a bank. Well, I mean, obviously what they're trying to measure their own righteousness by is some standard.

And what they want to measure against is not something holy and pure like God. They want to measure against something worse than themselves so they can say, I'm all right, really. And as long as everyone they know falls short of the glory of God and sins, as long as everyone they know is a violator of God's law, they can comfort themselves with the suggestion that keeping God's law just isn't realistic.

No one does it. No one can do it. Certainly God doesn't expect me to be an angel.

No one else. No one can keep these laws. Therefore, God must have some lenient means of judgment.

If God grades on a curve, I'll be reasonably safe. Because everybody's worse. But as soon as one person walks in to the neighborhood who doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, doesn't sleep around, suddenly those who think that that's all there is realize that isn't all there is.

There's somebody who is doing what obviously God wants done. Now, they may not think about it quite so rationally as that, but I think that's all going on inside, whether they know it or not. I think it threatens them.

Suddenly there's something there that isn't affirming that their way of life is okay

anymore. In fact, it's denying their way of life, rejecting their way of life. And that speaks to them that that way of life is wrong.

And they knew it was wrong. And I think they know it's wrong, but they just as soon have no one there reminding them. As long as everyone they associate with is as bad as they are.

This is why sinners so much want to bring a Christian down and back into sin. They want you to get back in sin about as much as you want them to become a Christian. But you want them to become a Christian, I hope, not because you're insecure and you won't feel like you're in the right movement until you have a whole bunch of people and they're including all your former friends and that their rejection of Christianity makes you wonder whether Christianity is okay or not.

I hope that's not it. But it certainly is the case, I believe, with most unbelievers, that your vote of confidence, your vote of approval of their lifestyle is part of their assurance that their lifestyle is okay and that they'll be all right. Ultimately, when they stand before God, in the large scheme of things, they're not really very bad compared to everybody else.

In fact, they're about as good as people can be as far as they know. But then they see someone who does better and it blows that bubble up and explodes it. I remember R.C. Sproul, I believe he was talking about either a class he was in when he was in graduate school or else he's a professor and it might have been one of the classes that he teaches.

But he said there was a particular exam that was very, very difficult. And the professor read off when the papers had been graded and he read off the scores in front of the class and he said, Joe Smith failed. Sarah Jones failed.

You know, Susie Peterson failed. And name after name, failed, failed, failed, failed, failed. And suddenly it came to one name, you know, Linda Hood.

A. He says, Do you think that all the class stood up and applauded that girl's A? They booed. They hissed. Why did they do that? She did well.

They did poorly. Why did they boo and they hiss? Because she broke the curve. If everybody got an F, it could be argued that test was unfair.

There should be a different test. The grade should be expunged. No one should pay any attention to the results of this test because no one can pass it.

But one girl got an A and she broke the curve. She proved that if a person would do so, they could pass that test. And that means that all those who failed had no excuse.



And they did not congratulate her. They hissed and they booed when they heard that she got a good grade, that they had all failed. And that is a very good illustration, I think, of how sinners in general react.

Those who are committed to sin. Now, there are sinners who really kind of want to be good people and they don't think of themselves as sinners. They're not measured up to God's standards and they need to be made aware of what God's standards are so that they can know they're sinners.

But there are people who are not committed to any particular licentiousness or debauchery and who think themselves good people. But I'm talking largely about those people who are committed to licentiousness and debauchery and you stop running with them and they know in their heart of hearts they're doing the wrong thing but they hope everyone's doing it. They hope everyone's doing as bad as they are because they know they're not doing very good.

And then they meet someone who has ceased from sin and who doesn't run with them anymore. And as Peter says, they speak evil and they cause that person to suffer. So, in a sense, those who persecute you for righteousness sake are flattering you.

We read in Acts chapter 5 in verse 41 that after the apostles Peter and John had been beaten a second time by the Sanhedrin and released with threats of further violence if they did not stop preaching the gospel, we read in Acts 5.41 that they, Peter and John, departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. Now, to rejoice that you're counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, this is an exact obedience to what Jesus said. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven when they persecute you for righteousness sake.

They were and they did. They rejoiced like Jesus said to do. Actually, in Luke's parallel, Luke 6, he says, Rejoice and leap for joy.

In Luke's version, it actually says, Leap for joy when they persecute you for righteousness sake. But how can you do that? Well, you've just got to put it in perspective. It's not a pleasant thing, suffering.

Suffering persecution or any other kind of suffering is never pleasant. But there is an upside. When you think about it, hey, I was counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus.

That's a cause for rejoicing. Now, what I mean by counted worthy, there's two ways in which that is true. One way is that God has counted you worthy.

You know, God will not permit you to be tempted beyond that which you're able to endure. We're told that in 1 Corinthians 10, 13. And therefore, if he allows you to endure, if he allows you to be tempted or tested severely, it's because he believes you are going to be able to endure it.

It means that he either has confidence... Well, let me put it this way. When God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, we're told that he did not take them by way of the... Who was it there? The Amalekites, I think at that time, or the Philistines. He did not take them the route near a certain group of enemies.

Because he says he was afraid that if they saw war, they would lose courage and they'd turn back to Egypt. So he took them another route. In other words, they were immature.

They didn't know God very well. They were new at this, following God's stuff. And he didn't want to discourage them by making them face battles.

But 40 years later, he had them go into the land of Canaan and conquer seven kings greater than themselves and so forth. I mean, he did allow them to see war at a later date. But when he wouldn't, he was coddling them.

He was coddling them because he didn't think they were very strong. He didn't think they could handle it. Later, when they knew him better, he trusted them with more.

He didn't have to carry them. He didn't have to coddle them. And in a sense, allowing one generation to go in and fight the wars that he had not allowed the earlier generation to fight because he didn't trust them to be able to handle it is a flattery to the later generation that he did allow.

Not that war is a good thing or a pleasant thing. It's a different way of looking at the same reality and it's a genuine way. God trusted the apostles with this suffering.

He trusted Job with suffering. It's a flattery to Job that God said, Okay, Satan, you go ahead and try it. I'll bet he won't.

You say he'll deny me. I say he won't. You try it.

I'll show you. He was boasting on Job. He was showing Job off.

He trusted Job in a gamble between God and the devil. Not that there was any real gamble involved in my opinion, but the fact of the matter is that's the way it's portrayed. God and Satan had a bet on him.

And God was so confident that Job would not succumb under those circumstances. He said, Go ahead, try it. And by allowing Job to suffer that way, God was... It was something of a flattery to Job.

He didn't understand it like that, of course. But from a divine point of view, it's an honor. And the disciples rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus and that worthiness was counted by God.

But it was also counted by their enemies who caused them to suffer. And that is possibly

what they had in their mind. To be hated by somebody who hates Jesus is a flattery.

They don't intend it as such. But it is nonetheless if you think Jesus is great. Because they hate you because they hated Him.

If you were not a Christian, they would not hate you. If you ran with them in the same flood of dissipation, they wouldn't hate you. They might not like you, but they wouldn't persecute you.

A lot of sinners don't like other sinners. But persecution comes upon Christians from sinners because Christians do not affirm them and the Christians resemble Jesus too much in what they stand for. And therefore, those who hate Jesus hate those who resemble Him.

It says this in 1 Peter 4. 1 Peter 4, verses 12-14 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 if you are reproached for the name of Christ. Blessed are you for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

On their part, indeed He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. Peter tells us that there is a glory in it. Those who reproach you are reproaching God.

They're blaspheming God. Therefore, they're lumping you together with God in their treatment. They're essentially making no difference between you and Jesus.

And that's a flattery. That's something to rejoice in, to be counted worthy by your enemies, to suffer honor for the name of Christ whom they also dishonor. For the name of Christ whom they also dishonor.

So, there's much there. Actually, of course, we have a lengthy series of six hours of teaching called Making Sense of Suffering where I try to lay out what many of the benefits are of suffering. Not just of suffering persecution, but of suffering in general.

That God can use suffering to benefit us in many ways. And persecution is one form of suffering. And in a sense, any time we suffer, whether by persecution or some other way, there are occasions to rejoice.

But Jesus is not talking about this generic sense of rejoicing and suffering in general. Not here, at least. Certainly, it is a biblical teaching, but it is not what is in view here.

He's not talking about generically suffering because pain helps, or pain is beneficial, or something like that. It may well be, but his concept here is not so much that you rejoice because you're going to derive this out of the other spiritual benefit, but because you are being flattered. You are being treated as He is being treated.

You are being treated as the prophets were treated. That's why he says in verse 12, Matthew 5, Rejoice and be exceedingly glad because great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You might recall when we looked at the Beatitudes as they are recorded in Luke's Gospel, that there was not only this Beatitude, but there was a corresponding woe.

In Luke chapter 6, in verse 22 and 23, it says, Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and revile you and cast out your name as evil for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets. But look at verse 26, But woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

So if people persecute you for righteousness' sake, you are in good company. You are in the company of the prophets of old. If everyone speaks well of you, then you are in the company of the false prophets.

People spoke well of them too. The idea being that you cannot stand for God faithfully without incurring the wrath of those who hate Him. It can't be done.

You can't live a neutral life where you serve God faithfully, but you just never make anyone mad. Because if you never make anyone mad, you're not doing what He would do. Jesus made people mad everywhere He went.

People were plotting to kill Him from early on in His ministry. Everywhere He went, they were looking for opportunity to kill Him. And they were speaking evil of Him.

They were doing all kinds of things. There were large crowds who followed Him at various times, but He certainly wasn't making everybody happy. And the religious leaders were among those that were the most unhappy with what He was doing.

This likeness to the prophets' suffering is no doubt something in the Sermon on the Mount that James alludes to. I've mentioned to you before that James has at least 20, if not more, allusions to the Sermon on the Mount in that one short epistle. And I take it to be more or less a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, or at least a sermon based upon the Sermon on the Mount as its text.

But in James 5, it says in verse 10, My brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed, we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and have seen the end intended by the Lord that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

Now, it's interesting. He says, Take the prophets who have suffered as an example, and we count them blessed who endure suffering and persecution. Why do we count them blessed who are persecuted? Well, for the simple reason that Jesus said, Blessed are you when you're persecuted.

He's alluding to that beatitude, and certainly so, when Jesus says, For so they persecute the prophets before you. James said, Remember those prophets before you, how they were persecuted. Remember there's a blessing there in being in their company.

Consider yourself part of that long line of faithful witnesses for the kingdom of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New. Not the prophets only, but Jesus Himself. Even a better example.

It says in Hebrews 12, verse 3. Well, I should read earlier, I suppose. Hebrews 12, 1 says, Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, 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, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God, of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

You have not yet resisted unto bloodshed in striving against sin. So, here it says, Jesus is the example, really. And it's not just that we want to be like Jesus.

We want to be with Jesus. In the next chapter, Hebrews 13, Hebrews 13, 12, and following, it says, Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

So, Jesus suffered outside the camp. He was excluded from the Jewish society. Like the refuse parts of the sacrifice, which were not burned in the temple, but were taken out to an unclean place to be disposed of outside the camp.

So, Jesus was treated like that unclean carcass of the beast and sacrificed outside the gate. He says, well, if that's how they're going to treat Him, they ought to treat us that way. Let's go with Him outside the camp.

Let's bear that reproach that He bore. Of course, He's writing to Jewish people who are believers in Hebrews. And, you know, no doubt they were experiencing persecution from the same crowd that persecuted Jesus.

It says, listen, they thrust Him out. His next statement is, here we have no continuing city. In other words, if they kick you out of Jerusalem like they did Him, no big deal.

It's not going to continue long. He's alluding to the near destruction of Jerusalem at the time He wrote it. And, so Jesus says, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now, brings us to the end of the eight beatitudes in

Matthew 5. And we'll go on and take the rest of the Sermon on the Mount in the following sessions. I would just say, again, by way of summary, that what the beatitudes present to us is a standard of blessedness, a standard of enviable-ness that is distinctly a revealed standard.

It is not something that people would have thought. People do not, on their own, think that these things constitute blessedness. Mourning, being meek, being hungry, and, you know, being peacemakers, and being persecuted.

These are sacrifices that people make. This is not something that is usually considered to be what you do for a good time. And to say, happy are such people, enviable are such people, what a happy state such people are in, is not what we would know to be true if He hadn't told us.

And this illustrates the fact that right at the beginning when Jesus, of course the setting was that Jesus taught this to His disciples just after He chose the twelve, the twelve leaders of His movement, He taught them His standards, His new standards of blessedness. A person will always be motivated by his standard of blessedness. A person always wants to be blessed, happy.

And whatever they regard to be a blessed state is what people would be motivated to pursue. And therefore, if a person's orientation in this respect is not changed, he will never live the Christian life. If a person does not believe these Beatitudes, he will never be able to happily fulfill the rest of the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

If these Beatitudes are true, and if I accept them as true, and if I really believe it's a blessing to be poor in spirit, to mourn, to be meek, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful, to be pure in heart, and a peacemaker and persecutor for righteousness, if I believe that, then the rest of the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is going to fit quite comfortably into that general frame of thinking. In fact, you might not even need the rest of the Sermon on the Mount because it describes in practical situations simply what you do if you are pure in heart, what you do if you are meek, what you do if you are merciful. If you are the people described in the Beatitudes, then the rest of the Sermon on the Mount is a description of what you do.

And we will look in detail at the rest of it, of course, in the following sessions. But we'll stop at this point. It's a good place to break.