

Introduction

The beatitudes, or the commandments of blessedness, given us by the Savior, do not in anyway annul the commandments of the Law. On the contrary, these commandments complement each other.

The Ten Commandments of the Law are restricted to prohibiting those acts which would be sinful. The Beatitudes explain to us how we may attain Christian perfection or grace.

The Ten Commandments were given in Old Testament times to restrain wild, primitive people from evil. The Beatitudes are given to Christians to show them what disposition to have in order to draw closer and closer to God, to acquire holiness, and together with that, blessedness, which is the highest degree of happiness.

Holiness, arising from proximity to God, is the loftiest blessedness, the greatest happiness that anyone could possibly desire.

The Old Testament Law is a strict code of righteousness, but the New Testament Law of Christ is the law of Divine love and grace, the only means by which people are given the strength to live in full observance of the Law of God and to approach perfection.

Jesus Christ, calling us to the eternal Kingdom of God, shows us the way to it through fulfillment of His commandments. For their fulfillment He, the King of Heaven and earth, promises eternal blessedness in the future eternal life.

Our Savior teaches: *Matthew 5: 1-12*

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
2. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.
3. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
4. Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.
5. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
6. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.
8. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

9. Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in Heaven.

In each of these teachings of the Lord, one should observe the commandments on the one hand and the promises of reward on the other.

For the fulfillment of the commandments of the Beatitudes it is necessary to have contact with God through prayer, both internal and external. One must struggle against sinful inclinations through fasting, abstinence, and so on.

The First Beatitude

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed — joyful in the highest degree and pleasing to God; poor in spirit — **humble**, those who are conscious of their imperfections and unworthiness before God, and never think that they are better or more holy than others.

Spiritual lowliness is the conviction that our entire life and all our spiritual and physical blessings, such as life, health, strength, spiritual ability, knowledge, riches, and every good thing of life, all this is the gift of our Creator God. Without help from Heaven, it is impossible to acquire either material well-being or spiritual riches. **All this is the gift of God.**

Spiritual lowliness is called **humility**. Humility is the foundation of Christian virtue, because it is the **opposite of pride**, and pride introduced all evil into the world. Due to pride the first among the angels became the Devil; the first people sinned, their descendants quarreled and went to war among themselves from pride. *The first sin was pride* (Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus 10:15).

Without humility it is impossible to return to God. Nor are any of the other Christian virtues possible. Humility permits us to know ourselves, correctly to assess our worth and deficiencies. It acts beneficially in the fulfillment of our obligations to our neighbor, arouses and strengthens in us faith in God, hope and love for Him. It attracts the mercy of God to us and also disposes people well towards us.

The Word of God says, *A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart is broken and humbled God will not despise* (Ps. 50:17). *Surely he scorneth scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly* (Prov. 3:34). *Learn of me, instructs the Saviour, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls* (Matt. 11:29).

Physical misery or privation can result in the acquisition of much spiritual humility if this privation or need is accepted with good will, without a murmur. But physical privation does not always result in spiritual humility; it can lead to **bitterness**.

Even the wealthy can be spiritually humble if they understand that visible, material wealth is decadent and transitory, fleeting, and that it is substitute for spiritual riches. They must understand the word of the Lord, *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?* (Matt. 16:26).

But Christian humility must be strictly distinguished from self-seeking self-abasement, such as **fawning and flattery**, which discredit human dignity.

It is necessary strictly to reject so-called "noble self-love" or "defense against affronts to one's honor," which reflect prejudices, pernicious superstitions, which were inherited from Roman paganism hostile to Christianity. The true Christian must decisively renounce these superstitions which resulted in the anti-Christian and shameful custom of the duel and revenge.

In reward for meekness of spirit, humility, the Lord Jesus Christ promises the Kingdom of Heaven, a life of eternal blessedness. Participation in the Kingdom of God for the humble begins here and now — by means of faith and hope in God; but the ultimate reward in all of its fullness will be seen in the future life.

The Second Beatitude

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

The weeping about which the second beatitude speaks is first of all true tribulation of heart, and **repentant tears for our sins**, weeping over our guilt before the merciful God (for example, the tears of the Apostle Peter after his renunciation).

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death, said the Apostle Paul (2 Cor. 7:10).

Tribulation and tears coming from misfortunes which befall us can be spiritually beneficial. For example, the death of one of our close ones can result in beneficial tears, if the sorrow is permeated by faith and hope, patience and devotion to the will of God. **Jesus Christ Himself wept over the death of Lazarus.**

Even more so can tears and tribulation lead to blessedness when they are shed over the **suffering of our unfortunate neighbor**, if these sincere tears are accompanied by Christian deeds of love and mercy.

Worldly grief is grief without hope in God. It proceeds not from acknowledgment of one's sins before God, but rather from **disappointment in ambition, aspiration to power, desire for gain.** Such sadness, characterized by despondency and despair, leads to spiritual death, which can also result in physical death, by **suicide** or simply weakness due to lack of will to live. An example of such grief is that of **Judas Iscariot**, the betrayer of Christ the Saviour.

As a reward for mourning the Lord promises that they that mourn will be comforted. They will receive **forgiveness of sins**, and through this, **internal peace.** The mourners will receive eternal joy, eternal blessedness.

The Third Beatitude

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Meekness is peaceful, fully developed Christian love, free from all malice. It is manifested in the spirit of a man who never becomes angry, and never permits himself to grumble against God or people.

Meek people do not become irritated and they do not vex or aggravate other people. Christian meekness expresses itself mainly in patient endurance of insults inflicted by others and is the opposite of anger, malice, self-exaltation and vengeance.

A meek person always regrets the hardness of heart of the offending party. He desires his correction, prays to God for forgiveness of his deeds, remembering the precept of the Apostle: *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord* (Romans 12:18-19).

The best example of meekness given to us is that of our Lord Jesus praying on the cross for His enemies. He taught us to not take vengeance on our enemies but to do good to them. *Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls* (Matt. 11:29). Meekness tames even the hardest hearts. We can be convinced of this by observing the lives of people, and we find confirmation of it throughout the history of Christian persecutions.

A Christian may become angry only with himself, at his own fall into sin, and at the tempter — the Devil.

The Lord promises the meek that they will inherit the earth. This promise indicates that meek people in the present life will be preserved on earth by the power of God, in spite of all the intrigues of men and the most cruel persecution. But in the future life, they will be heirs of the heavenly homeland, the new earth (2 Peter 3:13) with its eternal blessings.

The Fourth Beatitude

Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are those people who **deeply acknowledge their sinfulness**, their guilt before God, and have a **burning desire for righteousness**. They try to serve God by a righteous life according to the commandments of Christ, which requires from Christians the most holy righteousness in all their relations with their neighbors.

The expression "hunger and thirst" indicates that our yearning for righteousness must be very strong, as strong as our desire to appease our appetite and thirst. King David beautifully expressed such yearning, *As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsted for God, the mighty the living* (Ps. 41:1-2).

God promised that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be **filled**. By this is meant **spiritual satisfaction**, comprised of internal spiritual peace, **a calm conscience**, justification, and **forgiveness**. Such satisfaction in the present, earthly life occurs only in part. The Lord reveals the mysteries of His kingdom to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, more than to others. Their hearts in this world are delighted with knowledge revealed in the divine truths of the Gospel, in Orthodox teachings.

Full satiety, full satisfaction of the holy yearnings of the human soul, and from this highest joy and blessedness, will be granted them in the future, **blessed life with God**. As the psalmist King David says, *I shall be filled when Thy glory is made manifest to me* (Ps. 16:16).

*"As the deer longs for running streams, so my heart longs for You, oh Lord"

The Fifth Beatitude

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy

The merciful are those who have **compassion** for others, who with all their hearts pity those who have fallen into misfortune or unhappiness, and who try to help them with **good works**.

Works of mercy are both physical and spiritual.

(corporal)
Bodily works of mercy:

1. Feeding the hungry.
2. Giving drink to the thirsty.
3. Clothing the naked.
4. Visiting those in prison.
5. Visiting the sick and helping them recover or preparing them for a Christian death.
6. Inviting strangers and foreigners and travellers into one's home and giving them rest.
7. Burying the dead.

Spiritual works of mercy:

1. By word and example to convert the sinner from the error of his way (James 5:20).
2. Teaching the ignorant truth and goodness.
3. Dispensing good and timely advice to neighbors who are in distress or danger.
- 4 ~~1~~. Comforting the grieving.
- 5 ~~2~~. Refraining from returning evil for evil.
- 6 ~~3~~. Forgiving offenses with all one's heart.
- 7 ~~4~~. Praying to God for everyone.

To the merciful, God promises in return that they will **receive mercy**. In the future judgment of Christ they will be shown the special mercy for the righteous. They will be **delivered from eternal punishment for their sins to the degree to which they showed mercy to others on earth** (See Matt: 25:31-46).

The Sixth Beatitude

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

The pure in heart are those people who not only do not sin openly, but do not conceal unclean thoughts, desires and feelings in their hearts. The hearts of such people are free from attachment and infatuation with physical, earthly things. In general they are free from passions caused by self-centeredness, egotism and pride. People with pure hearts unceasingly think about God.

In order to acquire a pure heart, it is necessary to observe the fasts proclaimed by the Church, and to guard oneself against gluttony, drunkenness, depraved spectacles and amusements, improper teachings and indecent books.

Purity of heart is far superior to simple sincerity. Sincerity requires only that a person be candid and single hearted in relation to his neighbor. But purity of heart requires complete suppression of depraved thoughts and constant remembrance of God and His holy commandments.

To the pure in heart God promises that they will see God. Here on earth they will see Him through Grace, mysteriously, with the spiritual eyes of their hearts. They can see God in His revelations, images and likenesses. In the future, eternal life, they will see God as *He is* (1 John 3:2). Furthermore, since contemplation of God is a source of the highest blessing, the promise to see God is a promise of the highest degree of blessedness.

The Seventh Beatitude

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Peacemakers are people living with everyone in peace and harmony and fostering peace among people. When other people are at enmity among themselves they try to reconcile them, or at least pray to God for their reconciliation.

Peacemakers remember the words of the Saviour, *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you* (John 14:27). *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*, said the Apostle Paul (Romans 12:18).

To the peacemakers the Lord promises that they will be called sons of God. They will be the closest to God, heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ. The peacemakers by their spiritual feat resemble the Only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, Who came to earth to reconcile sinful people with Divine judgment and to establish peace among people in place of the animosity reigning among them. Therefore to the peacemakers is promised the epithet, "sons of God," and inexpressible blessedness.

The Eighth Beatitude

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

For righteousness' sake, is meant to live righteously according to the commandments of God, and resolutely fulfilling Christian obligations. **Persecuted** — for their righteous and pious life, they suffer oppression, persecution, privation and adversity at the hands of the unrighteous enemies of truth and goodness, but nothing can cause them to waver from the truth.

Persecution is inevitable for Christians living according to the Gospel's righteousness, because evil people detest righteousness, as truth exposes their evil deeds, and always persecute people who stand for the truth. The Only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, was Himself crucified by haters of God's truth. For all His followers He predicted: *If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you* (John 15:20). *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*, says the Apostle Paul (2 Tim. 3:12).

In order to endure persecution patiently for righteousness' sake, a person must have love for the truth, be steadfast and firm in virtuous living, have courage and patience, and faith and hope in the help and protection of God.

To those persecuted for righteousness' sake, for their struggles in confessing the truth, the Lord promises the Kingdom of Heaven, spiritual triumph, joy and blessedness in the heavenly dwellings of the future eternal life (see Luke 22:28-30).

The Ninth Beatitude

Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven.

In the last, the ninth commandment, our Lord Jesus Christ calls especially blessed those who for the sake of Christ and for the true Orthodox faith in Him, **patiently bear disgrace, persecution, malice, defamation, mockery, privation and even death.** Such a spiritual feat is known as **martyrdom.** There is no higher spiritual feat than martyrdom.

The courage of Christian martyrs must be **distinguished from fanaticism,** which is **irrational zeal not according to reason.** Christian martyrs must also be **distinguished from the lack of feeling brought on by despair or pretended indifference,** with which some criminals because their incorrigible hardness and pride, serve out their sentences and go to execution.

Christian courage is based on the highest of Christian virtues, on **faith** in God, on **hope** in God, on **love** for God and neighbor, on complete **obedience** and unshaken faith in the Lord God.

The highest form of martyrdom was suffered by Jesus Christ Himself, and in like manner, the Apostles and an innumerable multitude of Christians, who with joy went to martyrdom for the name of Christ.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, and 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds (Heb. 12:1-3).

For the spiritual feat of martyrdom, the Lord promises a reward in Heaven. But here on earth the Lord glorifies many martyrs for their firm confession of faith with incorruptible bodies and miracles.

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:14-16).

Numberless **Christians martyrs rejoiced during unspeakable torture**, accounts of which are preserved in factual accounts of lives of the Saints. Note: In Roman courts, special scribes were obligated to write protocols (official records) of judicial procedures and legal decisions. Such protocols of interrogations, made in Roman courts during the legal process of Christian martyrs, after the period of persecutions were carefully preserved by the Church. The protocols came to be trustworthy accounts of the feats of martyrdom of the Christians.

Conclusion

Our lives must always be guided by the knowledge we acquire of the true faith and Christian piety. In order to make use of our piety and knowledge of the faith, it is necessary for each Christian to have the **virtue of discernment, Christian good sense**. In addressing the Christians, the Apostle Peter said, *Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge* (2 Peter 1:5). For whatever is done without discerning knowledge may turn out to be unwise. Even good can bring harm instead of benefit.

The teachings of the Orthodox Church which we have learned concerning faith and Christian life must be **manifest in deeds, and not hypocritically**, but sincerely fulfilling everything we know from this teaching. ***If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*** (John 13:17).

If we become aware that we sin, that we do not fulfill the teaching as we must, then we must force ourselves quickly to the most sincere repentance. We must firmly resolve to shun the sin henceforth, making reparation for it by opposing it with good works.

When it seems to us that we are doing well in fulfilling one commandment or another, we must never become complacent or proud of this. With the deepest humility and thanksgiving we must acknowledge that we have hardly fulfilled our **obligation**. As Christ the Saviour said, ***When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do*** (Luke 17:10).

Discussion on the Meaning of Evil

The concept of evil in the world imposes a grave burden of doubt in the hearts of many faithful people. It seems inconceivable that God would permit evil. In fact, God in His Omnipotence could easily eliminate evil. How could a merciful God allow the evil deed of a single offender to doom thousands, sometimes millions, or even half of humanity to poverty, grief or disaster? What then is the meaning of evil? With God nothing is without reason. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to recall what evil is.

By the term evil we do not mean suffering, need and deprivation, but sin and moral guilt. God does not desire evil. Almighty God cannot approve of evil. More than that, God forbids evil. God punishes evil. **Evil or sin is in contradiction to the will of God.**

Sin began, as we know, when the highest angel, created by God, insolently rejected obedience to the blessed will of God and became the Devil. **Evil is caused by the Devil.** He inspires or influences the occurrence of sin in man.

It is not the body which is the source of sin, as many believe. The body becomes an instrument of sin or of good not of itself but through the will of a person. True faith in Christ elucidates the following two causes of sin in the world:

The first cause lies in the free will of man. Our free will is the mark of our likeness to God. This gift of God elevates mankind to the highest of all earthly creatures. By freely choosing good and rejecting evil man exalts God, glorifies Him and perfects himself.

In the book of the Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus 15:14), it says, *He (God) in the beginning made man and left him in the hand of his own free will.*

By this God gives to people of good will the possibility to attain Heaven, and to people of evil will, the other world. However it happens, the result is only by means of a person's free will.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem says, "If nature were fused together and it were not possible to do good by free will, then for whom would God prepare the inexplicable crown? **Sheep are gentle, but they will never be crowned for their gentleness, because their gentleness comes not from their own free will but from their very nature.**"

Saint Basil the Great says, "Why is not sinlessness incorporated our nature, so that it would be impossible to sin, even if we wanted? You do not recognize good and faithful servants when you keep them restricted, but only when you see that they voluntarily fulfill their responsibilities before you. Virtue comes on the condition of free will, not necessity; and free will depends on the condition that we be free. Therefore, whoever reproaches the Creator for not creating us sinless prefers the irrational, immovable nature,

not having any yearnings, nature gifted with judgment and independence." In other words, **he prefers robots to intelligent creatures.**

Thus, the internal cause for the origin of evil, or sin, consists of the will of man.

The second basis for the existence of evil consists in the fact that directs evil to good. But God does not tolerate evil for the sake of good. For God, it is not necessary to pay such a high price.

God does not wish for evil under any circumstances. But when evil penetrated into the world through the fault of sinful people, then **God, in plan for the world, compelled even evil to serve good.** For example, the sons of Jacob sold his brother Joseph into slavery. They committed an evil deed, but God turned the evil into good. Joseph rose in Egypt and acquired the capacity to save from starvation the family from which the Messiah would come. **When Joseph saw his brothers several years later, he said to them, "You intended evil against me, but God turned it into good!"**

In the days of the Apostles, the Jews persecuted Christians in Palestine. The Christians had to flee from Judea, the land sanctified by the life and blood of the Saviour. But everywhere they went they sowed the words of the Gospel. **The sins of the persecutors were directed into spreading Christianity.**

The pagan emperors of Rome persecuted the young Christian Church. Tens of thousands of martyrs shed their blood for Christ. The blood of the martyrs became seeds for millions of new Christians. The fury of the persecutors, their sins of hatred and murder were directed by God in this instance into the building up of the Church. They thought and accomplished evil. God turned all of their deeds to the good. The history of mankind, right up to the events of our day, testifies to the truth of these words. The greatest downfall of man concurred with the greatest religious triumph, the turning of men to God.

We need only have patience and wait, **one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day** (2 Peter 3:8)

But this intertwining of evil into the plan for the management of the world did not appear to be some sort of belated addition for the correction of creation. The intertwining of evil was provided for in the act of the eternal will of God, in which was determined the creation of the world. For God is the eternal today! His foresight extends to eternity. It functions always and without interruption. (Extracted from a brochure by L. Lusin, "Who is Right?" with additions.)