

Behave Like You Believe

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Chapter 1. Introduction

DISCUSSION - Let me just throw out some questions to engender discussion, and get us thinking about this topic - If a person is a believer in Jesus Christ, SHOULD his / her behavior be impacted by that belief? How? To what extent should their behavior be impacted? Are there areas of behavior that should NOT be affected by belief in Christ? Explain.

DISCUSSION - I contend that far too few Christians behave like they claim to believe. Do you agree or disagree with that contention? Why?

The Bible has things to say about those who behave differently than they believe. (NOTE - discuss each of the following verses. Ask what light it sheds on the idea that behavior and belief may or may not be consistent.)

Luke 6:41-42

Luke 13:10-17

John 12:1-6

Romans 16:17-18

Titus 1:16

Matthew 23:1-2

However, these passages describe people who are blatantly hypocritical, they "say and do not." This level of hypocrisy is often visible to those around us, although not always. The discrepancy between behavior and belief that concerns me in this study, though, is much more subtle.) Let's look at a couple of examples and see if it clarifies the point.

Consider the following excerpt from a book by George Barna entitled, "Think Like Jesus." After I read it, we'll discuss how it applies to our topic.

"Every Wednesday my two daughters attend an Awana program at a nearby church. They have met many nice children there, have learned many wonderful lessons and principles, and have been loved and nurtured by the teachers in the program. To the credit of the program, both girls look forward to the midweek meetings.

Unlike me, both of our girls have a terrific memory and can rattle off Bible verse after Bible verse. Recently, our oldest daughter won an award for being the most proficient student in her grade level at Bible memorization. They made the presentation of the award a special event, giving her a commemorative plaque and a few prizes in front of the entire complement of students and assorted parents. She basked in the moment of glory, smiling broadly as her peers cheered her accomplishment. She was duly proud of her hard work and the recognition it had brought her.

Yet, within an hour of returning home after the memorable evening, she was fighting over some insignificant matter with her younger sister. This struck me as incongruous with what had happened earlier in the evening and the impact that Scripture knowledge should have on her behavior. I sat down with our award-winner and asked her some questions.

"What was that verse you recited from Luke 10?"

Without hesitation, she reverted to mechanical mode. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself."

"Good. A few weeks ago you memorized Matthew 7:12," I reminded her. "What did that verse say?"

Like a bullet out of a rifle, she responded, "Do for others what you would like them to do for you."

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"Good job, that's the verse. How about Matthew 5, verses 44 and 45? Tell me those."

She paused for a minute to flip through her mental file box of verses before grinning and reciting the words. "But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven."

I stared at her for a few seconds, waiting for the light bulb to go on. I made a face at her as if to say, Well, -what does that mean?; but there were no signs of recognition. She just stared back at me, waiting for the next question to ace on this spur-of-the-moment verbal exam.

"Honey, you just proved to the world that you know a lot of what God taught us in the Bible. And we've been learning that the Bible isn't like any other book; it's God's lessons for us on how to live a life the right way, in a way that pleases Him and is best for you. The verses you memorize should affect what you do, right?" She nodded dutifully, waiting for the next verse to call out.

"So think about the three verses you just told me. What do they have to do with how you treat your sister? What's the connection between what God is teaching you in those verses and how you two get along?"

Her eyes narrowed a bit as she tried to determine if this was a trick question. After mumbling some nonsensical reply, she sat quietly awaiting the next quiz question. She was a champion at recalling passages of Scripture, but she had no clue how those verses related to her behavior.

I don't fault my daughter for knowing Bible verses but failing to understand and integrate them into her life. I had been derelict in my responsibility, as her spiritual overseer, to help her connect the dots. She had the raw material at her disposal but no blueprint or coaching that helped her know what to do with it. She could answer, What does the Bible say? but she was not able to answer, So what?

Most of the adults I meet at church have been attending for many years. Although they are decades older and have had much more experience than my daughter, they are no more spiritually mature.

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DISCUSSION - Your thoughts? Does this paint a common picture? Does it describe a problem that is common in American Christianity?

Let me read an excerpt from a question and answer session with John MacArthur. He was answering to the IFCA (Independent Fundamental Churches of America) for some of his positions, in particular the positions he expounded in his book, "The Gospel According To Jesus." I find his answer to this particular question relevant to our discussion this morning. This is a lengthy excerpt, and I ask your patience as I read it.

Board Member: OK, thank you. Now we move into the final category, which we want to spend the rest of our time, on salvation. The first question, John, is could you explain your motive and intent behind writing the book The Gospel According to Jesus?

John MacArthur: Well, that's a hard question to answer without sounding a little self-serving or pious, but I have to tell you I felt like a man under compulsion. It's hard to access the motive, you know I'd like to think all my motives were pure; I don't think it was financial. Patricia and I devoted all that God has given us from that

book back into the Lord's work so it hasn't brought any money to us. I don't think I was trying to confuse the church, but I wrote that book... Let me give you just a brief statement of background.

When I was in high school I had a very dear friend - played on our baseball team, played on our football team, we were buddies, he played first base, I played short stop, he played a backup quarterback position, I was a tailback - and we were close. His father was real active in a church group and, of course, my father was a pastor and we did a lot of personal evangelism in those days, we'd go down to the Pershing Square in LA and witness. Ralph went away to Redlands University - I saw him after his second year, after I'd been away to college, and I was so glad to see him and he said, "John, something's changed." I said, "What?" He said, "I'm an atheist." I was shocked. I said, "What do you mean, you're an atheist?" He said, "I don't believe in God. I don't believe any of that "blankety-blank" stuff in the Bible." I just didn't have a category in my theology to put him in at that point.

I went away to college. I had a very, very similar experience with a number of guys that I knew, who named the name of Christ at one point in time, and who abandoned Christ. The guy that sticks in my mind most of all - I was in my senior year at college. He was my running mate in the backfield; he was a great football player. We had great times together. He was a youth pastor on the weekends; he taught the College Sunday school class in a Presbyterian church, and I taught the College Sunday school class for my dad - we always compared notes. He graduated. I went on to seminary. He went on to get a Ph.D. in Psychology; he went to teach at Cal. State University in Long Beach, and I picked up the Times one day to find out that he had brought nude students into the classroom and was demonstrating sexual stuff in front of the whole class. He was defrocked - kicked out of the school - found out he was selling drugs on the side - he wound up with a seven-year prison sentence. You know, when you play football with a guy for three years, you get close. He was the student body president, I was vice president; his father was a pastor, a good friend of my dad's; to this day he denies Christ.

I went away to seminary - the son of the Dean of my seminary married a Buddhist and set up a Buddhist altar in his house after graduating from Talbot Seminary. I struggled through a lot of that kind of stuff. Then, I went to a church and I baptized a guy who was a porno film maker and within 2 months, he was back making porno films.

As a pastor, I have seen them come and go and come and go and come and go; and trying in my own heart to access the nature of true conversion was very much a personal struggle with me, not a theological one. Then, I began to study the gospel of Matthew and I preached in Matthew for 8 years at our church and in that process of going through Matthew, I began to come to grips with the whole gospel record, because I was doing a study of the synoptics and John at the same time. I began to fix on how Jesus evangelized and what he called for and so forth and born out of that, I began to look at the church at large.

I began to look, for one thing, at the Charismatic movement, which I say this with compassion in my heart, has been, without question, the most disruptive disastrous thing that has happened to the church in the last 50 years. It has devastated the church in America in a number of ways. I wish I had time to go in to them. And then coming behind it, this psychological salvation stuff. The combination of this has created the illusion of salvation in our society.

I'm not trying to make people insecure; I'm just trying to make sure there aren't some people thinking they're on their way to heaven, who are going to wake in hell, and fulfill Matthew 7:21-23 and say, "Lord!

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Lord! What about us?" That, to me, is the most frightening passage in all of Scripture. It'd be one thing to go to hell and know you were going there, it'd be one thing to go to hell and not expect anything different; it'd be another thing to go to hell and wonder why you got there when you thought you were a Christian. I just don't want any responsibility in my life or any of your responsibility with regard to that doctrine.

So, that's really what motivated me through the years, just going over that and trying to deal with the reality of that issue and then watching people who name the name of Christ, but their life is the same. One very moving experience - I was with the president of a seminary and we were driving along and we passed a liquor store. It was all glass and it was lit on the inside with lights in the middle that shot through all the liquor and through the windows too at night. It looked like a diamond.

I said, "That is unbelievable. Look at all that liquor."

He said, "Well, yes, there's a lot of those stores in our city and they're owned by a guy in my Sunday school class" - I think I mentioned that in the book.

I said, "You've got to be kidding me."

He said, "No, he's in the class."

I said, "Has he been there a long time?"

He said, "Yes, he's been there several years."

I said, "Is this guy a Christian?"

He said, "Yes, he's a Christian. He owns these stores all around the city."

I said, "Well, doesn't anybody confront him about this."

He said, "No."

I said, "Well, has it ever entered your mind that this guy might not be a Christian?"

And to which he replied, "Well, I remember the day he walked the aisle."

And then he said to me, this rather pensively, "Yeah, there's one thing that bothers me about him though. He's been living with this girl who is not his wife, for about two years."

This is a seminary president. I'm saying, "Wait a minute." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation," that's got to mean something.

DISCUSSION - What do you think? Does this describe a problem in Christianity?

The discrepancy that I want to consider in this study goes beyond simple outward hypocrisy. I want to consider the discrepancy that often exists between the way Jesus would THINK about something, and the way I think about it. After all, if I'm a new creature in Christ, should I not want to think like Him? Should the things that are important to Him not be the most important things to me? Would His use of time not be the example for how I should use my time? Would not His activities and speech patterns be the pattern for mine? Would not anything that He would avoid be something I should avoid at all times? If I believe in Him, and all that the Bible

teaches about Him, should my behavior, both public and private, be consistent with that belief?

QUOTE - "Behavior and belief - If you don't live it, you don't believe it." (Source unknown)

QUOTE - Anyone who has ever taught or attempted to lead others knows the tendency in all of us toward exaggerating our depth of character while treating leniently our flaws. The Bible calls this tendency hypocrisy. We consciously or subconsciously put forward a better image of ourselves than really exists. The outward appearance of our character and the inner reality (that only God, we, and perhaps our family members know) do not match. (C. S. Lewis explains the conflict in *The Four Loves*.)

A rather pompous-looking deacon was endeavoring to impress upon a class of boys the importance of living the Christian life. "Why do people call me a Christian?" the man asked. After a moment's pause, one youngster said, "Maybe it's because they don't know you." (Source unknown)

ILLUS - Robert Redford was walking one day through a hotel lobby. A woman saw him and followed him to the elevator. "Are you the real Robert Redford?" she asked him with great excitement. As the doors of the elevator closed, he replied, "Only when I am alone!" (Source unknown)

And so, the question is - who are you when you are alone? That is the real you, and the one that concerns us today. Does the behavior that is common to you during your aloneness coincide with what you believe? Does it demonstrate the indwelling presence of Christ? Would it please Him? You see, this is not OUTWARD hypocrisy, but a much more INWARD kind.

Now you might disagree with me that this is a problem. Maybe you think things are pretty good in the church, and in your life. Maybe you don't see the issue. Consider the following:

ILLUS - The Princeton Religion Research Center has measured the impact of religion on day-to-day work. Comparing the "churched" with the "unchurched" on a wide range of behaviors like pilfering supplies (stealing), overstating qualifications on resumes (lying), calling in sick when not sick (lying and stealing), and overstating tax deductions (lying, stealing, and cheating), the center finds "little difference in the ethical views and behavior of the churched and the unchurched." What differences there are "are not significant or are of marginal significance." (William Hendricks, in *Christianity Today*, Nov. 25, 1991)

DISCUSSION - What does this have to do with HomeBuilders? I suggest it is the most important subject we could discuss. Husbands, your wives can see inconsistency between belief and behavior. Wives, your husbands can see it, too. Few things are as detrimental to a marriage relationship as half-hearted Christianity in one or both partners. So, if we strengthen the consistency of our faith as individuals, I believe we will strengthen our marriages. And parents, there is nobody on earth that watches you more closely for evidence of consistency in what you say you believe versus what you do, than your children. Children are brilliant at pointing out inconsistencies. And our children's relationship with God is easily influenced, either for good or ill, by the reality of yours. So, this subject is critical to HomeBuilders.

Notes

1. "Think Like Jesus", by George Barna, p. 189

Chapter 2. Beatitudes

The theme of the Sermon on the Mount is righteousness. Jesus describes the righteousness that God expects; the righteousness that is acceptable in the kingdom; the righteousness that is enough to please God. This does not describe how to be saved, for the Bible is clear that the only way to be saved is through faith in Christ. (BIBLE STUDY - cf. *Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5, Acts 16:30-31, John 3:16*) It does, however, describe the ideal standard of righteous behavior that a saved person will exhibit. It is a standard that is unreachable apart from Christ's work and the indwelling Holy Spirit, as Jesus confirms in *Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."*

DISCUSSION - The fact that Jesus is setting this forth as the standard of righteous behavior can be seen in one little phrase which He spoke in *Matthew 5:20*. How does this verse point out that God's standard of righteousness is quite high?

Actually, the people of the day thought the Pharisees were incredibly righteous. This group of individuals had defined an intensely detailed list of rules and regulations which were nearly impossible to live up to, and then they proceeded to openly and outwardly live up to them. Paul said that according to that list of rules and regulations he had been blameless before coming to Christ (cf. *Philippians 3:4-6*). So, for Jesus to put forth a standard that was higher than even the Pharisees was no doubt, in the peoples' eyes, revolutionary.

If this is, therefore, the standard of righteous behavior that we should be striving for (and I contend that it is), then we can use it to help us ensure our behavior and our belief is consistent.

Matthew 5:3-11 contain what are commonly referred to as "The Beatitudes." The word "beatitude" is not found in our English Bibles, but rather comes from the Latin, and simply means "blessings."

Blessed are the poor in spirit - vs. 3

QUESTION - What do you think this means?

It is possible that this verse is simply discussing the benefit of being poor in this world's wealth. In the parallel passage in Luke, the phrase "in spirit" is omitted.

QUESTION - For sake of discussion, accept that this verse refers simply to earthly poverty, and describes the blessedness of those in such a state. Why would this state bring happiness?

I believe this refers to spiritual poverty, rather than economic need. I believe it describes the attitude one must have when approaching Christ for salvation. One must recognize their need, which is ABSOLUTE.

QUOTE - But here the explanatory words, "in spirit," fix the sense to "those who in their deepest consciousness realize their entire need." This self-emptying conviction, that "before God we are void of everything," lies at the foundation of all spiritual excellence, according to the teaching of Scripture. (JFB Commentary)

READ - *Revelation 3:14f*. Notice especially *Revelation 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:*

QUOTE - To be poor in spirit is to have a humble opinion of ourselves; to be sensible that we are sinners, and have no righteousness of our own; to be willing to be saved only by the rich grace and mercy of God; to be willing to be where God places us, to bear what he lays on us, to go where he bids us, and to die when he commands; to be willing to be in his hands, and to feel that we deserve no favour from him. It is opposed to pride, and vanity, and ambition. (Barnes Notes)

We MUST come to Christ with empty hands. We have nothing to offer him. The first ingredient in our belief system is a recognition of our extreme spiritual poverty. Other verses include *Romans 3:23, Isaiah 64:6*

Get the picture here - we have ABSOLUTELY NOTHING to commend us to Christ when we come to him. We are like Peter sinking in the waves, "LORD SAVE ME!" We are like the thief on the cross, "LORD REMEMBER ME." Our poverty is described in the words of the old hymn, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling."

DISCUSSION - Notice the promised blessing - "*theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" What do you suppose Jesus meant by this?

ANSWER - A couple of thoughts - Jesus meant that salvation was the result. Those who come to God "poor in spirit," relying only on Christ and on none of their own works, receive the present possession of the kingdom of heaven. Positionally, they are saved that moment. (*cf. John 5:24*) Practically, they will see the realization of that when they are taken home to be with Christ, or when Christ returns, whichever happens first.

Let's discuss how this should affect our behavior. Remember our goal for these studies. We want to improve the consistency between our belief and our behavior. We want to Behave Like We Believe. We want to do everything we can to ensure there is no hypocrisy in our Christian testimony. So, let's consider this particular aspect of our belief:

QUESTION - We have discussed this primarily in light of our salvation. But does this attitude, this mental picture of being "poor in spirit," apply to a person after salvation as well? Explain.

QUESTION - If we really believe that we come to Christ completely poor, and that in spite of that poverty, He saves us, how should it impact our behavior? What differences should exist in the life of a person who believes this way and one who does not?

ILLUS - May I suggest that we should be so grateful for the free gift of salvation that we just can't get over it. Like Jacopo in the movie version of Alexandre Dumas' book, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, who, upon being saved from death by the principle character Edmond Dantes, said, "I am your man forever!" His gratitude was demonstrated in a lifetime of service to Edmond.

ILLUS - The 10 lepers - READ - *Luke 17:12-18*

QUESTION - What changes will occur in a person who comes to Christ knowing they are poor in spirit, receives salvation, and then feels the gratitude we've just discussed? What changes will occur in their life?

DISCUSSION - What does this have to do with HomeBuilders? In what way would our marriages, homes, parenting skills, relationships, etc., be influenced if we truly recognized that we are "*poor in spirit*"? Would it make a difference? How?

Blessed are those who mourn - vs. 4

DISCUSSION - What does this mean?

DISCUSSION - As with the previous verse, there are a couple of ways to interpret this. It is possible that we may interpret it as simply mourning over the problems and pain of this life. Assume for a minute that that is the interpretation. What possible benefit could there be in such mourning? Why would Jesus say such are blessed?

Well, sometimes troubles (mourning) come to equip you to help others. *cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4* If you mourn today, perhaps He is equipping you to help someone else tomorrow.

Another interpretation, and probably the correct one, is that this more specifically refers to mourning over our sin. Jesus taught in *vs. 3* that the way to come to Him is with empty hands. We come to Him "*poor in spirit*", and He saves us, entirely through His grace and mercy. It has nothing to do with any sort of merit on our part. And so, *vs. 4* builds on this thought. We come "*poor in spirit*", or empty handed, and we come "mourning" or repentant over our sins.

DISCUSSION - How would you define the word "repent" or "repentance?"

DEFINITION - Repent, repentance:

- NAVES - A complete reversal of one's attitude and values, i. e. a turning toward God
- The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia has a lengthy study of this. It mentions that there are 3 aspects to repentance in the New Testament - an intellectual element, an emotional element, and a volitional element. Good stuff. It mentions that there are 3 NT terms used - 1. Repent--"to Care," "Be Concerned", 2. Repent--"to Change the Mind", 3. Repent--"to Turn Over," "to Turn Upon," "to Turn Unto"

ILLUS - Lyons Lawson, long time deacon at the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Pontiac, Michigan where I once attended, tells a story that wonderfully illustrates repentance. Driving down the highway, Brother Lawson saw a young man hitchhiking and decided to offer him a ride. Discussion ensued, from which Lyons learned this man was running from a terrible problem in his family and trying to get as far away from there as he could. During the discussion, Lyons shared Christ, and the young man bowed his head and was saved. Looking up from that prayer, he turned to Lyons with streaming eyes and asked him to stop the car. "Why?" asked Brother Lawson. "Because, now that I'm saved, I need to return home and fix some things." Brother Lawson described his last view of this young man, walking and hitchhiking in the direction from which he had come, as the perfect view of repentance - changing your mind and turning around.

DISCUSSION - Which of the aspects of repentance - the intellectual, emotional, volitional, are requirements for salvation? What of the aspects of repentance - intellectual, emotional, volitional, may be present in a life without salvation?

It is interesting to note that we like to define repentance as simply a "change of mind," thus stressing the intellectual element or repentance, and unfortunately ignoring the emotional and volitional elements of repentance. However, Judas had that kind of repentance, *Then Judas, which had betrayeth him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, (Matthew 27:3, KJV)* Simply recognizing the reality of sin as an intellectual exercise does not seem to be enough.

The Bible teaches in many places that there needs to be a sorrow over sin - repentance.

BIBLE STUDY - What do the following scriptures teach about the necessity of repentance?

Matthew 9:13
Mark 1:4,15 (compare these)
Luke 13:1-5
Acts 17:30
Acts 26:19-20
Hebrews 6:1
James 4:8-10
Revelation 3:2,3,19

Based on these scriptures, and on the definition of the word "repentance" in scripture, it seems that true repentance is a part of salvation, and all three parts of that definition - the intellectual, the emotional, and the volitional aspects need to be present.

QUESTION - What do you think of the following quote - In his book *I Surrender*,

Chapter 2. Beatitudes

Patrick Morley writes that the church's integrity problem is in the misconception "that we can add Christ to our lives, but not subtract sin. It is a change in belief without a change in behavior." He goes on to say, "It is revival without reformation, without repentance." (Quoted in John The Baptizer, Bible Study Guide by C. Swindoll, p. 16)

As a parenthetical thought, realize that repentance is not only a requirement for salvation, but it is also the way back when we Christians have lost our way.

ILLUS - Robert Robinson was an English clergyman who lived in the 18th century. Not only was he a gifted pastor and preacher he was also a highly gifted poet and hymn writer. However, after many years in the pastorate his faith began to drift. He left the ministry and finished up in France, indulging himself in sin.

One night he was riding in a carriage with a Parisian socialite who had recently been converted to Christ. She was interested in his opinion on some poetry she was reading: Come thou Fount of every blessing, Tune my heart to sing thy grace, Streams of mercy never failing, Call for hymns of loudest praise.

When she looked up from her reading the socialite noticed Robinson was crying.

"What do I think of it?" he asked in a broken voice. "I wrote it. But now I've drifted away from him and can't find my way back."

"But don't you see" the woman said gently, "The way back is written right here in the third line of your poem: Streams of mercy never ceasing. Those streams are flowing even here in Paris tonight."

That night Robinson recommitted his life to Christ.

Source: Adapted from R Kilpatrick, "Assurance and Sin" in RC Sproul (editor), Doubt and Assurance (Baker, 1993)

QUESTION - Let's apply some of this now. Remembering our goal for these studies is to ensure our behavior conforms to our belief, we need to figure out how this applies to our behavior. And so, let's discuss it - how do you think this should impact our behavior? If we are truly "those who mourn" what impact will it have on our day to day, hour by hour, minute by minute lives?

A couple of thoughts on the impact:

1. READ - *Luke 19:1-9*

DISCUSSION - Here we have the story of Zaccheus' salvation, and the accompanying repentance. What do these verses teach us about the result of repentance?

2. READ - *2 Corinthians 7:8-11*

DISCUSSION - Paul, in this passage, describes a previous letter he had written to the Corinthian church (some believe it is 1 Corinthians as found in our Bibles, and some believe this refers to a different letter.) in which he had blasted them for sinful activities and behaviors. Here he describes their subsequent repentance and its results. What do these verses teach us about the result of repentance?

3. READ - *Psalms 51:12-15*

DISCUSSION - This passage is the classic scriptural demonstration of repentance, as David repented of his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. The verses we read describe some of the results that repentance. What were those results?

If repentance exists in our life, if we are truly those "who mourn," then it will have a dramatic impact on how we live. It will cause us to want to live a life with positive influence for our Savior, and a life that makes up for the wrongs of the past.

ILLUS - Early in the 20th century Japan invaded, conquered and occupied Korea. The occupation was brutal, and included a persecution of the Christian church. Forbidden to gather, one pastor continually nagged the local Japanese police chief, begging for the opportunity to gather for worship. Eventually the police chief relented, agreeing to open the church for single day for worship.

News soon spread, and on the appointed Sunday eager Christians packed the church. The worship was heartfelt and the congregation bursting with song. It was during the singing of "Nearer My God to Thee" that the Japanese police chief waiting outside gave orders to barricade the doors to the church, douse it with kerosene and set it on fire.

As smoke and flame filled the sanctuary panic set in. People rushed to the windows, only to be met by a hail of bullets. Knowing there could be no escape, the terrified congregation took refuge in song. Alas! and did my Saviour bleed? and did my Sovereign die? Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?

Just before the roof collapsed they sang the last verse: But drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe: Here, Lord, I give myself away 'Tis all that I can do! At the cross, at the cross Where I first saw the light, And the burden of my heart rolled away -- It was there by faith I received my sight, And now I am happy all the day.

When the fire had finished the bitterness remained in the hearts of the Koreans who had witnessed such horror. A monument was built where the church had stood, memorialising the pain of those who had died and those who had lived on.

It was 1972 when a group of Japanese pastors travelling through Korea came upon the memorial. learning what had happened they were filled with shame and returned home to tell their story. They raised ten million yen (\$25,000) to pay for the building of a new church, a symbol of their repentance and plea for forgiveness for the deeds of their countrymen.

On the day the new building was dedicated both a Japanese delegation and Korean Christians participated, the Japanese on one side and the Koreans on the other. The tone was sombre. For many Koreans the struggle to forgive was difficult. Bitterness was rooted deep in their hearts. The service closed with the two hymns sung as the original church had been burnt: "Nearer My God to Thee" and "At the Cross." Tears began to flow as Japanese and Korean Christians moved towards one another, meeting in the middle of the new church, clinging to each other - repentance met with forgiveness.

Source: reported in Tim Kimmel, Little House on the Freeway

DISCUSSION - In closing this section, let's draw it once again to our Homebuilder's Class, and ask how it applies to our homes and marriages?

Blessed are the meek

DISCUSSION - This is an interesting word. What does it mean? Describe for me the person at your work place, school, neighborhood or church who is meek. Which Bible characters would be examples of the meek?

ILLUS - According to Bill Farmer's newspaper column, J. Upton Dickson was a fun-loving fellow who said he was writing a book entitled *Cower Power*. He also founded a group of submissive people. It was called DOORMATS. That stands for "Dependent Organization Of Really Meek And Timid Souls -- if there are no objections." Their motto was: "The meek shall inherit the earth -- if that's okay with everybody." Their symbol was the yellow traffic light. (Our Daily Bread.)

QUESTION - Is the above, though humorous, an accurate depiction of the how the meek are viewed? Is it what Jesus meant when He said "Blessed are meek?" Could we paraphrase His words as "Blessed are doormats?"

ILLUS - Moses was meek - *Numbers 12:3*

ILLUS - Christ was meek *Matthew 11:29, 1 Peter 2:23*

Neither of these two Bible personalities could be considered doormats. Moses was a giant among men, someone looked to even today as a supreme example of leadership and godliness. Jesus Christ was and is the very Son of God. Neither was weak. Both were meek. Neither was timid. Both were meek.

DISCUSSION - Note the following definitions. Do they help you to understand this word "meekness?"

DEFINITION - a calm temper of mind, not easily provoked (*James 3:13*) (Easton's Bible Dictionary)

DEFINITION - Mild of temper; not easily provoked or irritated; patient under injuries; not vain, or haughty, or resentful; forbearing; submissive. (Websters Dictionary)

DEFINITION - Meekness is the opposite of being out of control. It is not weakness, but supreme self-control empowered by the Spirit (cf. *Galatians 5:23*) (MacArthur Study Bible)

DEFINITION - *Luke 6:29 And unto him that smiteth thee on the [one] cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not [to take thy] coat also.*

BIBLE STUDY - Some interesting verses about meekness (have individuals read these verses):

- We are encouraged to SEEK it and CULTIVATE it in our lives - *Zephaniah 2:3, Colossians 3:12*
- It is a quality needed in ministers - *1 Timothy 6:11*
- A fruit of the Spirit (something that every Christian should exemplify - *Galatians 5:22-23*)
- Vital aspect in teaching, something I struggle with - *2 Timothy 2:25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;*
- Just as vital an aspect in LEARNING - *James 1:21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.* (Interesting discussion, comparing the role of meekness in both teaching and learning - how can we do this better on both sides of the pulpit?)
- TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION - Is it particularly expected of women? We'll save this for another class, but I encourage the ladies to read and consider *1 Peter 3:1-5*. What is God saying to you ladies, here?

Let's try and summarize this now. I would like to share a personal illustration that may bring it home.

ILLUS - Beth and I have owned 2 Great Danes. The first was named Pharaoh, and he was a Harlequin Dane (black and white spots). The second was Maximillian, a Merle Dane (bluish grey mottled). Pharaoh weighed about 170 lbs, and was strong enough to eat me alive. But he never would. When I owned Pharaoh, I was very harsh on him, and believed that he needed to know I was boss. I showed him often. No matter what I would do or say to him, Pharaoh would never get hostile. He was as calm and submissive, even under oppression, as you could imagine. Maximillian was larger than Pharaoh. I don't know how much he weighed because he was too heavy for me to weigh. Unlike Pharaoh, though, Max learned to throw his weight around. He got mean and we ended up getting rid of him. Both of these dogs were strong. Only one was meek - Pharaoh. He had strength, but it was under control.

Here is what I want you to take away, then, as a simple way to understand this word "meekness." "Just because you CAN do a thing, does not necessarily mean you SHOULD do that thing." If we are meek, we will do those things that please God, and we will not do those things which do not. Meekness is a form of self-control. Just because we can do something, does not mean we should or will do it.

DISCUSSION - Now, let's discuss how these ideas, summed up in Christ's words "blessed are the meek" should change our lives? How should our day-to-day activities be influenced by these concepts?

DISCUSSION - Consider the following list of daily situations. How should the behavior of the meek Christian be different from the non-Christian in each case?

- Somebody just cut me off with their car!

ILLUS - This just happened to me the other night. The party in the other car added insult to injury by flashing me a single digit salute as they went by. One of my passengers remarked, "Good thing you were driving and not me!" I asked, "Why, what would you have done differently?" This person said, "I would have pulled them out of their car!" Of course this was silly stupid talk, but we all think things like that when we are injured. The meek might think them, but they don't act on them!

- My son/daughter got in a fight at school today.

This goes more to the idea of teaching our kids how to respond to wrongs suffered, doesn't it? If you are trying to be meek, and trying to teach the same concept to your kids, how do you teach them to respond when wronged?

PERSONAL OBSERVATION - I think the best thing parents can teach kids is to walk away. There will be times when it is not the right answer, but those times are RARE! MOST OF THE TIME, the right answer is to just walk away. Meekness.

- I got passed up (unjustly) for a promotion at work.
- I saw my neighbor pitching garbage into my yard!

ILLUS - Another personal illustration, so please bear with me. Some time back a woman walked up to me in church, and asked if they could talk to me. She was smiling at the time, so I thought everything was peachy, and said, "Sure." For the next couple of minutes, the skin on my face was scalded by the vicious words that pored from this person's mouth, as she vented rage at me for something that she perceived I had done. She was absolutely and totally incorrect in what she accused me of. I was on righteous ground, and could have squashed her like a bug with facts. However, I listened to her frothing speech, looked at her for a second, and turned and walked away. QUESTION - Was this an example of meekness on my part? ANSWER - In theory, yes. In all honesty, though, I walked away from that confrontation because I was so aghast and hurt that I had no words. I was speechless, and simply crawled away to lick my wounds. Later, in the safety of my car while driving home, my imaginative response was anything but meek! I came up with all

kinds of good things to say! I really told her! Meekness was not the reason I reacted as I did. However, I still think the response was correct, and if I had been able to respond, I HOPE, I would have responded the same way - in meekness, rather than in kind.

APPLICATION - Can this concept be applied in any specific way to homes and marriages? How does it relate to this HomeBuilders class?

DISCUSSION - I think a good way to finish this section is to notice the wonderful promise that Christ has for the meek - they shall inherit the earth. Why is that promise particularly special to "the meek?"

To our human way of understanding, the meek are always abused. If you turn the other cheek, there are plenty of people who will be glad to slap both for you. If you walk away from conflicts, you will be considered weak by many, and the object of ridicule and scorn. Yet Jesus promises here that, ultimately, it is not the bullies or the assertive that win. It is the ones who practice strength under control.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness

READ - *Matthew 5:6*

Three questions immediately come to my mind when I read this passage. What is hunger? What is thirst? What is righteousness?

BRAINSTORM - Tell me what comes to your mind when I say each of these words? (take only about 30 seconds for each word, and list the responses on the white board)

GROUP DISCUSSION - Let's break into 2 groups this morning, and discuss those questions for a few minutes, with one group taking the words "hunger" and "thirst" and the other group taking the word "righteousness. Discuss a definition of the word, and the practical manifestation of the condition in your life. For "What is hunger?" for example, be prepared to discuss a definition of the word "hunger" as well as how "hunger" would manifest itself in your life, and what you would do about it. Some scripture to help jump start your discussion - for righteousness, consider *Romans 10:3-9*, *2 Corinthians 5:21*, and for hunger and thirst consider *Matthew 4:1-11* (TAKE 10 MINUTES for the discussion, and then 10 minutes to share the results with the group.)

One of the things I quickly concluded in my study of this passage was that there was nothing special about the words, themselves. Often there is deep meaning in the words, and we can learn things from an indepth study of their meanings. With these 3 words, however, there is nothing beyond their obvious meanings. Hunger means hunger. Thirst means thirst. No magic there. We could spend some time on righteousness, but as long as we understand that righteousness is simply living up to God's level of holiness and perfection - impossible apart from a relationship with Christ, and guaranteed in such a relationship, there is not much else to say.

So, I tried to think of another way to study the passage. I decided that since I have never really been hungry, I would try and experience the meaning of the word. This was on Tuesday morning, and I decided that I would eat nothing for the rest of the week, and see what I could learn from the experience. This experiment lasted until Tuesday evening. So, I have still not personally experienced physical hunger. However, there are some observations that I think we can make about what it means to hunger (and thirst), either from the few times we have missed a meal and experienced the preliminary pangs of hunger, or from things we have read and seen in the lives of others.

DISCUSSION - For each of these, simply open it up for discussion. The main goal of the discussion is to determine how it applies to the idea of "hungering and thirsting after righteousness."

Note: Perhaps jump start this discussion by asking "What happens when you have to go without food for a day?" or "What do you suppose happened to me when I tried to go without food for a day?"

- When I am hungry, I SEE every food sign. My SENSES ARE HEIGHTENED and especially tuned into my need for food. Other things are easily ignored, but food is not.

DISCUSSION - Considering this fact in light of *Matthew 5:6*, what does this teach us about what our relationship to Christ should be? What impact should it have on our behavior?

- When I am hungry, I THINK about food constantly. My MIND IS FOCUSED on my need for food.

DISCUSSION - Considering this fact in light of *Matthew 5:6*, what does this teach us about what our relationship to Christ should be? What impact should it have on our behavior?

- In order to NOT eat, I have to find something else to do to fill that time. The time that would have been spent eating is now used for something else.

DISCUSSION - Considering this fact in light of *Matthew 5:6*, what does this teach us about what our relationship to Christ should be? What impact should it have on our behavior?

- If I'm not careful, since I am so used to just grabbing food whenever I want it, I will eat something without even realizing I'm doing it!

DISCUSSION - Considering this fact in light of *Matthew 5:6*, what does this teach us about what our relationship to Christ should be? What impact should it have on our behavior?

Consider how wonderful it would be if "righteousness" was such an involuntary action.

- If a person is truly hungry, other people notice their need - gurgling intestinal sounds, emaciated body, etc.!

DISCUSSION - Considering this fact in light of *Matthew 5:6*, what does this teach us about what our relationship to Christ should be? What impact should it have on our behavior?

Do other people notice when we hunger for righteousness? How?

- Even though I never experienced hunger, within mere hours of my last food intake, I was uncomfortable - stomach grumbling, feeling like I needed food.

DISCUSSION - Considering this fact in light of *Matthew 5:6*, what does this teach us about what our relationship to Christ should be? What impact should it have on our behavior?

I wish I felt that way when I'm away from the Bible for a short period of time. (I have esteemed thy word more than my necessary food? - something like that)

- It is totally unnecessary for me to be hungry- FOOD IS EVERYWHERE!

DISCUSSION - Considering this fact in light of *Matthew 5:6*, what does this teach us about what our relationship to Christ should be? What impact should it have on our behavior?

Consider the fact that the Word of God is always available to us. There is no more need for spiritual hunger in this nation as there is for physical hunger.

We could go on and on with that discussion. There are many parallels between physical hunger (and thirst, as well... we just chose to concentrate on the one) and our spiritual condition. I hope that you see the point, though, that physical hunger has certain manifestations, and spiritual hunger should have similar manifestations.

QUESTION - And so I guess the ultimate question becomes, how do we develop this hunger? Jesus says here that we are HAPPY if we hunger and thirst after righteousness. Why?

ANSWER - As with all of these beatitudes, the happiness is not a result of the need, but of the promised solution to that need. Those who mourn are not happy because they mourn, but because they will be comforted. Those who hunger and thirst will be happy not because they are hungry, but because they "will be filled." They will be righteous!

My challenge to each of you this morning is to get hungry! WANT the things of God, like you want food! DESIRE the Word of God, fellowship with God, the righteousness that comes ONLY from a personal relationship with Him. WANT IT!

DISCUSSION - Does this apply to the HomeBuilder's class? Does it have any bearing on our homes, marriages, parenting techniques? (If time does not permit this last discussion, provide it as a parting challenge, that class members may think about it throughout the coming week.)

Blessed are the merciful (vs. 7)

BRAINSTORM - Beginning as we have for the last few beatitudes, let's start with a brainstorming session. For the next few seconds, tell me what comes to mind when I say the word "MERCY" or "MERCIFUL." (Use whiteboard to record results)

DEFINITION - MERCY - 1. Forbearance to inflict harm under circumstances of provocation, when one has the power to inflict it; compassionate treatment of an offender or adversary; clemency. 2. Compassionate treatment of the unfortunate and helpless; sometimes, favor, beneficence. 3. Disposition to exercise compassion or favor; pity; compassion; willingness to spare or to help. (Webster)

DEFINITION - MERCIFUL - 1. Full of mercy; having or exercising mercy; disposed to pity and spare offenders; unwilling to punish. 2. Unwilling to give pain; compassionate. (Webster)

DISCUSS - Based on these definitions, what does it mean that God is merciful to you? What does it mean that we are instructed to show mercy; be merciful; to others?

DISCUSSION - There seems to be an implication in our text that our receiving mercy is DEPENDENT on our showing it to others. What do you think? Does God provide mercy in response to our providing mercy? - cf. *Psalm 18:25-26, Matthew 6:12*

ANSWER - No, God's mercy is not DEPENDENT on our showing mercy, or we would none of us receive it. cf. *John 8:1-11*. However, showing mercy on others SHOULD FLOW from the mercy we have received. cf. *Matthew 18:23-35*

DISCUSSION - To make sure we understand the point, let's review the two scriptures mentioned above (*John 8:1-11, Matthew 18:23-25*). What main truth does each teach us about mercy?

Note: The main truth for *Matthew 18:23-25* is that mercy should flow from us to others, as a natural result of the mercy we have received. If we behave like we believe, we will be merciful! The main truth for *John 8:1-11* is that mercy is TOTALLY UNDESERVED.

ILLUS (for *John 8:1-11* - A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and justice demanded death. "But I don't ask for justice," the mother explained. "I plead for mercy." "But your son does not deserve mercy," Napoleon replied. "Sir," the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for." "Well, then," the emperor said, "I will have mercy." And he spared the woman's son. (Luis Palau, "Experiencing God's Forgiveness," Multnomah Press, 1984)

God is merciful, and if we are to be like Him, then we need to be merciful, too:

Psalms 86:5 For thou, Lord, [art] good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.

Psalms 103:17 But the mercy of the LORD [is] from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

What others have said on the subject of MERCY:

QUOTE - Nowhere do we imitate God more than in showing mercy. In nothing does God more delight than in the exercise of mercy, *Exodus 34:6, Ezekiel 33:11 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9*. To us, guilty sinners; to us, wretched, dying, and exposed to eternal woe, he has shown his mercy by giving his Son to die for us; by expressing his willingness to pardon and save us; and by sending his Spirit to renew and sanctify the heart. Each day of our life, each hour, and each moment, we partake of his undeserved mercy. All the blessings we enjoy are proofs of his mercy. If we also show mercy to the poor, the wretched, the guilty, it shows that we are like God; we have his spirit, and shall not lose our reward. And we have abundant opportunity to do it. Our world is full of guilt and woe, which we may help to relieve; and every day of our lives we have opportunity by helping the poor and wretched, and by forgiving those who injure us, to show that we are like God. *Matthew 6:14*. (Barnes Notes)

QUOTE - We must have compassion on the souls of others, and help them; pity the ignorant, and instruct them; the careless, and warn them; those who are in a state of sin, and snatch them as brands out of the burning. We must have compassion on those who are melancholy and in sorrow, and comfort them (*Job 16:5*); on those whom we have advantage against, and not be rigorous and severe with them; on those who are in want, and supply them; (Matthew Henry)

If we are to behave as we believe, if our lives are to be patterned after Christ, and not after the world, then we must be merciful. When we discussed *vs. 5*, we noted that meekness is a sensibility that is foreign to our culture. I would make the same point about mercy. Our world admires the merciful. Just look at how the worldly media praised Mother Theresa for that trait. But in spite of such admiration, our culture teaches us to use other means to get ahead in life, to look out for number one always, to be assertive rather than merciful, to "get even" when we are wronged. We live in a litigious society that influences us to "stand up and get what is ours." Such is not mercy, and such is not Christlike.

APPLICATION - How does this apply to our homes and marriages? What practical changes can a husband / wife make in how they treat their spouse? What practical changes might a parent make in how they treat their child(ren)?

Blessed are the pure in heart (vs. 8)

QUOTE - This is the most comprehensive of all the beatitudes. (Matthew Henry)

Perhaps this particular statement from our Lord sums up everything else He is saying here in these 8 verses we call "The Beatitudes." We have been using these verses as an outline to help us with the reality of our faith - i.e. behaving like we believe.

We do not want to be as the Pharisees, who Jesus said "say and do not." We do not want to be like the majority of those today who call themselves Christians, but who, according to various surveys, live no differently than those who do not "call themselves Christians."

Note: ILLUS (I used this illustration in the introduction to the series, but let's review it) - The Princeton Religion Research Center has measured the impact of religion on day-to-day work. Comparing the "churched" with the "unchurched" on a wide range of behaviors like pilfering supplies (stealing), overstating qualifications on resumes (lying), calling in sick when not sick (lying and stealing), and overstating tax deductions (lying, stealing, and cheating), the center finds "little difference in the ethical views and behavior of the churched and the unchurched." What differences there are "are not significant or are of marginal significance." (William Hendricks, in Christianity Today, Nov. 25, 1991)

We want our lives to demonstrate the reality of our faith. We want to "be" Christians, and not just people who "call themselves" Christians. There is a vast difference. We want to think like our Savior, and live like our Savior. After all, to remind you of a quote used earlier in our study, "Behavior and belief - If you don't live it, you don't believe it." (Source unknown) And so, this verse seems to sum that desire up for us. We want to be pure, not just in our outward actions, but all the way into the core of our being - our hearts.

Note: "True religion consists in heart-purity." (Matthew Henry)

For such an inward purity cannot help but be manifested in our behavior on a day to day basis.

DISCUSSION - What does it mean to be "pure in heart?"

BIBLE STUDY - Psalm 24:3-4; Hebrews 12:14; Hebrews 10:22; Acts 15:9. Do any of these verses help us to understand the phrase "pure in heart?"

Note: One thing to ensure we cover - such purity comes from our relationship with Christ, and not through any of our own efforts. We are clean through His blood. We are saved only through faith in His finished work. cf. Acts 5:12 The Bible Knowledge Commentary says that "the pure in heart are those who are inwardly clean from sin through faith in God's provision and a continual acknowledging of their sinful condition."

DEFINITIONS - Use each of these definitions as a discussion topic, asking 2 questions in relation to each definition - 1. How does this definition help us to understand the purity of heart Christ is describing? 2. What impact would we expect purity, as so defined, to have on our outward and daily behavior? (or to be even more precise - what behavior(s) would a person in 21st century America need to give up, remove from their life, or add to their life in order to be pure, as it is defined here?)

- Definition 1 - Having a homogeneous or uniform composition; not mixed: unmixed with any other matter; *as in pure oxygen or pure gold.*
- Definition 2 - Free from adulterants or impurities; Free of dirt, defilement, or pollution; Containing nothing inappropriate or extraneous.

Note: These first 2 definitions are actually opposite sides of the same coin - one positive and one negative. To be pure in heart might therefore be considered from a positive perspective - having a heart filled with the unmixed things of God - God and only God, as well as from a negative perspective - having a heart where things not of God are constantly removed.

- Definition 3 - Complete; utter: *as in pure folly or pure nonsense.*

Perhaps a more interesting way of wording this one - "being thus and nothing other" (Merriam Webster's Dictionary of Law)

- Definition 4 - having no faults; sinless; *as in "pure as the driven snow"*

QUOTE - Blessed are the pure in heart. That is, whose minds, motives, and principles are pure. Who seek not only to have the external actions correct, but who desire to be holy in heart, and who are so. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart. (Barnes Notes)

QUOTE - The heart must be pure, in opposition to mixture--an honest heart that aims well; and pure, in opposition to pollution and defilement; as wine unmixed, as water unclouded. The heart must be kept pure from fleshly lusts, all unchaste thoughts and desires; and from worldly lusts; covetousness is called filthy lucre; from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, all that which come out of the heart, and defiles the man. The heart must be purified by faith, and entire for God; must be presented and preserved a chaste virgin to Christ. Create in me such a clean heart, O God! (Matthew Henry)

ILLUS - Two theological students were walking along a street in the Whitechapel district of London, a section where old and used clothing is sold. "What a fitting illustration all this makes!" said one of the students as he pointed to a suit of clothes hanging on a rack by a window. A sign on it read: "Slightly Soiled - Greatly Reduced in Price." "That's it exactly," he continued. "We get soiled by gazing at a vulgar picture, reading a coarse book, or allowing ourselves a little indulgence in dishonest or lustful thoughts; and so when the time comes for our character to be appraised, we are greatly reduced in value. Our purity, our strength is gone. We are just part and parcel of the general, shopworn stock of the world." Yes, continual slight deviations from the path of right may greatly reduce our usefulness to God and to our fellowman. In fact, these little secret sins can weaken our character so that when we face a moral crisis, we cannot stand the test. As a result, we go down in spiritual defeat because we have been careless about little sins.

After a violent storm one night, a large tree, which over the years had become a stately giant, was found lying across the pathway in a park. Nothing but a splintered stump was left.

Closer examination showed that it was rotten at the core because thousands of tiny insects had eaten away at its heart. The weakness of that tree was not brought on by the sudden storm; it began the very moment the first insect nested within its bark. With the Holy Spirit's help, let's be very careful to guard our purity. (H.G.B. Our Daily Bread, August 16)

ILLUS - In the forests of northern Europe and Asia lives a little animal called the ermine, known for his snow-white fur in winter. He instinctively protects his white coat against anything that would soil it. Fur hunters take advantage of this unusual trait of the ermine. They don't set a snare to catch him, but instead they find his home, which is usually a cleft in a rock or a hollow in an old tree. They smear the entrance and interior with grime. Then the hunters set their dogs loose to find and chase the ermine. The frightened animal flees toward home but doesn't enter because of the filth. Rather than soil his white coat, he is trapped by the dogs and captured while preserving his purity. For the ermine, purity is more precious than life. - (HGB, Our Daily Bread, April 21, 1997)

APPLICATION - In my study of this verse, I came across the following set of thought-provoking questions (from *Leading the Way* by Paul Borthwick, Navpress, 1989, pp. 120-121.) Let me share them with you for your personal reflection. I think they bring the subject home:

- Are we being desensitized by the present evil world? (cf. *Matthew 24:12*, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.") Do things that once shocked us now pass us by with little notice? Have our sexual ethics slackened?
- Where do our minds wander when we have no duties to perform? (cf. *Philippians 4:8*)
- What are we reading? Are there books or magazines or files in our libraries that we want no one else to see?
- What are we renting at the local video stores? How many hours do we spend watching TV? How many adulteries did we watch last week? How many murders? How many did we watch with our children?
- How many chapters of the Bible did we read last week?

What of the promised blessing? Here Jesus says that those who are pure in heart "shall see God." This wonderful promise is given elsewhere in our Bibles, as well:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2, KJV)

And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22:3-5)

QUOTE - There is a sense in which all shall see God, *Revelation 1:7*. That is, they shall behold him as a Judge, not as a Friend. In this place it is spoken of as a peculiar favour. So also in *Revelation 22:4*. And they shall see his face. To see the face of one, or to be in his presence, were, among the Jews, terms expressive of great favour. So here, to see God, means to be his friends and favourites, and to dwell with him in his kingdom. (Barnes)

Blessed are the peacemakers - vs. 9

BRAINSTORM - Let's start by trying to define the term. Tell me everything that comes to your mind when you hear the term "peacemaker." (List results on the white-board)

Let me share a couple of definitions. (After reading these definitions, return to the BRAINSTORM activity briefly. Do the definitions bring anything else to mind?)

- DEFINITION - Those who strive to prevent contention, and strife, and war. Who use their influence to reconcile opposing parties, and to prevent lawsuits, and hostilities, in families and neighbourhoods. Every man may do something of this; and no man is more like God than he who does it. (Barnes Notes)
- DEFINITION -

We must begin with a proper understanding of what is included in this key word. The Greek word for "peace" ("eirene") is a beautiful word, full of meaning. The word is a picture-word, calling to mind specific mental images when heard. The word means tranquility, and is used to describe a boat sailing on a calm sea. It means harmony and describes a song in which all notes and cords blend in perfect agreement. And it conveys the idea of an absence of strife, calling to mind two people walking hand-in-hand along the road. (Our English word "peace" comes to us from the Latin "pax" from which we derive "pact." A pact is a treaty between two parties/governments).

The Hebrew equivalent is the word "shalom." This word is also rich in meaning and was, for the Jew, the common word of greeting. It means all of what the above Greek word means, yet adds another aspect. Not only does shalom convey the negative -- the absence of strife and evil -- but also the positive, the presence of all good things. To wish shalom on another was in essence to say, "I wish for you not only the absence of all that may harm, but also the presence of everything that makes for a person's good."

From the above definitions we see that the word "peace" has to do with the state of harmony, tranquility, and unity as it exists between two parties.

BIBLE STUDY - What does the Bible say about peace and peacemakers?

1. Peacemakers are those who actively SEEK peace

Psalm 34:14, 1 Peter 3:10-11, 2 Timothy 2:22, Romans 14:19

NOTE that we are not expected to necessarily ACHIEVE peace, but rather to SEEK it. We are not held accountable for the result (which we have not the power to achieve), only the effort.

QUOTE - So we pray and we take whatever practical initiatives we can to make peace beginning with something as simple as a greeting. But we do not always succeed. And I want to make sure you don't equate peacemaking with peace-achieving. A peacemaker longs for peace, and works for peace, and sacrifices for peace. But the attainment of peace may not come. (John Piper)

2. God is the author and maker of peace

1 Corinthians 14:33; Isaiah 45:7; Hebrews 12:14; Isaiah 9:6

3. Peace should be our LIFESTYLE, or how we live day to day.

1 Corinthians 13:11; Romans 12:18

4. Peace is a result of Christ's working in our lives.

John 14:27; Romans 5:1

Let's consider a few questions:

1. Can you think of any examples of peacemakers?

ILLUS - Abram and Lot - *Genesis 13:8-9*

ILLUS - Scene in the Harrison Ford movie entitled *The Witness* where an Amish man is bullied by tourists who try to goad him into a fight, but he refuses to fight back, preferring rather to peacefully accept their attack. Is this an example of peacemaking? DISCUSS

2. How do we keep peace and remain pure to the Word of God? One reason so many denominations exist is because people chose to separate from others rather than compromise on what they believed. In other words, they chose purity to the Word of God over peacemaking. What do you think of this?

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. (James 3:17, KJV)

QUOTE - In James 3:17 it says "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable." First pure, then peaceable, not the other way around. And that is the order we have in the beatitudes also (in verses 8 and 9): First, "Blessed are the pure in heart," then, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Purity takes precedence over peace. Purity is the basis of Biblical peace. Purity may not be compromised in order to make peace. (Piper)

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:18)

Ah, but that raises a tough question: Is it your fault when the stand that you take is causing the division? If you have alienated someone and brought down their anger upon your head because you have done or said what is right, have you ceased to be a peacemaker?

Not necessarily. Paul said, "If it is possible ... live at peace." He thus admits that there will be times that standing for the truth will make it impossible. For example, he says to the Corinthians (in 11:18-19), "I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized." Now he would not have said that if the genuine Christians should have compromised the truth in order to prevent divisions at all cost. It was precisely because some of the Christians were genuine - genuine peacemakers - that some of the divisions existed. (Also see I Corinthians 7:15.)

Jesus said in Matthew 10:34,

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household.

In other words, you must love peace and work for peace. You must pray for your enemies, and do good to them, and greet them, and long for the barriers between you to be overcome. But you must never abandon your allegiance to me and my word, no matter how much animosity it brings down on your head. You are not guilty; you are not in the wrong if your life of obedience and your message of love and truth elicit hostility from some and affirmation from others.

(John Piper)

DISCUSSION - What do you think of this?

3. Think of the period of history known as the Crusades. People attempted to influence the world for Christ at the point of a sword. How does this fit with Christ's teaching here on peacemaking?

Another way to look at this question - is there an aspect to peacemaking that affects how we influence our world for Christ?

Some have used violence to try and advance Christ's kingdom. We see that in Islam today, as they attempt to advance their false religion via any means possible, and we see it from time to time in the misguided efforts of some Christians. But it doesn't jive with Christ's teaching here - blessed are the peacemakers.

4. Is there an aspect to this peacemaking that should change our behavior in our personal relationships? (family, friends, church, co-workers, neighbors)

ILLUS - I arrived at work yesterday Friday morning to discover two of my coworkers livid with each other over an earlier altercation. How should I have behaved, if I were to be a peacemaker?

ILLUS - This past week, we watched in amazement as hurricane Katrina demolished parts of our nation. Thinking back to the news coverage you've seen of this event, are there illustrations of peacemakers? Can you think of times and places where peacemakers were needed, and would have made a difference?

Jesus explained HOW a peacemaker operates further on in His sermon. As a matter of fact, I don't think we can totally understand *Matthew 5:9* without this later explanation:

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44-45)

5. Is it possible to be a peacemaker without knowing the peace of Christ?

QUOTE - "Peacemaking is a noble vocation. But you can no more make peace in your own strength than a mason can build a wall without a trowel, a carpenter build a house without a hammer, or an artist paint a picture without a brush. You must have the proper equipment. To be a peacemaker, you must know the Peace Giver. To make peace on earth, you must know the peace of heaven. You must know Him who "is our peace." (Billy Graham)

6. What of the promised blessing? What does it mean that they shall be called the sons of God?

Is Jesus saying that this is HOW you become a child of God? Or is He saying that peacemaking is means by which the reality of our sonship is demonstrated?

QUOTE - When Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God," he does not tell us how to become a son of God. He simply says that sons of God are in fact peacemakers. People who are peacemakers will be recognized as the sons of God at the judgment and they will be called what they are and welcomed into the Father's house. To see how to become sons of God we can look, for example, at John 1:12 and Galatians 3:26. John 1:12 says, "To all who received him (Jesus), who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." And Galatians 3:26 says, "For in Christ we are all sons of God through faith." In other words, we become sons of God by trusting in Christ for our forgiveness and hope. What Jesus is saying in Matthew 5:9 is that people who have become sons of God have the character of their heavenly Father. And we know from Scripture that their heavenly Father is a "God of peace" (Romans 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20). We know that heaven is a world of peace (Luke 19:38). And most important of all, we know that God is a peacemaker! (John Piper)

QUOTE - "They shall be called the children of God; it will be an evidence to themselves that they are so; God will own them as such, and herein they will resemble him. He is the God of peace; the Son of God is the Prince of peace; the Spirit of adoption is a Spirit of peace. Since God has declared himself reconcilable to us all, he will not own those for his children who are implacable in their enmity to one another; for if the peacemakers are blessed, woe to the peace-breakers! Now by this it appears, that Christ never intended to have his religion propagated by fire and sword, or penal laws, or to acknowledge bigotry, or intemperate zeal, as the mark of his disciples. The children of this world love to fish in troubled waters, but the children of God are the peace-makers, the quiet in the land." (Matthew Henry)

In concluding our discussion on peacemakers, let's remember that peacemaking is usually a thankless job in this life. Stepping between two arguing factions, even when striving simply for peace, usually puts you at odds with both sides!

However, peacemakers are vital. And peacemakers change the world.

ILLUS - Telemachus was a monk who lived in the 4th century. He felt God saying to him, "Go to Rome." He was in a cloistered monastery. He put his possessions in a sack and set out for Rome. When he arrived in the city, people were thronging in the streets. He asked why all the excitement and was told that this was the day that the gladiators would be fighting and killing each other in the coliseum, the day of the games, the circus. He thought to himself, "Four centuries after Christ and they are still killing each other, for enjoyment?" He ran to the coliseum and heard the gladiators saying, "Hail to Caesar, we die for Caesar" and he thought, "this isn't right." He jumped over the railing and went out into the middle of the field, got between two gladiators, held up his hands and said "In the name of Christ, forbear." The crowd protested and began to shout, "Run him through, Run him through." A gladiator came over and hit him in the stomach with the back of his sword. It sent him sprawling in the sand. He got up and ran back and again said, "In the name of Christ, forbear." The crowd continued to chant, "Run him through." One gladiator came over and plunged his sword through the little monk's stomach and he fell into the sand, which began to turn crimson with his blood. One last time he gasped out, "In the name of Christ forbear." A hush came over the 80,000 people in the coliseum. Soon a man stood and left, then another and more, and within minutes all 80,000 had emptied out of the arena. It was the last-known gladiatorial contest in the history of Rome. (Source unknown)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. - Matthew 5:9

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:10-12)

We will look at these last 3 verses together, for they all deal with the topic of persecution. In *vs. 10*, Jesus starts with a general statement "*persecuted for RIGHTEOUSNESS sake*", but He gets more specific in *vs. 11*, where He says, "*for MY sake*". In other words, I think there is a form of persecution that occurs in the lives of good people, whether they are saved or not, and there is an even more specific form of persecution that affects Christians.

Let's start with the word - some definitions:

PERSECUTION

punishment or harassment usually of a severe nature on the basis of race, religion, or political opinion (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law, copyright 1996 Merriam-Webster, Inc.)

PERSECUTE

To oppress or harass with ill-treatment, especially because of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or beliefs. (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition)

PERSECUTE

cause to suffer (WordNet 2.0, copyright 2003 Princeton University)

DISCUSSION - Does this happen today?

DISCUSSION - What kind of things happen around the world, to Christians, that might be called persecution?

DISCUSSION - What kind of things happen here in Ohio to Christians, that might be called persecution? Do you have specific examples of times when you, personally, have been persecuted?

QUOTE - (related to things that happen here in America that might be called persecution) - A local ACLU director equated al-Qaida terrorists with members of a Louisiana school board seeking to open their meetings with prayer. . . . Joe Cook of the ACLU of Louisiana spoke on camera with WAFB-TV, Baton Rouge, La., while staff and teachers of the Tangipahoa Parish district in New Orleans were at a seminar being informed of their free-speech rights by a member of the Alliance Defense Fund. . . . Referring to the school board, Cook said, "They believe that they answer to a higher power, in my opinion. Which is the kind of thinking that you had with the people who flew the airplanes into the buildings in this country, and the people who did the kind of things in London." ("ACLU boss compares officials to 'people who flew the airplanes into the buildings' copyright 2005 WorldNetDaily.com)

ILLUS - (related to things that happen here in America that might be called persecution) A federal judge has rejected the latest effort by a man who wants the state of Vermont to give him a vanity license plate with a religious message. . . . U.S. District Court Judge J. Garvan Murtha agreed with a federal magistrate who denied a request by Shawn Byrne of West Rutland to order the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles to issue him a plate with "JN36TN," referring to a passage in the Bible. . . . Murtha wrote in his one-page order that he reviewed the report and recommendation filed earlier this month by federal Magistrate Jerome J. Niedermeier as well as the recent objections to it filed by Byrne's attorneys. (The Boston Globe)

ILLUS - More Christians died for their faith in the twentieth century than at any other time in history, says Christian Solidarity International. Global reports indicate that over 150,000 Christians were martyred last year, chiefly outside of the United States. However, statistics are changing: persecution of Christians is on the increase in the United States. What's happening to bring about this change?

According to some experts a pattern is emerging reminiscent of Jewish persecution in post war Germany. "Isolation of, and discrimination against Christians is growing almost geometrically" says Don McAlvany in The Midnight Herald. "This is the way it started in Germany against the Jews. As they became more isolated and marginalized by the Nazi propaganda machine, as popular hatred and prejudice against the Jews increased among the German people, wholesale persecution followed. Could this be where the growing anti-Christian consensus in America is taking us?"

Tolerance of anti-Christian attitudes in the United States is escalating. Recently, a woman in Houston, Texas was ordered by local police to stop handing out gospel tracts to children who knocked on her door during Halloween. Officers informed her that such activity is illegal (not true), and that she would be arrested if she continued. In Madison, Wisconsin, the Freedom from Religion Foundation distributes anti-Christian pamphlets to public school children entitled, "We Can Be Good Without God." The entertainment industry and syndicated media increasingly vilify Christians as sewer rats, vultures, and simple-minded social ingrates. The FBI and the Clinton White House brand fundamentalist Christian groups as hate mongers and potential terrorists. The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago warns that plans by Southern Baptists to hold a convention in the Windy City next year might foment "hate crimes" against minorities, causing some Christians to fear that speaking openly about their religious beliefs will soon be considered a crime. All this, while Christianity itself is often a target of hate-crime violence. We remember the students at Columbine, and the United Methodist minister who was fatally beaten and burned in a remote part of Chattanooga, Tennessee, to name a few of the recent examples of interpersonal violence aimed at believers.

Chapter 2. Beatitudes

Even a casual observance of the facts reveals growing isolation of Christians as a people group, especially school age believers. Faculty and peer efforts to convince public school children that America was not founded on Christian ideals, and that our forefathers actually wanted a secular society, permeates public school interaction. History revisionists labor to eliminate any and all contradictory historical evidence from public school curriculum, and mockingly stereotype Christians as unenlightened fringe.

A few years ago, Dr. Paul Vitz, then professor of psychology at New York University, worked with a committee that examined sixty social studies and history textbooks used in public schools across the United States. The committee was amazed to find that almost every reference to the Christian influence of early America was systematically removed. Their conclusion: the writers of the commonly used textbooks exhibited paranoia of the Christian religion and intentionally censored Christianity's positive role in American history.

(from an article entitled "Persecution Growing in the United States," by Thomas Horn)

DISCUSSION - How do these examples make you, as a Christian feel? Do they go along with what Jesus said here in our text? Do Jesus' words in our text help us to deal with this? How?

BIBLE STUDY - Let's spend a few minutes looking at some verses that shed light on persecution. For each passage, discuss these questions, "What does this passage teach me about persecution?" "How does this verse help me as a Christian to be prepared for persecution?" How does this verse tell me I should respond to persecution?"

Mark 10:29-30

John 15:18-25

Romans 8:35-39

1 Corinthians 4:12-13; 2 Corinthians 4:8-12,17

1 Peter 3:12-17

DISCUSSION - We are summing up our discussion of the beatitudes as descriptions of how a Christian should behave, and how our behavior should be different from the world's behavior. What, then, should be our response to persecution? Is it to be avoided or embraced? How should the response of the Christian differ from the response of the non-Christian to similar persecutions? Do any of the other beatitudes help us to define the proper Christian response to persecution?

DISCUSSION - How do we teach this to our children? Children want to fit in, and "peer pressure" is often cited as a rationalization for our kids behaving like the world, rather than behaving like Christians. How can we teach our kids to expect and embrace persecution for their faith?

ILLUS - (Demonstrates the impact of standing against persecution) - During China's Boxer Rebellion of 1900, insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad. (Today in the Word, February, 1989, p. 17.)

That story points out the positive influence of peer pressure - one of the reasons we need to be in church and with God's people. We are influenced by their righteous ex-

ample, and pushed toward righteous behavior, rather than influenced by the worldly behavior we see outside of God's family. cf. *Hebrews 10:25*. Seeing how others deal with persecution greatly strengthens us when we face it.

Persecution is not something we like to think about, but Jesus made it clear in our text that it is a reality we will face. Other scriptures give similar warnings. HOWEVER, the Bible also encourages us that we will ultimately triumph through Christ.

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall... persecution... ? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35,37-39)

Summary - embrace the beatitudes in order to behave like you believe!

In this brief review of the beatitudes, we have placed emphasis on how living according to each of these ideals sets the Christian apart from the non-Christian. If we are true to these, then our LIFESTYLE, and our minute-by-minute BEHAVIOR will be drastically different than those who live by another set of ideals. In other words, we will more closely behave like we believe.

Summarizing:

Blessed are the poor in spirit...

The world believes we can earn our way. The "self-made man" is admired and respected in worldly circles. Yet the Christian knows his / her poverty. We come to Christ "poor in spirit" and He gives us the riches of eternity. The hymn writer put it well, "Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling."

From such realization of our deep poverty and need, as well as Christ's astonishing provision, bursts forth a gratitude that should permeate the life of the believer. Such a gratitude is not seen in the world, but it is seen in the children of God.

Blessed are they that mourn...

Sorrow for our sinful condition - that is the meaning of this passage. Jesus taught us that we come to Him empty handed, and we come to Him burdened with our sinfulness. Our response to that condition needs to be repentance - a turning from our sin and toward our Savior.

In Zaccheus the tax collector's life, this mourning, or repentance, manifested itself in good works and a desire to openly serve his new Savior. So with Christians today. Repentance is not just a mind thing. It is a heart thing, too, and it leads to a change in action.

If repentance exists in our life, if we are truly those "who mourn," then it will have a dramatic impact on how we live. It will cause us to want to live a life with positive influence for our Savior, and a life that makes up for the wrongs of the past.

Blessed are the meek...

Here is a quality that definitely separates the Christian from the world. Assertiveness is the cry of the worldling - meekness the standard of the disciple of Christ.

We summed up our section on meekness with the thought that "just because you CAN do a thing, does not necessarily mean you SHOULD do that thing." If we are meek, we will do those things that please God, and we will not do those things which do not. Meekness is a form of self-control. Just because we can do something, does not mean we should or will do it.

Certainly, the believer who lives meekly will behave differently than the world.

Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness...

Although most of us in America never experience true hunger and thirst, we have an idea what it means. Jesus made it clear in this verse that our desire for the things of God should be just as great as the physical desire for food and drink. Such a fervent need for righteousness cannot help but influence our daily activities. Everything we read, write, think, speak, watch, and do, will be changed when we truly hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful...

This world outwardly admires the merciful. Just look at how the media praised Mother Theresa for that trait. But in spite of such admiration, the culture teaches us to use other means to get ahead in life, to look out for number one always, to be assertive rather than merciful, to "get even" when we are wronged. We live in a litigious society that influences us to "stand up and get what is ours." Such is not mercy, and such is not Christlike.

God is merciful. If our behavior is to conform to His, and if we are going to behave like we believe, then we need to cultivate mercy, too.

Blessed are the pure in heart...

Of this verse, Matthew Henry said, "This is the most comprehensive of all the beatitudes."

It does seem that this particular statement from our Lord sums up everything else He is saying here in these 8 verses we call "The Beatitudes." We want our lives to demonstrate the reality of our faith. We want to "be" Christians, and not just people who "call themselves" Christians. There is a vast difference. We want to think like our Savior, and live like our Savior. This verse sums that desire up for us. We want to be pure, not just in our outward actions, but all the way into the core of our being - our hearts. Such an inward purity cannot help but be manifested in our behavior on a day to day basis.

Blessed are the peacemakers...

Peacemakers are those who "strive to prevent contention, and strife, and war - who use their influence to reconcile opposing parties, and to prevent lawsuits, and hostilities, in families and neighbourhoods. Every man may do something of this; and no man is more like God than he who does it." (Barnes)

We learned in our discussion on peacemakers, that peacemaking is usually a thankless job in this life. Stepping between two arguing factions, even when striving simply for peace, usually puts you at odds with both sides! However, peacemakers are vital. And peacemakers change the world.

We also learned that peacemaking is not normal in our culture where fighting, bickering, telling the other party off, assertiveness training, and other similar behaviors are the norm. For the Christian who behaves like he / she believes, though, peacemaking will be in evidence.

Blessed are they which are persecuted...

Our behavior is changed by what we believe. This is evident from an even casual observation of scripture. In this final beatitude, Jesus pointed out that our lives might be changed in a very negative way by the persecution that comes against us for our faith.

And yet, nowhere is the difference between the Christian's behavior and the world's behavior more starkly contrasted. They persecute, and we live with persecution. We accept it, and understand it, and look forward to that day when the ultimate victory over persecution and persecutors will come, for *"greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."*

Chapter 2. Beatitudes