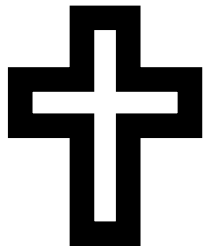


Twelve Lessons
on
Christian Character

Compiled and Written
by
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THE PROMISE AND PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER – LESSON 1

Matthew 5:1-16

Introduction: Why is character vital to good Christian influence? Why must we strive to attain high standards of morality in our attitudes and conduct? The content of Matthew chapter 5 through chapter 7 reveals the relationship of Christian character with effective service for Christ.

Lesson Goals:

1. Matthew 5 through 7 record the sermon on the mount preached by the Lord Jesus Christ. We are blessed with a tremendous message from God himself in the flesh.
 - a. Jesus is the Preacher – The disciples of Christ marveled as they sat under his teaching. The fulness of God's wisdom was revealed.
 - b. Jesus was the full answer to the questions of the OT. Notice his verse words in preaching was in Matt. 4:17 – *“Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*
 - c. After the message of salvation, his next command was to his disciples in Matt. 4:19 – *“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”*
 - d. Beginning with chapter 5, he begin to tell the disciples how to follow. This instruction is referred to as “The Beatitudes”.
2. The whole message of the Sermon on the Mount centers on the effectiveness of godly living. We see this in 5:13-14 – *“Ye are the salt of the earth.... Ye are the light of the world.”* The Point: The message of this passage is that if we are called to repentance, and wish to follow the Lord Jesus Christ in becoming an effective witness as salt and light, we must practice the 8 characteristics of a blessed man found in Matthew 5:1-12. You will notice each step progressively develops and displays Christian character creating in the believer the qualities necessary for becoming effective salt and light.
3. To see the **the Promise of Christian Character** – 5:1-12 – *“Blessed”* and the Purpose of Christian Character – 5:13-14 – *“Ye are the salt of the earth... Ye are the light of the world”*
4. Verses 3-10 will be the focus of our study. As we study these steps, refer to the illustration at the end of the lesson. You must understand and apply this illustration to fully understand the message of the lesson. At the end of each main point, there will be an application to the illustration. Please refer to the illustration throughout the lesson.

Definitions of Important Terms/Phrases:

1. Humility – In ethics, freedom from pride and arrogance; humbleness of mind; a modest estimate of one's own worth. In theology, humility consists in lowliness of mind; a deep sense of one's own unworthiness in the sight of God, self-abasement, penitence for sin, and submission to the divine will.
2. Meekness – Softness of temper; mildness; gentleness; forbearance under injuries and provocations.

I. STEP ONE – HUMILITY – 5:3 – *“Blessed are the poor in spirit”*

1. To be poor in spirit is to be emptied of self – The Greek word is “ptochos” and means to be “destitute of wealth, influence, position, honor: helpless, powerless to accomplish an end needy.”
2. The first step towards God is humility. Until you recognize your need of God, you can never fully enjoy his presence and provisions.
3. This verse is not speaking of material wealth. It is concerned with humility of spirit.
4. To be poor in spirit is to recognize our position before God. We consider and understand ourselves to be weak, inferior, foolish, insignificant without God's intervention.
6. Humility is the abandoning of all self-confidence. Like the publican we cry *“God be merciful to me a sinner?”* Recognition of our need of God is the first step to the development of character.
7. Matthew Henry stated, “Self denial is the first lesson to be learned in Christ's school, and poverty of spirit entitled to the first beatitude. The foundation of all other graces is laid in humility. Those who would build high must begin low; and it is an excellent preparative for the entrance of gospel-grace into the soul; it fits the soil to receive the seed. Those who are weary and heavy laden, are the poor in spirit, and they shall find rest with Christ.”
8. As long as you attempt to do for yourself you will never be truly happy. I'm not talking about laziness, but reliance upon God. The Galatians were guilty of working in the energy of the flesh.
9. **Applying the Illustration** – Before salvation, man is in a constant turmoil. He is in confusion, unstable,

groping in the darkness of sin. His first step towards God is humility!

II. STEP TWO – MOURNING – 5:4 – *“Blessed are they that mourn”*

1. Those who are poor in spirit will naturally be moved to mourn. People who do not have an awareness of their sinfulness and lack of ability often find it hard to be burdened.
2. The word mourn is translated from “pentheo (pen-teh'-o)” and refers to grieving (the feeling or the act): It is accustomed to weeping, wailing, and lamenting after the Lord.
3. There are basically two types of mourning.
 - a. Penitence – “remorse for personal immorality” – This mourning is referred to as “godly sorrow.” This Christian lives a life of constant and quick repentance of sin. They see their sin as God does and abhor it.
 - b. Interceding – “remorse for the needs of others” – This mourning is sympathetic mourning for those suffering the affliction of sin.
4. The mourners have a vision of sin's destructive nature and are truly sorrowful for their sins and pray for others facing the same dilemma.
5. When one is humble, the awareness of sin will cause him to weep over the damage his sin has caused. The believer begins to look at the world in the same manner as does God.
6. **Applying the Illustration** – When we are humble before God, we view our sin as He views it. This realization causes us to forsake the world and embrace the will of God.

III. STEP THREE – MEEKNESS – 5:5 – *“Blessed are the meek”*

1. The word meek is generally associated with humility but the meaning of the word is much deeper. Meekness comes from “praus” which means “mildness of disposition, gentleness of spirit, meekness;”
2. Meekness toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting.”
3. In the Old Testament, the meek are those wholly relying on God rather than their own strength to defend them against injustice. Thus, meekness toward evil people means knowing God is permitting the injuries they inflict, that He is using them to purify His elect, and that He will deliver His elect in His time. (Isa. 41:17, Lk. 18:1-8)
4. Gentleness or meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will (Gal. 5:23) – Thayer's definition.
5. The meek are rarely provoked to anger. They do not carry grudges but quickly resolve disputes. They deem their relationships more important than their opinions.
4. They have rule over their temperaments.
5. People who have mourned are often the most observant and quiet. Tribulation humbles.
6. A person who always dominates without regard to others opinions and desires is a person that is not humble or mourning.
7. Meekness is willingness to accept any difficulty that God allows to come into your life without complaining.
8. Meekness refers to the acceptance of God's will for our lives.
9. **Applying the Illustration** – Those who are humble and have an understanding of their own depravity through mourning readily accept the will of God for their lives.

IV. STEP FOUR – DESIRE – 5:6 – *“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness...”*

1. Meekness, willingness to accept God's will, leads one to the next level of Christian experience, hungering after God!
2. Righteousness is to bear the image of God; to have an interest in Christ and the promises. Righteousness is the reproduction of Christ, and this becomes the consuming desire of the believer. No longer are we concerned with our desires but fully yield our wills to the glory of God.
3. This was Paul's mindset in Phil. 1:12 – *“But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel.”* vs 21 – *“For me to live is Christ...”*
4. When you understand the will of God for your life, you should begin to hunger and thirst for more of God. It must be true hunger and thirst. True hunger and thirst which return frequently.
5. The believer who desires more of God is promised to be filled. God has more and more experiences for you if you hunger and thirst. Hunger and thirst mean to “crave and painfully fill their need”. Notice the

promise of God in Isaiah 44:3 – “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: ” God wants to bless you, but you've got to hunger and thirst for it.

6. **Applying the Illustration** – Humility leads to mourning, mourning leads to meekness or accepting God’s will, accepting God’s will creates in the believer a desire to know more of God. The pattern of effective Christian service is being developed in the believer’s life.

V. STEP FIVE – MERCIFULNESS – 5:7 – “*Blessed are the merciful*”

1. The definition of the word “merciful” is “eleemon (el-eh-ay'-mone)” meaning “compassionate”.
2. It refers to people who are inclined to “pity, help, and succor persons in misery.” (Henry)
3. As we hunger and thirst for God, we begin to be filled with the characteristic of mercy. God is a merciful God; He is a God who extends love to His fallen creation.
4. The more God fills us with righteousness, the more mercy we will show to our fellow man. It is our responsibility as children of God to bear the burdens of others. Most believers however are like the friends of Job. Criticism often takes the place of compassion in our lives.
5. People who are not compassionate do not have an understanding of the will of God, nor His purpose in being merciful to mankind.
6. **Applying the Illustration** – The more we are filled righteousness, the more compassionate we will become.

VI. STEP SIX – PURITY – 5:8 – “*Blessed are the pure in heart*”

1. Matthew Henry – “True religion consists in heart-purity. Those who are inwardly pure, show themselves to be under the power of pure and undefiled religion. True Christianity lies in the heart, in the purity of heart; the washing of that from wickedness.”
2. Purity of heart is to be clean within – There are three main types or demonstrations of purity
 - a. Purity by fire – This can be referred back to mourning and meekness
 - b. Pruning – All dead limbs cut back to produce fruit.
 - c. Ethical purity:
 - 1) free from corrupt desire, from sin and guilt
 - 2) free from every admixture of what is false, sincere genuine
 - 3) blameless, innocent
 - 4) unstained with the guilt of anything
3. A dirty heart is like muddy water. After a few hours the puddle is clear, but one stir and the dirt clouds the visibility. Dirt is 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; we must be presented and preserved a chaste virgin to Christ.
4. Create in me such a clean heart, O God!
5. Purity of heart actually speaks of our motivation. Why are we being merciful to others? Why do we do the things we do? Are we motivated by the right things?
6. **Applying the Illustration** – If we have followed the previous steps and have become merciful to others, God increases our effectiveness by creating within us the right motivation for service and sacrifice.

VII. STEP SEVEN – PEACEFULNESS – 5:9 – “*Blessed are the peacemakers*”

1. “Peacemakers” comes from “eirenopoios (i-ray-nop-oy-os)” meaning “peaceable; those who pacify”.
2. The greatest position of peace is to be right with God, then right with man.
3. Peacemakers have a peaceable disposition. Their conversation preserves peace and is not used as a weapon of provocation. Their presence promotes harmony and reconciliation not strife and contention. Why? Because God through the previous steps has developed in them Christian character.
4. **Applying the Illustration** – At this point the believer has attained a level of Christ-likeness seldom reached.

VIII. STEP EIGHT – PERSECUTION – 5:10 – “*Blessed are they which are persecuted*”

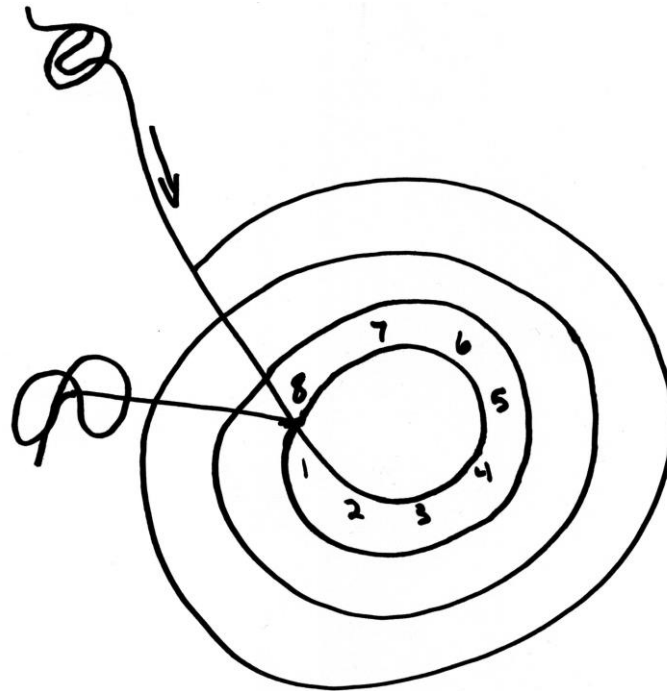
1. When we as believers have reached the level of peacemaker in Christian character, God will test our resolve.
2. The word for “persecuted” is “dioko” and in this context refers to being mistreated, to suffer persecution on account of something.
3. Ironically, the very people you help will often become your enemy. Those who you are kind to and help settle stressful situation will usually cause you the most pain.
4. This persecution is hard to swallow? Why? Because the persecution is usually the betrayal of your own

sacrifice and love for others.

5. How will you respond?

6. **Applying the Illustration** – You have two choices here. You can swell up with pride and “kick out” on God. If you do you will begin wondering again, not as a lost man, but as a saved man out of the will of God. So, what do you do when you follow the will of God (first 7 steps) and suddenly you are faced with temptation? The Answer: Bear it with HUMILITY, and thus the cycle our character development begins again.

The Point of the Entire Lesson – You must humble yourself to begin God’s development of character in your life. Once you’ve completed the first cycle of God’s development you will surely face persecution. However, if you respond correctly and humble yourself, you begin another cycle of greater and deeper development of character in you life. Notice the illustration. Each cycle of character development increases and expands your outreach of being “salt” and “light” to the world. This is the promise and purpose of Christian character. God promises to bless you, and as He does, you fulfill the purpose for which God called you!



**GREATER INFLUENCE AS
SALT + LIGHT
THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER**

Explanation of the Illustration:

1. Before salvation we are wondering in darkness without hope or direction.
2. When we heed the command of Christ to repent, we humble (#1) ourselves and begin the first cycle of developing Christian character. We follow the steps of mourning (#2), meekness (#3), desire (#4), mercifulness (#5), purity (#6), peacefulness (#7), and persecution (#8).
3. When we reach the level of peacemaker (#7), persecution (#8) will follow.
4. At this point we have two choices. We can get out of God’s will and begin wondering aimlessly as a believer, or we can humble (#1) ourselves again and begin a deeper level of character development.
5. As we continue this cycle time and time again in our lives, we are constantly expanding the scope of our influence as salt and light in the world.