

Lesson #2 – The Principles Related to a Correct View of Self.

Introduction

- A. In reading the Bible one is impressed with the great value that God places upon spiritual growth. The believer is not only exhorted to grow (I Peter 2:2; II Peter 3:18), he is described, if obedient, as a growing and fruitful tree (Psalm 1:3; Jeremiah 17:8).
- B. From our own personal viewpoint there are few things in life that are more enjoyable than the experience of steady growth in the things of God. It was undoubtedly this experience that caused the Psalmist to speak of the Word of God as exceedingly precious to him.

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Psalm 19:10

- C. For this spiritual growth to be a continual experience in our daily life we must understand and implement the Biblical principles which form the foundation, motivation, and blueprint for such growth.
- D. In this lesson we come to a vitally important group of principles - those which enable us how to rightly understand and evaluate who we are and how we are to live before God.
- E. The primary text for our study is found in Matthew 5:3.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

- F. Some observations on this important statement.
 - a. This verse is the first of a number of beatitudes which describe the various characteristics of a spiritual believer. They have been called "blessed attitudes".
 - b. Some writers look upon all the other beatitudes as an elaboration of the first - the one before us. Perhaps it would be better to say that the first presents the necessary condition whereby all the others may be realized in our daily life.
 - c. As we study this first beatitude it is important that we keep in mind that the Lord is speaking to each of us - personally.

I. The Biblical Description of the Believer.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

A. The Biblical use of the term "spirit".

John 4:23,24 - we are to worship God "in spirit".

Acts 17:16 - Paul's "spirit" was stirred in him.

Acts 18:25 - Apollos was fervent "in spirit".

Romans 2:29 - The true Jew is one "inwardly" - "in the spirit".

Romans 8:16 - The Holy Spirit witnesses with our "spirit".

I Cor. 5:5 - The immoral man was to be disciplined that his "spirit" may be saved.

Galatians 6:18 - The grace of God is to be with our "spirit".

James 2:26 - The body without the "spirit" is dead.

Summary: While the words "soul" and "spirit" are often used inter-changeably such references as we have seen above instruct us in the truth that one of man's most important dimensions, or functions, or relationships, or abilities, or faculties, or characteristics is that he has "spirit". Man has the capacity to know God - to be a spiritual person - and that is his particular genius.

B. The implications of this concept in regard to our creation and recreation in salvation.

1. It is vitally important for each of us to realize that we cannot understand ourselves by looking into the mirror of our present condition, nor by evaluating ourselves as sinners. While all of this is necessary, in its place, we are unable to come to a clear realization of who and what we really are - apart from our creation.
 - a. The necessity of this perspective can hardly be over-emphasized. To center our attention on our present condition or on what the Bible means by depravity - will only lead to a perverted concept of self-hood - and through that to making mistakes in other areas of life and thought.
 - b. We must begin with the Biblical description of what it meant to be created by God.
2. In regard to the Biblical doctrine of creation we are reminded that we were created in God's image and likeness.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness
Genesis 1:26

- a. The first Biblical teaching that we derive from this account of creation is that God made us as persons.
 - 1) This means that we have - before God - all the rights, honors, and privileges that accompany personality.
 - 2) We have the right - given by God - to be recognized as valuable and important, we have the right to be heard when we speak, to have opinions different from other people, to feel deeply about things, to develop our abilities, to have needs, to have those needs ministered unto, to love, to be loved, to become a responsible person, to do meaningful tasks, and to enjoy life.
 - 3) This means that God will never treat me as a thing. He will never treat me as irresponsible. Therefore I may not treat myself as a thing, nor as irresponsible, nor as unimportant.

b. The second facet of this creation instruction has to do with the kind of a person God brought into existence. We were created as spiritual, persons.

- 1) We were created so that we could know God and walk in fellowship with Him. We were given the ability to understand spiritual truths and perform spiritual functions. We were created as sacred people.
- 2) While almost everything in our present condition seems to be a contradiction to this - we understand from the Bible that our basic characteristic is that we are spiritual persons. We have "spirit". We were made by God for Himself (Isaiah 43:7,21) with an unlimited potentiality to glorify God and to enjoy Him.

3. In salvation we were re-created (the new birth) according to the former pattern of the image of God. While almost totally destroyed by the Fall - we have been re-born in righteousness, holiness, and knowledge (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Our former capacity to know, love, serve, and enjoy God has been largely restored.

C. The implications of this concept in regard to a correct view of self.

1. We may not contradict our creation and re-creation by how we treat ourselves or how we treat one another.
2. We must recognize the priority of the "spiritual" in our daily life.
3. All perspectives that evaluate us as primarily body, or soul, or mind, or will must be rejected.
4. If we are to grow as believers we must recognize who we are in Christ and carefully put that into practice daily.

II. The Recommended Attitude for the Believer.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

A. What this passage does not teach.

1. We are not told that the poor in body are blessed by God - if that were so then all the ill would be commended by God.
2. We are not told that the poor in mind are blessed by God - if that were so then all the deranged would be commended by God.
3. We are not told that the poor in soul are blessed by God - if that were so then all the depressed would be commended by God.
4. We are not told that the poor in will are blessed by God - if that were so then all who pretended humility would be commended by God.

B. What this passage does teach.

1. To be "poor in spirit" is to understand and practice one of the most basic principles of creation, namely, that God never created anything to be independent of His sustaining power.
 - a. We must, therefore, understand our total dependence on God for our very existence, for life itself. This is a recognition "in spirit" of our personal inability to even exist without a constant sustaining by God's gracious hand.

- b. Every facet of thought that would tend to personal independence, to self-sufficiency, to self-reliance, to the view that we are the source and master of our own existence and destiny - must be recognized as the very opposite of the truth.
- 2. To be "poor in spirit" is to understand how deeply sin has brought devastation and ruin into our life.
 - a. This is the attitude that confesses that we are sinners in that we have transgressed the will of God and that we are unrighteous in that we have failed to do God's bidding.
 - b. This is the recognition that without divine grace, as found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, we would be only creatures of death, living a life of meaninglessness, and with a future filled only with the righteous judgment for our sins.
- 3. To be "poor in spirit" is to understand how deeply we are indebted to the mercy and grace of God which has made salvation possible.
 - a. This is the realization that every good thing in our daily life has its ultimate source in the loving mercy of God to us.
 - b. It is the confession in life and thought that we do not now nor could we ever merit anything but judgment from God.
- 4. To be "poor in spirit" is to understand our constant dependence on God, as believers, for His sustaining of our spiritual life.
 - a. This is the attitude that recognizes and confesses the basic sins of self-centeredness (I John 2:16); of pride (Rev. 3:17); of false priorities (Matt. 23:23); of spiritual insensitivity to the things of God (Malachi 3:7); of that haughtiness of soul which leads to criticizing God (Malachi 1:6-8); of that use of the tongue which destroys the reputation of good people (James 3:6); and of the cute manipulation of words which makes it possible for some to commit and enjoy their sin while still confessing it before God (Isaiah 1:11-18).
 - b. This is the humble submission to God and dedication to living in harmony with His Word that is pleasing to God (Romans 12:1,2).

III. The Promise to the Spiritual Believer.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

A. The Promise Stated - "Blessed".

- 1. This word has a twofold thought behind it.
 - a. In this beatitude we have a description of the spiritual character of those upon whom the blessing of God rests.
 - b. The significance of this pronouncement and promise should not be overlooked. What more could anyone want in all of life - than to live with the blessing of God upon him?
 - c. The result of this blessing is also in the scope of this thought. That is why some translators of the Bible render the word "happy".

- d. By this we are reminded that true happiness is only found in a salvation relationship with God which is consistently practiced in all facets of life.
 2. This promise brings before us the remarkable contradiction between the attitude commended in the Bible and the attitude which is commended in the world culture. The attitude of the Bible is to recognize your dependence on God. The attitude of the world is to recognize your self-sufficiency and dependence on no one.
- B. The Promise Explained - ". . . for their's is the kingdom of heaven."
1. Here the Lord Jesus presents the reason the "poor in spirit" are "blessed" of God and are therefore to be regarded as "happy". It is because the kingdom of heaven is their possession.
 2. The question may well be asked if this is not true for all believers? The answer is, of course, yes. However, it is one thing to have a legal right to all the resources of the kingdom and quite another matter to be in the spiritual position whereby those resources may be utilized with power, joy, and fruitfulness.
 3. It is a sad commentary, but true, that many Christians are legally the possessors of the kingdom as its subjects - and yet their daily life testifies to a lack of the experience of divine blessedness.
 4. In the last lesson we considered some of the promised resources related to the kingdom of heaven.
 - a. Spiritual life - John 3:3,5.
 - b. Forgiveness - Mark 2:10.
 - c. Righteousness - Romans 14:17.
 - d. Peace - Romans 14:17.
 - e. Joy - Romans 14:17.
 - f. The presence and favor of the Lord Jesus Christ - Mark 11:9,10.
 5. Now we understand how the "kingdom of heaven" belongs to those who are "poor in spirit". Such an understanding of their true relationship to God makes it possible for them to draw upon and to experience the provision and resources of the kingdom itself.

Conclusion: Now we must ask ourselves a practical question. "Can I truly say that I am 'poor in spirit'?"