

THE FOURTH BEATITUDE

NO. 3157

A SERMON
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“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”
Matthew 5:6.

[In the year 1873, Mr. Spurgeon delivered what he called “a series of sententious homilies” on the Beatitudes. After an introductory discourse upon the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes as a whole, he intended to preach upon each one separately, but either illness or some other special reason prevented him from fully carrying out this purpose. There are, however, six Sermons upon the Beatitudes, five of which have already been published—See Sermons #422, Volume 7—THE PEACEMAKER; #2103, Volume 35—THE HUNGER AND THIRST WHICH ARE BLESSED; #3155, Volume 55—THE BEATITUDES; #3156, Volume 55—THE FIRST BEATITUDE ; #3065, Volume 53—THE THIRD BEATITUDE—and this one—

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I REMARKED, on a former occasion, that each of the seven Beatitudes rises above the one which precedes it, and rises out of it. It is a higher thing to hunger and thirst after righteousness than to be meek, or to mourn, or to be poor in spirit. But no man ever becomes hungry and thirsty after righteousness unless he has first passed through the three preliminary stages—has been convinced of his soul poverty, has been made to mourn for sin and has been rendered humble in the sight of God. I have already shown that the meek man is one who is contented with what God has given him in this world, that he is one whose ambition is at an end and whose aspirations are not for things beneath the moon. Very well then, having ceased to hunger and thirst after this world, he is the man to hunger and thirst after another and a better one! Having said farewell to these gross and perishing things, he is the man to throw the whole intensity of his nature into the pursuit of that which is heavenly and eternal—which is here described as “righteousness.” Man must first of all be cured of his ardor for earthly pursuits before he can feel fervor for heavenly ones. “No man can serve two masters.” And until the old selfish principle has been driven out and the man has become humble and meek, he will not begin to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

I. Proceeding at once to consider our text, we notice here, first, THE OBJECTIVE WHICH THE BLESSED MAN DESIRES. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness.

As soon as the Spirit of God quickens him and really makes him a blessed man, *he begins to long after righteousness before God.* He knows that he is a sinner and that as a sinner he is unrighteous and, therefore, is condemned at the bar of the Most High. But he wants to be righteous. He desires to have his iniquity removed and the defilement of the past blotted out. How can this be done? The question which he asks again and again is, “How can I be made righteous in the sight of God?” And he is never satisfied until he is told that Jesus Christ is made of God unto us “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.” Then when he sees that Christ died in the sinner’s place, he understands how the sinner’s sins are put away—and when he comprehends that Christ has worked out a perfect righteousness, not for Himself, but for the unrighteous—he comprehends how, by imputation, he is made righteous in the sight of God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ! But until he knows that, he hungers and thirsts after righteousness—and he is blessed in thus hungering and thirsting.

After he has found Christ to be his righteousness as far as justification is concerned, this man then *longs to have a righteous nature.* “Alas,” he says, “it is not enough for me to know that my sin is forgiven. I have a fountain of sin within my heart and bitter waters continually flow from it. Oh, that my *nature* could be changed so that I, the lover of sin, could be made a lover of that which is good! That I,

now full of evil, could become full of holiness!” He begins to cry out for this and he is blessed in the crying—but he never rests until the Spirit of God makes him a new creature in Christ Jesus. Then is he renewed in the spirit of his mind and God has given him, at least in measure, that which he hungers and thirsts after, namely, righteousness of nature. He has passed from death unto life, from darkness to light! The things he formerly loved, he now hates, and the things he then hated he now loves!

After he is regenerated and justified, he still pants after righteousness in another sense—*he wants to be sanctified*. The new birth is the commencement of sanctification and sanctification is the carrying on of the work commenced in regeneration—so the blessed man cries, “Lord, help me to be righteous in my character. You desire truth in the inward parts—keep my whole nature pure. Let no temptation get the mastery over me. Subdue my pride. Correct my judgment. Keep my will in check. Make me to be a holy man in the innermost temple of my being and then let my conduct toward my fellow men be in all respects all that it should be. Let me speak so that they can always believe my word. Let me act so that none can truly charge me with injustice. Let my life be a transparent one—let it be, as far as is possible, the life of Christ written over again.” Thus, you see, the truly blessed man hungers and thirsts for justification, for regeneration, and for sanctification!

When he has all of these, *he longs for perseverance in grace*. He thirsts to be *kept* right. If he has overcome one bad habit, he thirsts to put down all others. If he has acquired one virtue, he thirsts to acquire more. If God has given him much grace, he thirsts for more. And if he is, in some respects, like his Master, he perceives his defects and mourns over them—and goes on to thirst to be still more like Jesus. He is always hungering and thirsting to be made right and to be kept right. So he prays for final perseverance and for perfection. He feels that he has such a hunger and thirst after righteousness that he will never be satisfied until he wakes up in the image of his Lord that he will never be content until the last sin within him is subdued and he shall have no more propensities to evil, but be out of gunshot of temptation!

And such a man, beloved, *honestly desires to see righteousness promoted among his fellow men*. He wishes that all men would do as they would be done by, and he tries, by his own example, to teach them to do so. He wishes that there were no fraud, no false witness, no perjury, no theft, no lasciviousness. He wishes that right ruled in the whole world. He would account it a happy day if every person could be blessed and if there were no need of punishment for offenses because they had ceased. He longs to hear that oppression has come to an end. He wants to see right government in every land. He longs for wars to cease and that the rules and principles of right, and not force and the sharp edge of the sword, may govern all mankind. His daily prayer is, “Lord, let Your kingdom come, for Your kingdom is righteousness and peace.” When he sees any wrong done, he grieves over it. If he cannot alter it, he grieves all the more! And he labors as much as lies in him to bear a protest against wrong of every sort. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness. He does not hunger and thirst that his own political party may get into power, but he does hunger and thirst that righteousness may be done in the land. He does not hunger and thirst that his own opinions may come to the front, and that his own sect or denomination may increase in numbers and influence, but he does desire that righteousness may come to the fore. He does not crave for himself that he may be able to sway his fellow men according to his own desires, but he does wish that he could influence his fellow men for that which is right and true, for his soul is all on fire with this one desire—righteousness—righteousness for himself, righteousness before God, righteousness between man and man! This he longs to see and for this he hungers and thirsts—and therein Jesus says that he is blessed.

II. Now NOTICE THE DESIRE ITSELF.

It is said that he hungers and thirsts after righteousness—a double description of his ardent desire for it. Surely it would have been enough for the man to hunger for it, but he thirsts as well. All the appetites, desires and cravings of his spiritual nature go out towards what he wants above everything else, namely, righteousness. He feels that he has not attained to it himself, and therefore he hungers and thirsts for it. And he also laments that others have not attained to it and, therefore, he hungers and thirsts for them—that they, too, may have it.

We may say of this passion, first, *that, it is real*. Hungering and thirsting are matters of fact, not fancy. Suppose that you meet a man who tells you that he is so hungry that he is almost starving, and you

say to him, “Nonsense, my dear fellow, just forget all about it! It is a mere whim of yours, for you can live very well without food if you like”? Why, he knows that you are mocking him! And if you could surprise some poor wretch who had been floating in a boat cast away at sea, and had not been able for days to moisten his mouth except with the briny water which had only increased his thirst—and if you were to say to him, “Thirst? It is only your fancy, you are nervous, that is all, and you need no drink”—the man would soon tell you that he knows better than that, for he must drink or die! There is nothing in this world that is more real than hunger and thirst—and the truly blessed man has such a real passion, desire and craving after righteousness that it can only be likened to hunger and thirst. He *must* have his sins pardoned, he *must* be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and he *must* be sanctified! And he feels that it will break his heart if he cannot get rid of sin. He pines, he longs, and he prays to be made holy! He cannot be satisfied without this righteousness—and his hungering and thirsting for it is a very real thing.

And not only is it real, *it is also most natural*. It is natural to men who need bread to hunger. You do not have to tell them when to hunger or when to thirst. If they have not bread and water, they hunger and thirst naturally. So, when the Spirit of God has changed our nature, that new nature hungers and thirsts after righteousness. The old nature never did, never could, and never would—it hungers after the husks that the swine eat—but the new nature hungers after righteousness. It must do so, it cannot help itself. You do not need to say to the quickened man, “Desire holiness.” Why, he would give his eyes to possess it! You need not say to a man who is under conviction of sin, “Desire the righteousness of Christ.” He would be willing to lay down his life if he could but obtain it! He hungers and thirsts after righteousness from the very necessities of his nature.

And this desire is described in such terms that we perceive that *it is intense*. What is more intense than hunger? When a man cannot find any nourishment, his hunger seems to eat him up—his yearnings after bread are terrible. I have heard it said that in the bread riots, the cry of the men and women for bread was something far more terrible to hear than the cry of, “Fire!” when some great city has been on a blaze. “Bread! Bread!” He that has it not feels that he must have it—but the cravings of thirst are even more intense. It is said that you may palliate the pangs of hunger, but that thirst makes life, itself, a burden—the man must drink or die. Well now, such is the intense longing after righteousness of a man whom God has blessed! He wants it so urgently that he says in the anguish of his heart that he cannot live without it. The psalmist, says, “My soul waits for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.”

There is no other desire that is quite like the desire of a quickened man after righteousness and, therefore, *this desire often becomes very painful*. Hunger and thirst endured up to a certain point, involve the very keenest of pangs, and a man who is seeking the righteousness of Christ is full of unutterable woe until he finds it. And the Christian warring against his corruptions is led to cry, “O wretched man that I am!” until he learns that Christ has won the victory for him. And the servant of Christ desiring to reclaim the nations, and to bring his fellow men to follow that which is right and good, is often the subject of unutterable pangs. He bears the burden of the Lord and goes about his work like a man who has too heavy a burden to carry! Painful, indeed, is it to the soul to be made to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The expressions in our text also indicate that *this is a most energetic desire*. What will not a man who is hungry be driven to do? We have an old proverb that “hunger breaks through stone walls” and, certainly, a man hungry and thirsty after righteousness will break through anything to get it! Have we not known the sincere penitent traveling many miles in order to get where he could hear the gospel? Has he not often lost his night’s rest and brought himself almost to death’s door by his determination in pleading with God for pardon? And as to the man who is saved and who desires to see others saved, how often, in his desire to lead them in the right way, will he surrender home comforts to go to a distant land? How often will he bring upon himself the scorn and contempt of the ungodly because zeal for righteousness works mightily within his spirit? I would like to see many of these hungry and thirsty ones as members of our churches, preaching in our pulpits, toiling in our Sunday schools and mission stations—men and women who feel that they *must* see Christ’s kingdom come or they will hardly be able

to live! This holy craving after righteousness, which the Holy Spirit implants in a Christian's soul, becomes domineering—it is not merely energetic, but it dominates his entire being! For this he puts all other wishes and desires aside. He can be a loser, but he must be righteous! He can be ridiculed, but he must hold fast his integrity! He can endure scorn, but he must declare the truth of God! “Righteousness” he must have! His spirit demands it by an appetite that lords it over all other passions and propensities! And truly “blessed” is the man in whom this is the case.

For, mark you, *to hunger after righteousness is a sign of spiritual life*. Nobody who was spiritually dead ever did this. In all the catacombs there has never yet been found a dead man hungering or thirsting—and there never will be. If you hunger and thirst after righteousness, you are spiritually alive! And *it is also a proof of spiritual health*. Physicians will tell you that they regard a good appetite as being one of the signs that a man's body is in a healthy state—and it is the same with the soul. Oh, to have a ravenous appetite after Christ! Oh, to be greedy after the best things! Oh, to be covetous after holiness—in fact, to hunger and thirst after everything that is right, good, pure, lovely and of good repute. May the Lord send us more of this intense hunger and thirst! It is the very opposite condition to that of the self-satisfied and the self-righteous. Pharisees never hunger and thirst after righteousness—they have all the righteousness they need and they even think that they have some to spare for that poor publican over yonder who cries, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” If a man thinks that he is perfect, what can he know about hungering and thirsting? He is already filled with all that he needs and he, too, thinks that he could give of his redundant riches to his poor brother who is sighing over his imperfections! For my part, I am quite content to still have the blessing of hungering and thirsting, for that blessing stands side by side with another experience, namely, that of being filled—and when one is in one sense filled, yet in another sense one still hungers for more—this makes up the complete Beatitude! “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”

III. Having thus described the objective and the desire of the truly blessed man, I must now proceed, in the third place, to speak of THE BLESSING ITSELF, the benediction which Christ pronounces over those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. “They shall be filled.”

This *is a unique blessing*. No one else ever gets “filled.” A man desires meat—he eats it and is filled for a little while—but he is soon hungry again. A man desires drink. And he has it, but he is soon thirsty again. But a man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness shall be so “filled” that he shall never again thirst as he thirsted before! Many hunger and thirst after gold, but nobody ever yet filled his soul with gold—it cannot be done. The richest man who ever lived was never quite as rich as he would have liked to be. Men have tried to fill their souls with worldly possessions. They have added field to field, farm to farm, and street to street and town to town till it seemed as if they would be left alone in the land—but no man ever yet could fill his soul with an estate, however vast it might be! A few more acres were needed to round off that corner or to join that farm to the main body of his territory—or if he could only have had a little more upland he might have been satisfied—but he did not get it, so he was still discontented. Alexander conquered the world, but it would not fill his soul—he wanted more worlds to conquer! And if you and I could own a dozen worlds, were we possessors of all the stars and if we could call all space our own, we would not find enough to fill our immortal spirits. We would only be magnificently poor, a company of imperial paupers! God has so made man's heart that nothing can ever fill it but God, Himself. There is such a hungering and thirsting put into the quickened man that he discerns his necessity and he knows that only Christ can supply that necessity. When a man is saved, he has obtained all that he needs. When he gets Christ, he is satisfied. I recollect a foolish woman asking me, some years ago, to let her tell my fortune. I said to her, “I can tell you yours, but I don't want to know mine—mine is already made, for I have everything that I need.” “But,” she said, “can't I promise you something for years to come?” “No,” I answered, “I don't need anything. I have everything that I need—I am perfectly satisfied and perfectly contented.” And I can say the same tonight! I do not know anything that anybody could offer to me that would increase my satisfaction. If God will but bless the souls of men and save them, and get to Himself glory, I am filled with contentment—I need nothing more. I do not believe that any man can honestly say as much as that unless he has found Christ. If he has by faith laid hold upon the Savior, then he has grasped that which always brings the blessing with it. “He shall be filled.” It is a unique blessing!

And *the blessing is most appropriate* as well as unique. A man is hungry and thirsty. How can you take away his hunger without filling him with food? And how can you remove his thirst without filling him with drink, at least in sufficient quantity to satisfy him? So Christ's promise concerning the man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is, "He shall be filled." He wants righteousness—he shall have righteousness! He wants God—he shall have God! He wants a new heart—he shall have a new heart. He wants to be kept from sin—he shall be kept from sin. He wants to be made perfect—he shall be made perfect. He wants to live where there are none that sin—he shall be taken away to dwell where there shall be no sinners forever and ever!

In addition to being unique and appropriate, *this blessing is very large and abundant*. Christ said, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall"—have a sup by the way? Oh, no! "For they shall"—have a little comfort every now and then? Oh, no! "For they shall be filled"—*filled*. And the Greek word might even better be rendered, "they shall be satiated." "They shall have all they need, enough and to spare! They who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled—filled to the brim. How true this is! Here is a man who says, "I am condemned in the sight of God. I feel and know that no actions of mine can ever make me righteous before Him. I have given up all hope of self-justification." Listen, O man, will you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and take Him to stand before God as your substitute and representative? "I will," he says, "I do trust in Him, and in Him alone." Well, then, O man, know that you have received from Christ a righteousness which may well satisfy you! All that God could rightly ask of you was the perfect righteousness of a man, for being a man that is all the righteousness that you could be expected to present to God. But in the righteousness of Christ you have perfect righteousness of a man and more than that—you also have the righteousness of God! Think of that! Father Adam, in his perfection, wore the righteousness of man and it was lovely to look upon as long as it lasted. But if you trust in Jesus, you are wearing the righteousness of God, for Christ was God as well as man. Now, when a man attains to that experience, and knows that having believed in Jesus, God looks upon him as if the righteousness of Jesus were his own righteousness—and in fact imputes to him the divine righteousness which is Christ's—that man is filled! Yes, he is more than filled, he is satiated! All that his soul could possibly desire, he already possesses in Christ Jesus!

I told you that the man also wanted a new nature. He said, "O God, I long to get rid of these evil propensities. I need to have this defiled body of mine made to be a temple meet for You. I want to be made like my Lord and Savior, so that I may be able to walk with Him in heaven forever and ever." Listen, O man! If you believe in Jesus Christ, this is what has been done to you! You have received into your nature, by the Word of God, an incorruptible seed, "which lives and abides forever." That is already in you if you are a believer in Jesus and it can no more die than God, Himself, can die, for it is a divine nature. "The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away; but the word of the Lord"—that word which you have received if you have believed in Jesus—"endures forever." The water which Christ has given you shall be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life! In the moment of our regeneration, a new nature is imparted to us, of which the apostle Peter says, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away." And the same apostle also says that believers are "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Is not that a blessed beginning for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness?

But listen further. God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the blessed Trinity, condescends to come and dwell in all believers! Paul writes to the church of God at Corinth, "Know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?" God dwells in you, my brother or sister in Christ! Does not this truth astonish you? Sin dwells in you, but the Holy Spirit has also come to dwell in you and to drive sin out of you. The devil assails you and tries to capture your spirit and to make it like those in his own infernal den—but lo, the eternal has Himself come down and enshrined Himself within you! The Holy Spirit is dwelling within your heart if you are a believer in Jesus! Christ Himself is "in you the hope of glory." If you really want righteousness, dear soul, surely you have it *here*—the nature changed and made like the nature of God. The ruling principle altered, sin dethroned and the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

dwelling within you as your Lord and Master! Why, I think that however much you may hunger and thirst after righteousness, you must count yourself well filled since you have these immeasurable blessings!

And listen yet again, my brother or sister in Christ. You shall be kept and preserved even to the end! He who has begun to cleanse you will never leave the work until He has made you without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. He never begins a work which He cannot or will not complete! He never failed in anything that He has undertaken and He never will fail! Your corruptions have their heads already broken and though your sins still rebel, it is but a struggling gasp for life. The weapons of victorious grace shall slay them all and end the strife forever. The sins that trouble you today shall be like those Egyptians that pursued the children of Israel into the Red Sea—you shall see them no more forever. “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” And as surely as you have believed in Christ, poor imperfect worm of the dust as you are, you shall walk with Him in white on yonder golden streets in that city within whose gates there shall never enter anything that defiles, “but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Yes, believer, you shall be near and like your God! Do you hear this? You hunger and thirsts after righteousness—you shall have it without stint, for you shall be one of the “partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” You shall be able to gaze upon God in His ineffable glory and to dwell with the devouring fire and the everlasting burnings of His unsullied purity! You shall be able to see the God who is a consuming fire and yet not be afraid, for there shall be nothing in you to be consumed! You shall be spotless, innocent, pure, and immortal as your God Himself—will not this satisfy you?

“Ah,” you say, “it satisfies me for myself, but I would like to see my children righteous too.” Then commend them to that God who loves their father and their mother and ask Him to bless your children as He blessed Isaac for Abraham’s sake, and blessed Jacob for Isaac’s sake. “Oh,” you say, “but I also want to see my neighbors saved.” Then hunger after their souls! Thirst after their souls as you have hungered and thirsted after your own! And God will teach you how to talk to them and probably, as you are hungering and thirsting for their souls, He will make you the means of their conversion!

There is also this truth of God to solace you—there will be righteousness all over this world one day. Millions still reject Christ, but He has a people who will not reject Him. The masses of mankind at present fly from Him, but “the Lord knows them that are His.” As many as the Father gave to Christ shall surely come to Him; Christ shall not be disappointed—His cross shall not have been set up in vain. “He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” Well may you groan because of the idols that do not fall, the oppressions that do not come to an end, the wailing of the widows, the weeping of the orphans and the sighing of those that sit in darkness, and see no light. But there will be an end of all this. Brighter days than these are coming—either the gospel will cover the earth, or else Christ Himself will personally come. Whichever it is, it is not for me to decide, but somehow or other, the day shall come when God shall reign without a rival over all the earth, you can be sure of that! The hour shall come when the great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thundering, shall say, “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigns!”

If we are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we are on the winning side! The battle may go against us just now. Priestcraft may be pushing us sorely and evils which our forefathers routed may come back with superior strength and cunning and, for a little while, the courage of the saints may be dampened and their armies may waver—but the Lord still lives and as the Lord lives, righteousness alone shall triumph—and all iniquity and every false way must be trampled underfoot! Fight on, for you must ultimately be victors. You cannot be beaten unless the eternal, Himself, should be overthrown—and that can never be. Blessed is the man who knows that the cause that he has espoused is a righteous one, for he may know that in the final chapter of the world’s history, its triumph must be recorded! He may be dead and gone. He may only sow the seed, but his sons shall reap the harvest and men shall speak of him with grave respect as of a man who lived before his time and who deserves honor of those that follow him! Stand up for the right! Hold fast to your principles, my brothers and sisters in Christ! Follow after holiness and righteousness in every shape and form. Let no one bribe or turn you away from this blessed Book and its immortal tenets! Follow after that which is true, not that which is patron-

ized by the great. That which is just, not that which sits in the seat of human authority. And follow after this with a hunger and a thirst that are insatiable and you shall yet be “filled.”

Would you like to be up there in the day when the Prince of truth and right shall review His armies? Would you like to be up there when the jubilant shout shall rend the heavens, “The King of kings and Lord of lords has conquered all His foes and the devil and all his hosts are put to flight”? Would you like to be up there, I say, when all His trophies of victory are displayed and the Lamb that was slain shall be the reigning monarch of all the nations, gathering sheaves of scepters beneath His arms and treading on the crowns of princes as worn out and worthless? Would you like to be *there* then? Then be *here* now—*here* where the fight rages! Here where the King’s standard is unfurled—and say unto your God, “O Lord, since I have found righteousness in Christ, and am myself saved, I am pledged to stand for the right and for the truth so long as I live! So keep me faithful even unto death.”

As I close my discourse, I pronounce over all of you who are trusting in Jesus the fourth benediction spoken by Christ on the Mount of Beatitude, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
MATTHEW 5:43-48; 6:1-4.

Matthew 5:43. *You have heard that it has been said, You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.* In this case a command of Scripture had a human antithesis fitted on to it by depraved minds—and this human addition was mischievous. This is a common method—to append to the teaching of Scripture, something which seems to grow out of it or to be a natural inference from it—which something may be false and wicked. This is a sad crime against the word of the Lord. The Holy Spirit will only father His own words. He owns the precept, “*You shall love your neighbor,*” but He hates the parasitical growth of, “*hate your enemy.*” This last sentence is destructive of that out of which it appears legitimately to grow, since those who are here styled enemies are, in fact, neighbors! Love is now the universal law of God and our King, who has commanded it, is Himself the pattern of it. He will not see it narrowed down and placed in a setting of hate. May grace prevent any of us from falling into this error!

44, 45. *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 you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.* [See Sermon #1414, Volume 24—NO DIFFERENCE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Ours it is to persist in loving, even if men persist in enmity. We are to render blessing for cursing, prayers for persecutions. Even in the cases of cruel enemies, we are to “*do good to them, and pray for them.*” We are no longer enemies to any, but friends to all. We do not merely cease to hate and then abide in a cold neutrality, but we love where hatred seemed inevitable. We bless where our old nature bids us curse and we are active in doing good to those who deserve to receive evil from us. Where this is practically carried out, men wonder, respect, and admire the followers of Jesus! The *theory* may be ridiculed, but the *practice* is revered and is counted so surprising that men attribute it to some Godlike quality in Christians, and admit that they are *the children of the Father who is in heaven*. Indeed, he is a child of God who can bless the unthankful and the evil, for in daily providence the Lord is doing this on a great scale—and none but His children will imitate Him. To do good for the sake of the good done, and not because of the character of the person benefited, is a noble imitation of God. If the Lord only sent the fertilizing shower upon the land of the saintly, drought would deprive whole leagues of land of all hope of a harvest. We also must do good to the evil, or we shall have a narrow sphere—our hearts will grow contracted and our sonship towards the good God will be rendered doubtful.

46. *For if you love them which love you, what reward have you, do not even the publicans do the same?* Any common sort of man will love those who love him. Even tax gatherers and the scum of the earth can rise to this poor, starveling virtue. Saints cannot be content with such a groveling style of

things. “Love for love is manlike,” but “love for hate” is Christ like. Shall we not desire to act up to our high calling?

47. *And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more than others?* [See Sermon #1029, Volume 18—A CALL TO HOLY LIVING—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] *Do not even the publicans do so?* On a journey, or in the streets, or in the house, we are not to confine our friendly greetings to those who are near and dear to us. Courtesy should be wide and none the less sincere because general. We should speak kindly to all and treat every man as a brother. Anyone will shake hands with an old friend, but we are to be cordially courteous towards every being in the form of man. If not, we shall reach no higher level than mere outcasts. Even a dog will salute a dog.

48. *Be you, therefore, perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* Or, “*You shall be perfect.*” We should reach after completeness in love—fullness of love to all around us. Love is the bond of perfectness and if we have perfect love, it will form in us a perfect character. Here is that which we aim at—perfection like that of God. Here is the manner of obtaining it—namely, by abounding in love. And this suggests the question of how far we have proceeded in this heavenly direction, and also the reason why we should persevere in it even to the end—because as children we ought to resemble our Father. Scriptural perfection is attainable; it dies rather in proportion than in degree. A man’s character may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing—and yet such a man will be the very first to admit that the Grace which is in him is, at best, in its infancy—and though perfect as a child in all its parts, it has not yet attained to the perfection of full-grown manhood. What a mark is set before us by our perfect King who, speaking from His mountain throne, said, “*Be you perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect!*”! Lord, give what You command—then both the grace and the glory will be Yours alone.

Matthew 6:1. *Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward from your Father which is in heaven.* “You cannot expect to be paid twice. If, therefore, you take your reward in the applause of men, who give you a high character for generosity, you cannot expect to have any reward from God.” We ought to have a single eye to God’s accepting what we give and to have little or no thought of what man may say concerning our charitable gifts!

2. *Therefore when you do your charitable deeds, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.* And they will have no more! There is, in their case, no laying up of any store of good works before God. Whatever they may have done, they have taken full credit for it in the praise of men.

3. *But when you do charitable deeds, let not your left hand know what your right hand does.* “Do it so by stealth as scarcely to know it yourself—think so little of it with regard to yourself that you shall scarcely know that you have done it. Do it unto God—let Him know it.”

4. *That your charitable deeds may be in secret: and your Father which sees in secret, Himself, shall reward you openly.* There is a blessed emphasis upon that word, “Himself,” for if God shall reward us, what a reward it will be! Any praise from His lips, any reward from His hands will be of priceless value! Oh, to live with an eye to that alone!

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