

BOOK SUMMARY

The Beatitudes

Thomas Watson



BE UNITED IN CHRIST BOOK SUMMARY

Book Summary: The Beatitudes
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Be United in Christ

Book Summary

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Thomas Watson

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Author

Thomas Watson was likely born in Yorkshire, England, in 1620, the same year the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at Cambridge University and married Abigail Beadle, with whom he had at least seven children. In 1646, Watson began ministering at St. Stephen's Church in London where he served first as Bible teacher and then as pastor. When Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity in 1662, Watson and numerous other pastors were ejected from their pulpits for refusing to conform to the rules and rites of the Church of England. However, he continued teaching and preaching in informal settings despite the threat of fines and imprisonment. In 1672, he returned to public ministry at Crosby Hall in London. Eventually failing health forced him into retirement. He died in 1686, leaving a legacy of such influential books as *A Body of Divinity*, *The Lord's Prayer*, and *The Beatitudes*. Thomas Watson is one of the most readable of the Puritans due to his "depth of doctrine, clarity of expression, warmth of spirituality, love of application, and gift of illustration."¹ As Charles Spurgeon commented, "No one ever grew weary under such pleasant yet weighty discourse as that which we find in his *Beatitudes*."²

Overview

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) is the most influential sermon ever preached. It begins with the Beatitudes, which Watson describes as "eight steps leading to true blessedness." After his introduction (Chapters 1–3), he devotes the rest of the book to explaining these spiritual virtues and rewards and how to attain them:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. (Chapters 4–5)

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Chapters 6–11)

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (Chapter 12)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Chapters 13–14)

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. (Chapter 15)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Chapters 16–17)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Chapters 18–20)

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. (Chapter 21)

Thus, the Beatitudes are Jesus' path to Heaven's blessings. Those who obey them will be rewarded both in this life and, more importantly, in the life to come. "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Luke 12:40).

¹ Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 606.

² C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2014), 403.

Introduction

Watson's first three chapters explain the setting of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, define true blessedness, and comment on the Beatitudes as a whole.

Setting

The preacher was Jesus Christ, "the best of preachers." "His words were an oracle, His works a miracle, His life a model, and His death a sacrifice." Christ's pulpit was "on a mountain," which symbolically paralleled Moses' teaching on Mount Sinai. The occasion was "seeing the multitude," for Jesus preached at every opportunity, as should His ministers. "Oh, how zealously industrious should Christ's ministers be to save these souls! If Christ spent His blood for souls, well may we spend our sweat." Church members for their part, says Watson, should listen to their pastors regularly and support them financially, emotionally, and prayerfully. Those unhappy with the preaching should be prayerful rather than critical. "Perhaps you complain the tool is dull, that the minister is dead and cold. You should have sharpened him by your prayer. If you want the door of blessing opened to you through your pastor's ministry, you must unlock it with the key of prayer."

Blessedness

"Blessed" is the first word of the sermon, and Jesus repeats it nine times in His first nine sentences. This contrasts with how God spoke through Moses at Mount Sinai. "Christ does not begin His Sermon on the Mount as the Law was delivered on the mount, with commands and threatenings, the trumpet sounding, the fire flaming, the earth quaking, and the hearts of the Israelites also quaking out of fear (Exodus 19:10–20). But our Savior begins with promises and blessings." Believers need the hope of God's blessing to sustain them through the many trials and tribulations of the Christian life.

Contrary to what the world teaches, true blessedness does not consist in possessions or pleasures. Spiritual beings can only be satisfied by spiritual things, so "a man may as well fill his treasure chest with grace as his heart with gold." True blessings should bring peace, but "the things of the world will no more keep out trouble of spirit than paper will keep out a bullet." True blessings should endure, but worldly rewards "are like a bouquet of flowers that withers while you are smelling it, like ice that melts away while it is in your hand." True blessings should not harm, yet "thorns are no more likely to tear our garments than riches are to tear our hearts." Finally, "a man can no more extract blessedness out of sin than he can suck health out of poison." Therefore, "if blessedness does not consist in externals, then let us not place our blessedness in externals."

True blessedness instead comes from fully enjoying the highest good, which is God, and it is the blessing of enjoying God that Jesus promises in the Beatitudes. Christians are "enriched with heavenly blessings," for "their sins are not imputed to them," "they are in covenant with God," and "they have an inheritance in Heaven." But believers are blessed even before they reach Heaven, for Jesus did not say "blessed will be" but "blessed are." Christians are "blessed before they are crowned" and should therefore be completely committed to Christ. "Spend and be spent for the Lord. Dedicate yourselves to Him by surrendering yourselves to Him and commit yourselves to Him as a way of rejoicing. Never think you can do enough for God who will shortly set you ashore in the land of promise."

Beatitudes

The first Beatitude is “blessed are the poor.” The last is “blessed are those who are persecuted.” Thus Jesus teaches that true blessedness begins with poverty and ends with persecution. This seems foolish to those who desire God’s blessings at no cost, who “would wear Christ’s jewels but refuse His cross.” But enjoying the Beatitudes’ blessings is conditioned upon obeying their obligations. Each Beatitude links a particular duty (“be poor in spirit”) to a specific reward (“the kingdom of Heaven”), for it is both these spiritual virtues and blessings together that constitute the blessed life. Finally, Watson explains that the individual Beatitudes are not independent but closely connected. Christians should be characterized by all these “heavenly inclinations of the soul to which Christ has attached blessedness.” “Where there is one grace there is all. . . . He who has poverty of spirit is a mourner. He who is a mourner is meek. He who is meek is merciful, and so on.” The Holy Spirit develops all these Christlike qualities in those He indwells. “The graces of the Spirit are like a row of pearls that hang together upon the string of religion and serve to adorn Christ’s bride.”

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

Blessed Poverty

Poverty is rarely associated with blessing, and “all poverty is not blessed.” Jesus is not referring to those made poor by folly and sin, or to the spiritually poor who lack grace and gratitude, or to monks and nuns who have taken vows of poverty. Rather, the poor in spirit are “those who are brought to the sense of their sins and, seeing no goodness in themselves, despair of themselves and appeal wholly for the mercy of God in Christ.” They are those who, aware of their moral bankruptcy, cry out, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:13). They deny any goodness or merit of their own and therefore entrust themselves entirely to Christ to save them (Philippians 3:9).

The reason Jesus mentions spiritual poverty first is that it is the seedbed for the other virtues. “Poverty of spirit is the very basis and foundation of all the other graces that follow. You may as well expect fruit to grow without a root as the other graces without this. . . . Therefore, Christ begins with poverty of spirit because this ushers in all the rest.” Watson offers several reasons for this:

It is God’s usual method to make a man poor in spirit and then fill him with the graces of the Spirit. As we deal with a watch, we take it first to pieces and then set all the wheels and pins in order, so the Lord first takes a man all to pieces, shows him his ruined condition, and then sets him in proper order.

Till we are poor in spirit we are not capable of receiving grace. . . . If the hand be full of pebbles, it cannot receive gold. The glass is first emptied before you pour in wine. God first empties a man of himself before He pours in the precious wine of His grace.

Till we are poor in spirit, Christ is never precious. Before we see our own insufficiencies, we never see Christ’s worth.

It shows in what a Christian’s riches consist, namely in poverty of spirit. Some think if they can fill their bags with gold, then they are rich. But they who are poor in spirit are the rich men. They are rich in poverty. This poverty entitles them to a kingdom. How poor are they who think themselves rich! How rich are they who see themselves poor! I call it the “jewel of poverty.”

Because Heaven itself is at stake, it is important to know whether we are in fact poor in spirit. Watson describes the spiritually poor as humble, grateful, and prayerful. They are “Christ admirers” who are no longer self-absorbed or self-reliant and who are never satisfied with their spiritual progress. “The hypocrite is ever telling what he has. A child of God complains of what he lacks. The one is glad that he is so good; the other grieves that he is so bad.” The person who is poor in spirit accepts Christ on His terms, for he “will do anything that he may have Christ.” Watson concludes: “Are you poor in spirit? You are blessed persons. Happy for you that you were ever born! If you ask, ‘In what does this blessedness appear?’ read the next words, ‘Theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.’”

Worms Made Kings

The reward for being poor in spirit is receiving the kingdom of Heaven, which Watson describes as “that state of glory that the saints shall enjoy when they shall reign with God and the angels forever—sin, Hell, and death being fully subdued.” Only the humble enter Heaven, yet “all Christ’s subjects are kings,” a truth illustrated by the emblems of royalty given them. The poor in spirit will receive the crown of life, wear robes of white, bear palm branches for scepters, and even sit with Christ on His throne (Revelation 2:10; 3:21; 7:9). The poor in spirit will reign in a kingdom more glorious and secure than any on earth. And their inheritance is certain, for God desires to give His subjects His kingdom (Luke 12:32), and Christ Himself has already paid the price. “As the kingdom of Heaven is a gift in regard to the Father, so it is a purchase in regard to the Son.”

The poor in spirit are therefore perfectly reasonable in denying themselves, taking up their crosses, and following Christ (Mark 8:34), for their reward is greater than any sacrifice they make. “That worms should be made kings, this is divine bounty.” Unbelievers should therefore admit their neediness and embrace Christ as Savior and Lord. How foolish and tragic it would be to forfeit the riches of Heaven for the petty passing pleasures of earth.

If men, before they committed a sin, would but sit down and rationally consider whether the present gain and sweetness in sin would compensate for the loss of a kingdom, I believe it would put them into a cold sweat and give some check to their unbridled passions.... How the devil at the last day will insult and laugh at men that they should be so stupidly foolish that for a rattle they forfeit a crown! Surely it will greatly contribute to the affliction of the damned to think how foolishly they missed out on a kingdom.

Those who have Christ as Savior and Lord should serve eagerly, live worthily, and endure hopefully.

I think we should sometimes go aside into our closets and weep to consider how little work we have done for God. What a vast discrepancy there is between our service and our reward!

“Walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:12). Live as kings. Let the majesty of holiness appear in your faces.... When we shine in zeal, humility, and dignity, this beautifies and honors us in the eyes of others and makes us look as those who are heirs apparent to a crown.

What does it matter if you now go about in rags? You shall have your white robes. What does it matter if you are fed like Daniel with vegetables and have inferior food? You shall feast when you come into the kingdom. Here you drink the water of tears, but shortly you shall drink the wine of paradise. Be comforted with the thoughts of a kingdom.

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

Blessed Gospel Mourning

Watson devotes no less than six chapters to this second Beatitude, because sin and sadness are such constant and painful parts of life. “Mourning would be a sad and unpleasant subject to discuss were it not that it has blessedness going before and comfort coming after... Though the saints’ tears are bitter tears, yet they are blessed tears.” Jesus does not promise comfort for those who lament outward losses, frustrated lusts, and regretted good deeds but for those who mourn sin and misery.

Saints should be saddened by their sins, but not all mourning for sin is “right gospel mourning.” Grief that is despairing, hypocritical, forced, insincere, or unrepentant will not be blessed by God. Genuine gospel mourning that God does bless is voluntary, immediate, specific, and prayerful. It grieves the wickedness of sin more than the consequences of sin. It hates sin and leads to holiness. It makes restitution for wrongs and, like the prodigal son, leads the repentant sinner back to God. Finally, true gospel mourning is as continual as disobedience. “A ship that is always leaking must have the water continually pumped out. While the soul leaks because of sin, we must remain pumping at the leak by repentance.”

Christ’s disciples mourn not only for their own sin but also for the sin of others. Christians should say like the psalmist, “Rivers of water run down from my eyes, / Because men do not keep Your law” (Psalm 119:136). God’s people should grieve for the hypocrisy, error, blasphemy, infidelity, pride, irreverence, injustice, and insubordination around them. They should mourn as well that there are so few mourners for this rebellion against God.

In addition to mourning for sin, Christians should mourn for the misery that sin causes. Believers should grieve the suffering of the saints and the decline of nations due to divisions, oppression, and immorality. This is especially appropriate during times of God’s judgment, before times of worship, and after “scandalous relapses” into sin. Sin is a serious matter, so “our mourning for sin must be so great as to exceed all other grief.”

Hardness of Heart

The opposite of holy mourning is “hardness of heart” (Matthew 19:8; Mark 3:5). A hard, stony heart is the most dangerous of all heart conditions because it refuses to be healed.

Hardness of heart makes a man’s condition worse than all his other sins besides. If one be guilty of great sins, yet if he can mourn, there is hope. Repentance unravels sin and makes sin not to be. But hardness of heart binds guilt fast upon the soul. It seals a man under wrath. It is not hatefulness of sin but hardness of heart that damns. This makes the sin against the Holy Spirit incapable of mercy, because the sinner who has committed it is incapable of repentance.

Watson repeatedly cautions those who minimize the seriousness of sin. “Did Christ bleed for sin, and can you not weep?” “How untimely it is to take up the harp and violin when God is taking up the sword!” “Ah wretch, did Christ bleed for sin, and do you laugh at sin?” Sin is no laughing matter, and those who do not mourn their sin now will most certainly mourn its judgment in the life to come.

In order to soften a sin-hardened heart one must remove the hindrances to gospel mourning such as:

The love of sin. The love of sin is like a stone in the pipe that hinders the current of water.

Taking mercy for granted. How many, spiderlike, suck damnation out of the sweet flower of God's mercy?... There is no mercy without forsaking sin, and no forsaking sin without mourning!

Minimizing the significance of sin. Sin cannot be little because it is against the Majesty of Heaven.... Read the greatness of your sin in the deepness of Christ's wounds.

Worldly pleasures. The sweet waters of pleasure destroy the bitter waters of mourning. How many go dancing to Hell like those fish that swim down pleasantly into the Dead Sea!

Two ways to promote proper mourning are to keep the sinfulness of sin in mind and to pray.

Every sin is a stroke at the soul. So many sins, so many wounds! Every blow given to the tree hastens the fall of the tree. Every sin is a hewing and chopping down of the soul for hellfire.

Pray to God that He will put us in mourning, that He will give us a melting frame of heart.... As tears flow out, comfort flows in, which leads to the second part of the text, "They shall be comforted."

Blessed Comfort

Godly mourning is blessed by God's comfort, for "mourning goes before comfort as the lancing of a wound precedes the cure." The Holy Spirit is "the Comforter" (John 14:26 KJV) whose mercies are powerful and enduring and produce joy and humility. "The fuller a tree is of fruit, the lower the branch hangs. The more full we are of the fruit of the Spirit, the more we bend in humility." Sometimes God withholds His comfort for a season to make us value His grace more. Other times we ourselves delay divine relief when we seek comfort from the wrong sources, when we continue in our sin, and when we are proud and complaining. Yet Christians can be sure that comfort is coming:

Though a child of God does not have comfort always in the flower, yet he has it in the seed. Though he does not feel comfort from God, yet he takes comfort in God.... The mourner is heir to comfort, and though for a small moment God may forsake His people (Isaiah 54:7), yet there is a time shortly coming when the mourner shall have all tears wiped away and shall be brimful of comfort.

Watson reminds us that there will be a time "when the saints shall bathe themselves in the river of life, when they shall never see a wrinkle on God's brow anymore, but His face shall shine, His lips drip honey, His arms sweetly embrace them." God will spread out a banquet for His redeemed such as has never been seen. God Himself will be the host, and Christ will be the guest of honor. The saints of every age will enjoy the richest of fellowship in the most lavish of settings. Friends and family will be reunited. The music will be grand. The conversation will be rich. It will be holy. It will be joyful. It will go on forever. "Oh, feed with delight upon the thoughts of this marriage supper! After your funeral begins your festival.... Christ has paid for this supper upon the cross, and there is no fear of a reckoning to be brought in. 'Therefore comfort one another with these words' (1 Thessalonians 4:18)."

Blessed Are the Meek

Watson defines meekness as “a grace whereby we are enabled by the Spirit of God to moderate our passion.” It is a fruit of the Spirit that prevents people from being controlled by their emotions (Galatians 5:23). “The passions are fiery and headstrong; meekness holds them in check.” Meekness makes sinners fit for fellowship with God and others, for otherwise their pride and anger would ruin these relationships. Meekness toward God makes us submissive to His will and responsive to His Word. Meekness toward men means that we must bear and forgive injuries and repay evil with good.³

Bearing injuries means that the meek person patiently suffers wrongs without responding in anger. “A meek spirit, like wet tinder, will not easily take fire.” It refuses to be provoked just as water refuses to ignite. “Meekness bears that motto, ‘Bear and forbear.’” It is the opposite of hastiness and malice, which is “mental murder.” Malice boiled over often leads to revenge, which meek people refuse to pursue. The meek restrain their tongues and decline to slander or verbally attack their attackers. Like Christ, when reviled they do not revile in return (1 Peter 2:23).

The meek not only bear injuries but also forgive them, for “a meek spirit is a forgiving spirit.” God’s children must “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). Finally, meekness requires believers to do good to those who wrong them. “To render evil for evil is beastly; to render evil for good is devilish; to render good for evil is Christian.” As Jesus commanded, “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

Yet despite its importance, meekness is not a virtue people naturally value, so Watson offers several motivations. First, meekness is modeled by such great men of God as Moses and David and is perfectly displayed by Jesus. Second, those who gain victory over their emotions are the most admirable of conquerors, for “he who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (Proverbs 16:32). Third, practically speaking “meekness is the best way to conquer and melt the heart of an enemy.... Passion makes an enemy of a friend. Meekness makes a friend of an enemy.” Finally, there is the great promise in the verse itself: “they shall inherit the earth.” Though they do not own it now, God has given the meek legal title to the earth to come. And unlike the wicked, they enjoy the blessings of this present earth in peace. Though a meek person may not possess much, “what he has he possesses with inward serenity and peace.” Moreover, the meek will inherit Heaven. “The meek are lords of the earth and ‘heirs of salvation’ as well (Hebrews 1:14 KJV).”

Watson offers two tips to attain meekness. First, “often look upon the meekness of Christ,” for “the scholar who would copy well has his eye often upon the manuscript.” Second, “pray earnestly that God will meeken your spirit.... When faith sets prayer to work, prayer sets God to work. All divine blessings come streaming to us through this golden channel of prayer.”

³ For a devotional reflection on this blessed but neglected virtue, please see our free book summary of Matthew Henry’s *Meekness and Quietness of Spirit* available at beunitedinchrist.com.

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Like all the Beatitudes, these words contain both a duty and a promise. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is the duty; being filled by God is the promise. Spiritual hunger is “the rational appetite whereby the soul pants after that which it perceives most suitable and compatible to itself.” It is driven by a desire for what it needs but lacks—righteousness.

There are two kinds of righteousness. First, there is “imputed righteousness” whereby Christ’s perfect righteousness is treated as the believer’s own. “By virtue of this righteousness God looks upon us as if we had never sinned.... He who has this righteousness is equal to the most illustrious saints. The weakest believer is justified as much as the strongest.” Second, there is “implanted righteousness” that the Holy Spirit produces in the heart and life of every Christian. Thus believers are both fully righteous already (imputed) and becoming more righteous (implanted).

Watson draws two conclusions from this twofold righteousness. First, God sets a low price for heavenly things. “The invitation of the gospel is free. If a friend invites guests to his table, he does not expect that they should bring money to pay for their dinner but only to come with an appetite.” All we must do to be saved is recognize our lack of righteousness, desire to be righteous, and then look to God to make us righteous in Christ. Second, it indicates that a truly godly person is someone who “hungers and thirsts after spiritual things.” Hunger is a sign of health and life. Those who have no desire for spiritual things are either spiritually ill or dead.

If our passion for God has diminished, then hopefully we grieve this decline. “Though it be a sign of the decay of grace to lose the spiritual appetite, yet it is a sign of the truth of grace to mourn the loss. It is sad to lose our first love, but it is happy when we mourn for the loss of our first love.” To renew our hunger, we should avoid earthly pleasures that fill without feeding, and we should undertake activities like prayer and Bible reading that increase spiritual desires.

By feeding excessively upon the sweet, luscious delights of the world, we lose our appetite for Christ and grace. You never knew a man to indulge himself upon the world and at the same time be lovesick for Christ. While Israel fed with delight upon garlic and onions, they never hungered after manna.

By the exercise of holy duties the spiritual appetite is increased. “Exercise yourself toward godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7).

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will certainly be filled with grace, peace, and heavenly glory. Therefore, Watson invites us to come to Christ and be filled.

Are you ignorant? Christ was filled with wisdom that He might teach you. Are you polluted? Christ was filled with grace that He might cleanse you. Shall not the soul then come to Christ, who was filled on purpose to fill the hungry? We love to knock at a rich man’s door. In our Father’s house there is bread enough. Come with desire and you shall go away with comfort. You shall have the virtues of Christ’s blood, the influences of His Spirit, the communications of His love.

Blessed Are the Merciful

In this fifth Beatitude, the duty and reward are the same: mercy. The truth Watson draws from this verse is, “The merciful man is a blessed man.” Watson defines mercy as “a melting inclination whereby we lay to heart the miseries of others and are ready on all occasions to be instrumental for their good.” Whereas love considers the welfare of all people, mercy considers the welfare of the miserable in particular. “Love is like a friend who visits those who are well. Mercy is like a physician who visits only those who are sick.”

The call to mercy is especially important because, by nature, we are not merciful but harsh and calloused. By nature we produce “not the oil of mercy but the poison of malice.” It is only by undergoing a spiritual rebirth that we acquire a compassionate spirit. “You must first be a new man before a merciful man.”

Mercy itself is “a fountain that runs in five streams.” It is concerned, first of all, with the souls of others. “There is a cruel mercy when we see men go on in sin and we leave them alone, and there is a merciful cruelty when we are severe toward men’s sins and will not let them go to Hell quietly.” Second, mercy guards others’ reputations. We must neither slander, gossip, criticize, or bear false witness, nor should we remain silent when others do so. Third, if someone owes us money, mercy makes us patient for repayment. Jesus warns that hard-hearted creditors will be judged by God (Matthew 18:28–35).

Fourth, mercy overcomes evil with good (Romans 12:21) and makes Christianity attractive to others. Fifth, mercy is concerned with the physical needs of others. Poverty is a difficult condition that could have been ours and may still be ours. Therefore, we should be compassionate and generous toward others. If we have the means to spend on our lusts and pride, then we have the means to do something to help those in need. God who is “rich in mercy” also “delights in mercy” (Ephesians 2:4; Micah 7:18), and He promises to show mercy toward the merciful in both this life and the life to come.

In this life, God blesses the merciful in their livelihood, condition, descendants, life, and reputation (Deuteronomy 15:10; Proverbs 11:25; Psalms 37:26; 41:2; 112:6). In the life to come, God will generously repay the merciful for their loving good deeds. As Jesus said, “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38). And so the saints should be humbly, sacrificially, wisely, and gratefully merciful for Christ’s sake, for those who do so will receive mercy. “Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

Jesus speaks of a pure heart rather than a pure life because it is the heart that directs the life.

Purity of heart does not exclude purity of life, no more than the pureness of the fountain excludes the pureness of the stream. But it is called purity of heart because this is the main thing in religion, and there can be no purity of life without it. A Christian's great care should be to keep the heart pure, as one would especially preserve the spring from being poisoned.

God is not pleased with a hypocritical holiness, for however righteous a person may appear, he "is but a spiritual leper till he is pure in heart." If we love sin, hate holiness, lack faith, and are hardened to our need for God's forgiveness and grace, then our hearts are still impure and we need a transplant.

Holy hearts make us like God and therefore pleasing to God, for "God delights in no heart except where He may see His own face and likeness." So how do we purify our hearts? By praying, reading Scripture, hearing good preaching, keeping righteous company, repenting of sin, walking by the Spirit, and behaving consistently with what we profess to believe. If we do so, then God promises that we will see Him in both this life and the life to come.

In this life, the pure-hearted see God through the eyes of faith. "Faith sees God's glorious attributes in the mirror of His Word (1 Corinthians 13:12; James 1:23)." In the life to come the holy-hearted will actually see God face to face and know Him fully (Revelation 22:4; 1 Corinthians 13:12)—"a pleasant prospect!" The splendor of God's presence will be transforming, so Christians should diligently purify their hearts in preparation for this privilege. As the apostle John explains, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2–3).

Therefore, Watson pleads with the unsaved "to get into Christ," for "we cannot come to God but by Christ." He urges sinners to "be purified persons," for "it is only the pure in heart who shall see God." And to believers whom God's Spirit is purifying, Watson offers four final encouragements:

Stand amazed at this privilege, that you—who are worms crept out of the dust—should be admitted to the blessed sight of God for all eternity.

Begin your sight of God now. Moses by faith saw "Him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27). Often look with believing eyes upon Him whom you hope to see with glorified eyes.

Be comforted with this: you shall shortly see God. The godly have many sights here that they wish they did not see. They see a body of death; they see the sword unsheathed; they see rebellion wearing the mask of religion; they see the devil in disguise. These sights cause sorrow, but there is a blessed sight coming: "they shall see God." And in Him are all sparkling beauties and ravishing joys to be found.

Be not discouraged at sufferings. All the hurt that affliction and death can do is to give you a sight of God. As one said to his fellow martyr, "One half hour in glory will make us forget our pain."

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

This Beatitude naturally follows the previous one because the Bible associates purity with peace. James writes that “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable” (James 3:17), and the author of Hebrews urges, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness” (Hebrews 12:14). And in the same way “Christ joins them together—‘pure in heart’ and ‘peacemakers’—as if there could be no purity where there is not a study of peace.” And peace is a particular passion of God’s. The Father is the “God of peace,” the Son is the “Prince of Peace,” and the Holy Spirit gives the fruit of peace (Hebrews 13:20; Isaiah 9:6; Galatians 5:22). Jesus Christ commanded peace, prayed for peace, and died for peace (Mark 9:50; John 17:20–26; Ephesians 2:13–16). Indeed, Watson suggests that the human body itself indicates that God made humans to live in harmony rather than conflict.

Man by nature seems to be a peaceable creature, fitter to handle the plough than the sword. Other creatures are naturally armed with some kind of weapon with which they are able to retaliate when attacked. The lion has its paw, the boar its tusk, the bee its sting. Only man has none of these weapons. He comes naked and unarmed into the world as if God would have him be a peaceable creature.

Therefore, God’s children must be passionate peacemakers like their Father who is in Heaven. “Before men can make peace among others, they must be of peaceable spirits themselves. Before they can be promoters of peace, they must be lovers of peace.” The pure in heart will “study and cherish” peace in their families, churches, and communities, for God calls us to peace (1 Corinthians 7:15). Of course we cannot accept sin or error for the sake of harmony. “We must not purchase peace with the loss of holiness,” and “peace must not be bought with the sale of truth.” But still, believers are required to do everything possible to live at peace with others (Romans 12:18).

“All good Christians ought to be peacemakers; they should not only be peaceable themselves but also make others to be at peace.” As people naturally sew a tear and mend a break, so believers should instinctively try to restore broken relationships. Abraham and Moses both labored for peace (Genesis 13:8; Exodus 2:13), and Jesus Christ “took a long journey from Heaven to earth to make peace.” God’s commitment to peace should serve as a warning for those inclined to break the peace. “If ‘blessed are the peacemakers,’ then cursed are the peacebreakers. If peacemakers are the children of God, then peacebreakers are the children of the devil.”

“Those who have made their peace with God and labor to make peace among brethren, this is the great honor conferred upon them: ‘they shall be called sons of God.’” Those who love peace prove that they truly are the children of God. Though we will still suffer trials in this life, we can take comfort in knowing that God works even painful and disappointing experiences for our good (Romans 8:28). Indeed, even “death works for good to the children of God.”

It is like the whirlwind was to the prophet Elijah, which blew off his mantle but carried him up to Heaven (2 Kings 2:13–14). So death to a child of God is like a boisterous whirlwind that blows off the mantle of his flesh (for the body is but the mantle the soul is wrapped in), but it carries up the soul to God. This is the glorious privilege of the sons of God. Everything that occurs shall do them good.

Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake

We have now come to the last Beatitude: “Blessed are those who are persecuted.” Our Lord Christ would have us consider the cost. “Which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it?” (Luke 14:28). Religion will cost us the tears of repentance and the blood of persecution. But we see here a great encouragement that may keep us from fainting in the day of adversity. For the present, blessed; for the future, crowned.

Godly people anger an ungodly world, for unbelievers instinctively hate and hurt believers. Jesus warned, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20), and the apostle Paul cautioned, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Yet the prospect of suffering cannot deter disciples from following their Lord. “A true saint carries Christ in his heart and the cross on his shoulders.” “Though they be ever so meek, merciful, and pure in heart, their godliness will not shield them from sufferings. They must hang their harp on the willows and take up the cross. The way to Heaven is by way of thorns and blood.”

The ultimate reason Christians are persecuted is that God decrees it in order to purify His people and to distinguish true from false believers. “See how differently afflictions work upon the wicked and godly. They make the one worse, the other better. Take a cloth that is rotten. If you scour and rub it, it frays and tears. But if you scour a piece of silver, it looks brighter.” Therefore the saints cannot interpret suffering as a sign of God’s anger or indifference, because Christ Himself says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted.”

Because Christ’s followers know they will suffer, they should prepare themselves to do so faithfully. Watson himself suffered for the faith and offers several pieces of advice.

Be well skilled in the knowledge of Christ. A man can never die for one he does not know.

Keep a good conscience. If a man’s heart is rotten, he will never stand in a storm of tribulation.

Make the Scripture familiar to you. The Scripture, well digested by meditation, will render a person ready for suffering.

Learn self-denial. Self-denial is the foundation of godliness, and if this is not well laid, the whole building will fall. If there is any lust in our souls that we cannot deny, it will turn at length either to scandal or a falling away from the faith.

Learn patience. Patience is a sweet submission to the will of God whereby we are content to bear anything that He is pleased to lay upon us. Patience makes a Christian invincible. It is like the anvil that bears all strokes.

Keep suffering in perspective. After the saints’ crucifixion follows their coronation. “They shall reign” (Revelation 22:5). The wicked first reign and then suffer. The godly first suffer and then reign. The saints shall have a happy reign. It shall be both peaceable and durable. Who would not swim through blood to this crown?

Appraisal

We all want a blessed life. The Beatitudes are Jesus' classic passage on this subject, and Watson's book is a classic presentation of this passage. His explanations are clear, his illustrations vivid, his applications practical, and his tone pastoral. Watson does not write to entertain or impress but to point out the path to the full and fulfilling life God intends for His people. Watson compares the Beatitudes to steps leading to blessedness, to Jacob's ladder reaching to Heaven, and to the temple stairs that ascended to the Holy of Holies. The first step is recognizing that we are "poor in spirit," having no righteousness of our own and looking to Jesus to save us from Hell. We then "mourn" sin and the misery sin causes, and we look to God for comfort. This awareness of our moral bankruptcy, sinfulness, and dependence upon God makes us "meek" and makes us "hunger and thirst for righteousness." It also makes us "merciful," for we recognize that we have received mercy and continually need mercy. We desire to be "pure in heart" so that we can see God, and we desire to be "peacemakers" so that we can be like Him. Finally, we are willing to be "persecuted for righteousness' sake," knowing that we will most certainly inherit the kingdom of Heaven. The promise of Heaven follows the first and last Beatitudes like beautiful bookends. Watson's presentation of Christ's Beatitudes instructs and inspires us to follow our Lord's path to godliness and blessing.

Connection to Be United in Christ

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Peacemaking is an essential part of a Christian's character and calling, one that demonstrates that he is indeed a child of God. The Father is the God of peace, the Son is the Prince of Peace, and the Holy Spirit produces "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Therefore, all God's children must strive to make and preserve peace. Peacemaking is the Christian's family business.

Indeed, all the Beatitudes have important implications for unity. Christians are united by their shared spiritual poverty and by the grace that makes them rich. They mutually mourn over sin and misery, and they receive a common comfort. The gospel makes them humble so that pride might no longer divide them. Believers united in their pursuit of righteousness enjoy the benefits of becoming more righteous—of becoming more patient, considerate, compassionate, loving, forgiving, and so on. Those who mutually purify their hearts will together share the joy of seeing God. Communities suffering persecution draw closer together for strength and support, and their heavenly reward is to enjoy loving community with God and one another.

Thus, both the duties and the rewards of the Beatitudes help integrate Christians into a common community. Those who obey the Beatitudes serve the same Lord, walk the same path, trust the same promises, and look to the same hope. Those who live according to the Beatitudes of Christ will Be United in Christ.

Key Quotations

“If blessedness does not consist in externals, then let us not place our blessedness in externals... As the angel told Mary concerning Christ, ‘He is not here; for He is risen’ (Matthew 28:6), so I may say of blessedness, ‘It is not here, it is risen; it is in a higher region.’”

“It is not every good that makes a man blessed; it must be the supreme good, and that is God.”

“Spend and be spent for the Lord. Dedicate yourselves to Him by surrendering yourselves to Him and commit yourselves to Him as a way of rejoicing. Never think you can do enough for God who will shortly set you ashore in the land of promise.”

“The graces of the Spirit are like a row of pearls that hang together upon the string of religion and serve to adorn Christ’s bride.”

“Poverty of spirit is the very basis and foundation of all the other graces that follow. You may as well expect fruit to grow without a root as the other graces without this.”

“Sin cannot be little because it is against the Majesty of Heaven... Read the greatness of your sin in the deepness of Christ’s wounds.”

“The invitation of the gospel is free. If a friend invites guests to his table, he does not expect that they should bring money to pay for their dinner but only to come with an appetite.”

“Love is like a friend who visits those who are well. Mercy is like a physician who visits only those who are sick.”

“It is called purity of heart because this is the main thing in religion, and there can be no purity of life without it. A Christian’s great care should be to keep the heart pure, as one would especially preserve the spring from being poisoned.”

“Before men can make peace among others, they must be of peaceable spirits themselves. Before they can be promoters of peace, they must be lovers of peace.”

“If ‘blessed are the peacemakers,’ then cursed are the peacebreakers. If peacemakers are the children of God, then peacebreakers are the children of the devil.”

“See how differently afflictions work upon the wicked and godly. They make the one worse, the other better. Take a cloth that is rotten. If you scour and rub it, it frays and tears. But if you scour a piece of silver, it looks brighter.”

“A true saint carries Christ in his heart and the cross on his shoulders.”

“A Christian may lose his life, but not his reward. He may lose his head, but not his crown.”

“A man who is to wade through deep water fixes his eyes upon the firm land before him. While Christians are wading through the deep waters of persecution, they should fix the eyes of their faith on the land of promise... Those who bear the cross patiently shall wear the crown triumphantly.”

“To render evil for evil is beastly; to render evil for good is devilish; to render good for evil is Christian.”

Key Bible Passages (NASB)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.” **(Matthew 5:3)**

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” **(Matthew 5:4)**

“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.” **(Matthew 5:5)**

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” **(Matthew 5:6)**

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” **(Matthew 5:7)**

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” **(Matthew 5:8)**

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” **(Matthew 5:9)**

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.” **(Matthew 5:10)**

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in Heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” **(Matthew 5:11–12)**

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.” **(Matthew 5:14–16)**

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” **(Matthew 7:21–23)**

“Everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.” **(Matthew 7:24–27)**

“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.” **(Luke 11:28)**

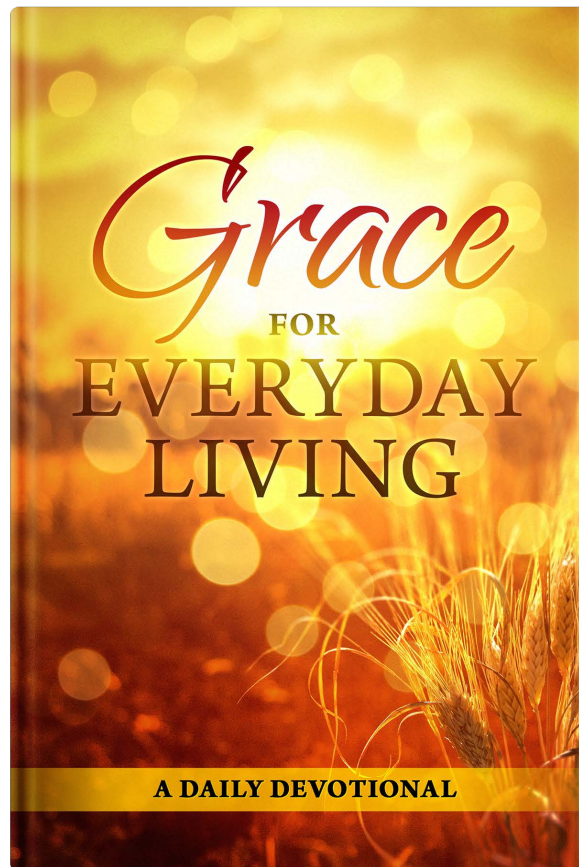
“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” **(Romans 12:18)**

“There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.” **(Revelation 22:3–5)**

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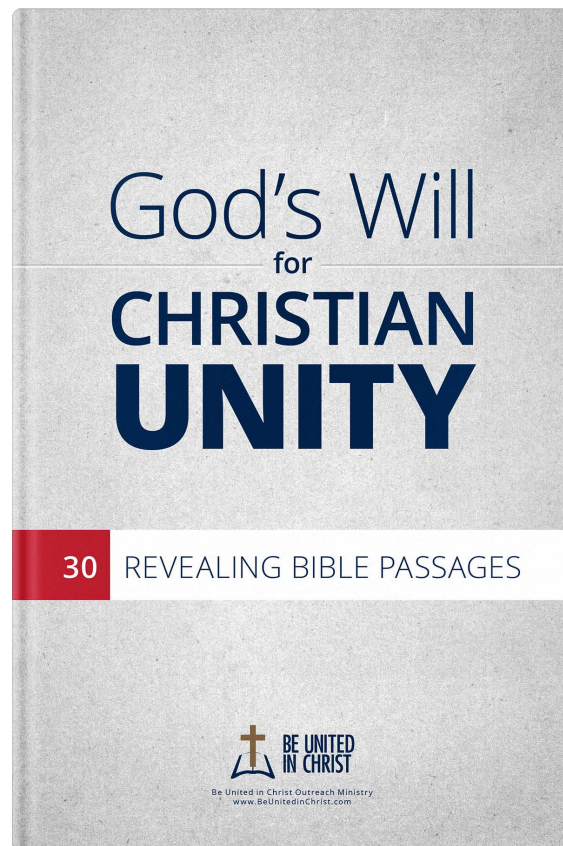
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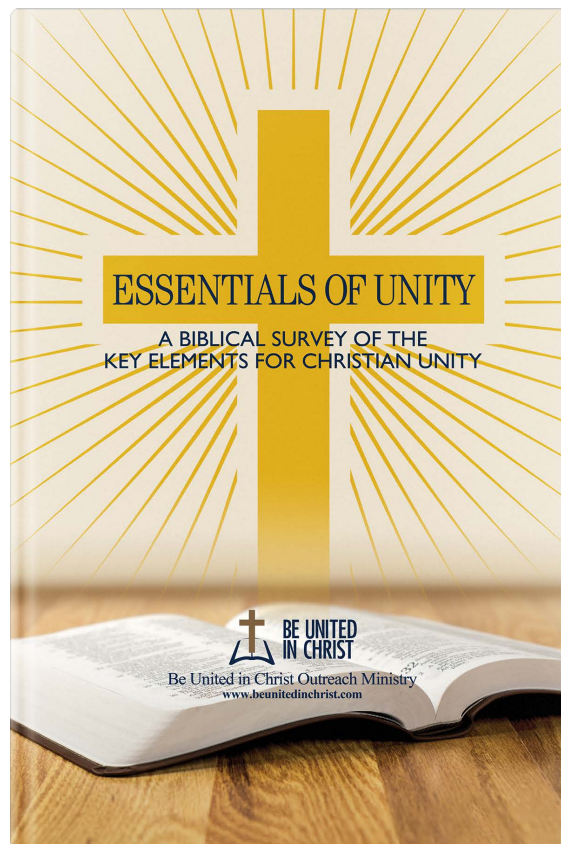
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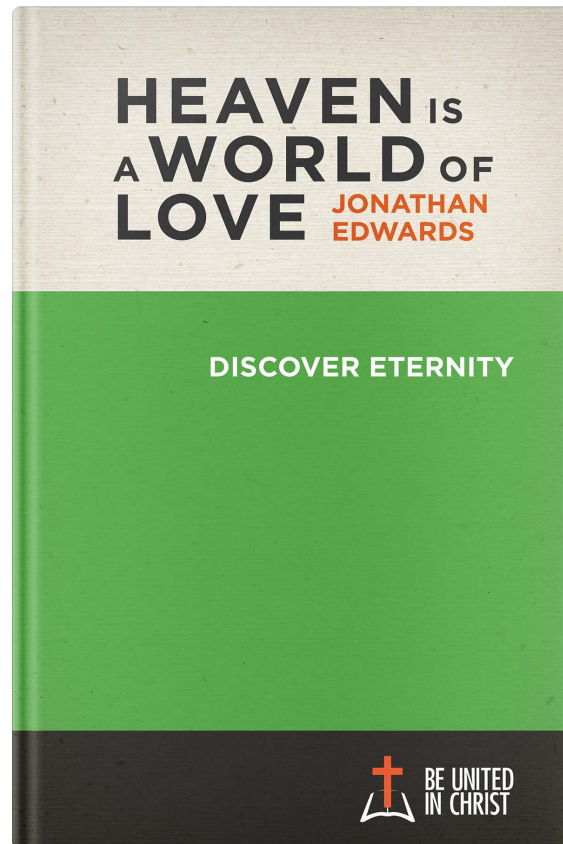
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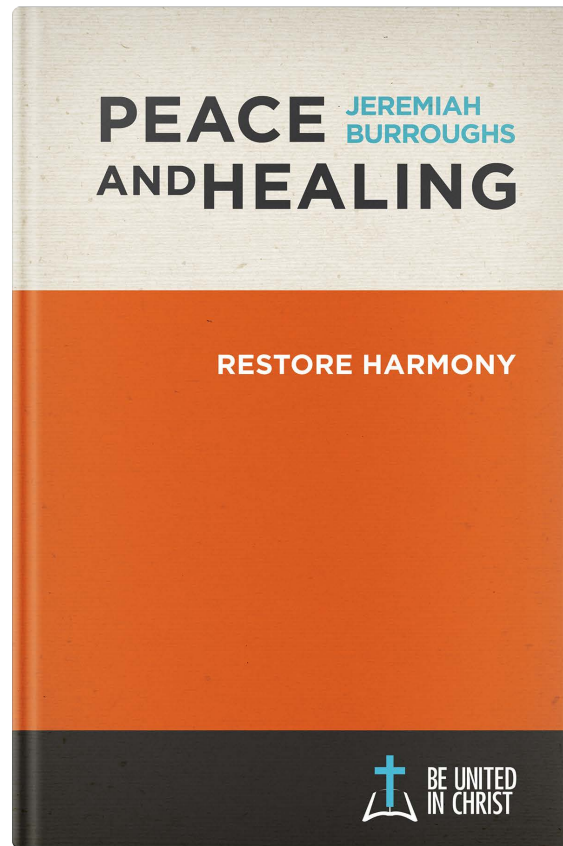
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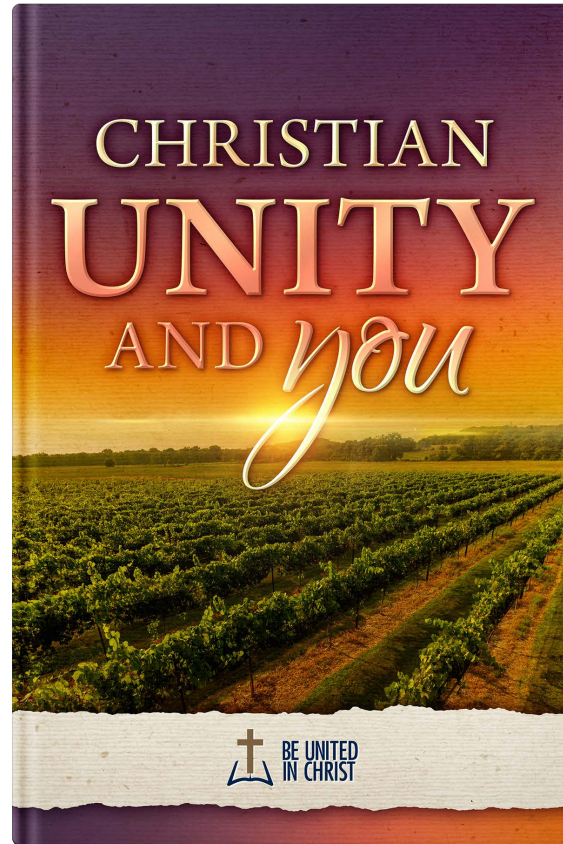
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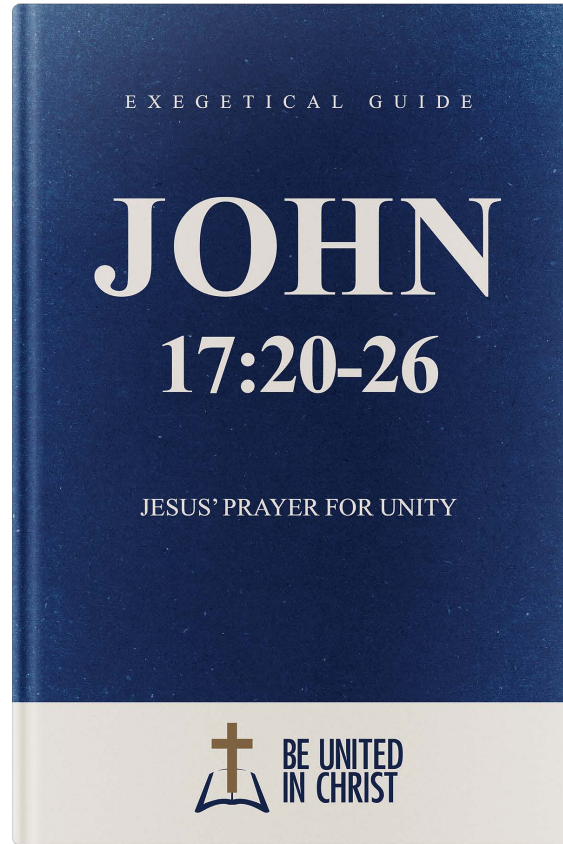
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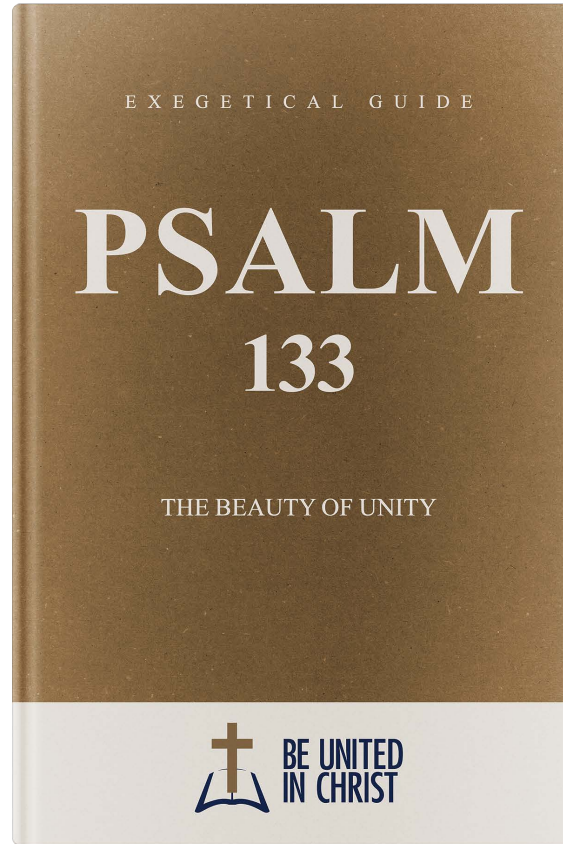
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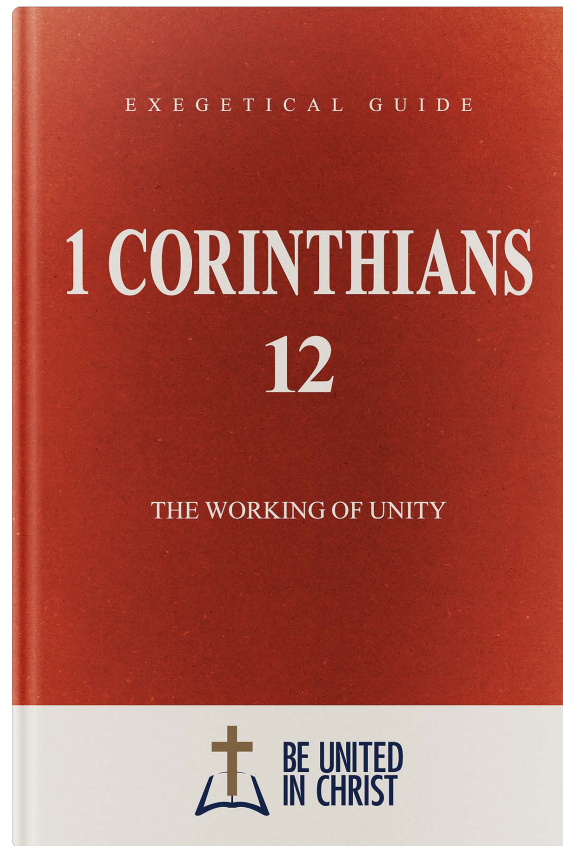
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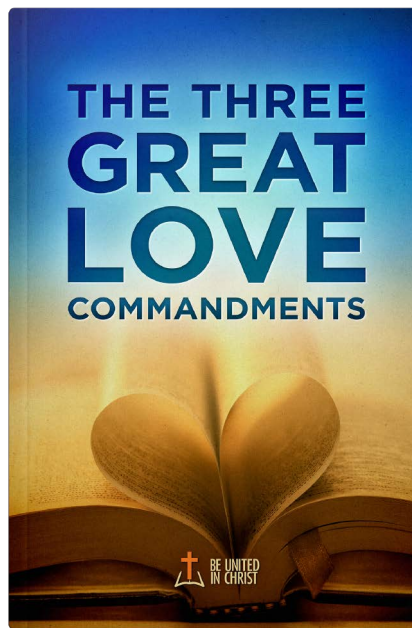
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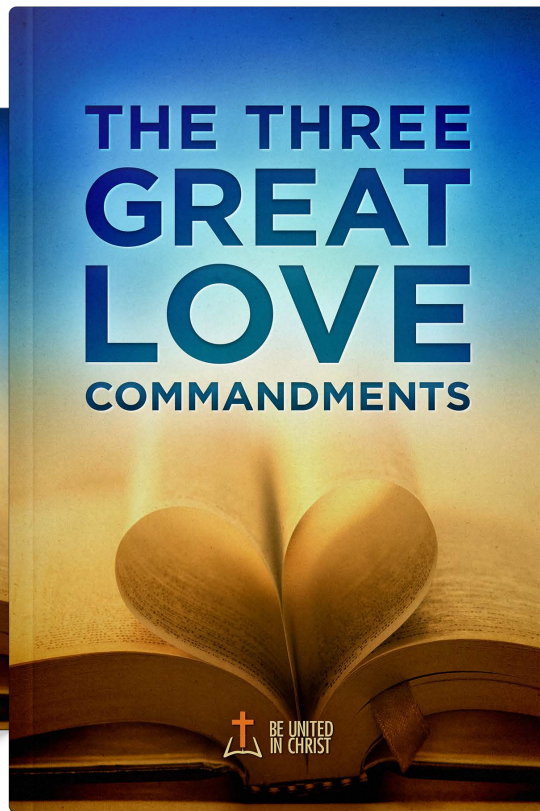
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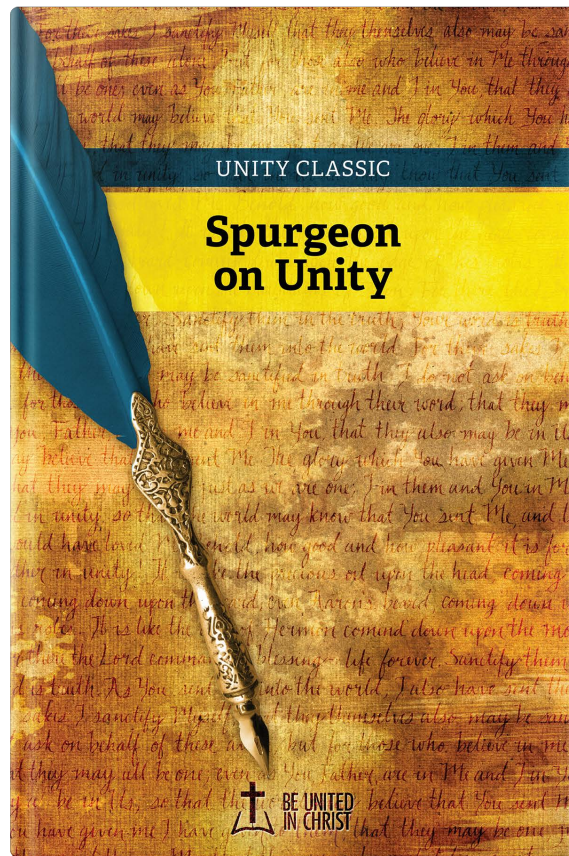
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