

IN RESPONSE - PERFECT BLESSEDNESS: SEVEN BEATITUDES, PART ONE

by Dennis Prutow

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When I pointed out to my congregation there are *seven* beatitudes in the marvelous book of Revelation, there was immediate interest. In another context, a good friend said, "I want to see what you do with them."

We find beatitudes throughout Scripture, especially in the Psalter. Psalm 1:1 counsels, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers." The Psalms teach us the blessings of life with and before God. Psalm 2 reminds us we ought to flee to Christ. "Blessed are all who take refuge in Him" (verse 12). There are twenty-six of these beatitudes in the Psalter.

Since Revelation leans upon Old Testament themes and pictures, we should not be surprised to find several beatitudes in this book. *Seven* comes to the fore immediately. It is the number of perfection or completion. Revelation represents the church universal with seven churches (1:11). There are seven lampstands & seven stars.

As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (1:20).

God commissions messengers, pastors. He places them in churches to proclaim the perfect light of heaven. The church is the light of God in the world. Revelation 3:1 speaks of the seven Spirits of God. God's holy Spirit is perfection.

Now we see *seven* beatitudes. The word blessed or happy is the same word used in the Greek version of the Old Testament and the same word we find in the beatitudes of Matthew 5. Blessed, happy, is the one.... This is not a joy born of earthly pleasure. It is a joy we derive from heaven, from God, only through Jesus Christ. It is a perfect happiness, a perfect blessedness. As a result, I say we are perfectly blessed as we grasp the significance of the seven beatitudes of Revelation and fully act on them.

The first beatitude comes in the introduction of the book. "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which

are written in it" (1:3). This is the overarching theme. To grasp the blessing we must understand the prophecy of Revelation. Those of you who have followed my exposition of the book will recall the primary theme of God's glory. Revelation calls us to come to grips with the glory, greatness and majesty of God. We take heed to the prophecy of this book when we recognize the sovereign God of the universe and realize we are part of His story. Ultimate happiness comes when we bow before the God of history. The tone is set with this beatitude.

My exposition of Revelation follows the recapitulation theory for the book. There are seven cycles in this book. Revelation reviews the period from the first advent to the second coming of Christ seven times from varying perspectives. In each cycle the visions fill in this period of time with ever increasing detail. The visions also shift from emphasis on the early part of the period to the end. Finally, there is increasing emphasis upon the heavenly glory awaiting the saints and the terrible doom prepared for the reprobate. In keeping with this overall viewpoint, the beatitudes of Revelation fall toward the end of sections and for the most part toward the end of the book in the final section. This, I think, emphasizes the heavenly aspect of the hope to which God calls the elect and the eternal doom awaiting those outside of Christ.

The second beatitude is in Revelation 14:13 toward the close of section four encompassing chapters 12-14. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." This section details the warfare between the dragon inspired beast and the people of God. Special blessing comes to those who die in the Lord. They die trusting Christ. They have ultimate happiness. The words *from now on* may refer to the special blessing which comes to believers at death.

We note two things. This beatitude consoles us in the midst of battle and struggle. It tells us the victory belongs to Christ. We may die and pass from this life in the midst of battle. Yet we have great hope as we persevere in the faith. In addition, the beatitude reminds us immedi-

ately that eternal verities take priority over earthly values.

The third beatitude takes us to the end of the next section of the book. Chapters 15 and 16 lay before us an awesome view of judgment, the seven bowls of wrath. "Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame" (16:15). The beatitude reminds us of the need to persevere in the faith if we are going to die in the Lord.

Perseverance requires vigilance. We must stay awake spiritually. Deception comes easily. The immediate context of this beatitude is Armageddon. This battle represents titanic spiritual warfare. We all have our Armageddons. They are decisive spiritual battles that change the course of our lives. In the midst of these significant battles we must keep our spiritual wits about us.

We must be mindful of our need of Christ. Only His righteousness, His garments, suffice as we stand before God. Without Christ's righteousness, we are without hope. We are naked. Without Christ's righteousness we will suffer ultimate shame. With it we have the hope of the resurrection. We have ultimate happiness before God. We join the ranks of heaven to give praise around the throne.

And so beatitude four reminds us, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (19:9). This beatitude comes toward the end of the sixth section of Revelation. Chapters 17 through 19 detail the fall and judgment of Babylon. Babylon is the capital of evil. She is the opposite of New Jerusalem, the center of holiness.

Christ came into this world as a bridegroom. The church is now in an engagement period. Christ will return for His bride. The stage is being set for the wedding. Those who trust Christ, heed His Word and persevere are invited to the wedding of the lamb. This is the greatest invitation a person can ever receive.

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IN RESPONSE - PERFECT BLESSEDNESS: SEVEN BEATITUDES, PART TWO

by Dennis Prutow

Last time we saw beatitude one sets the tone for our discussion. We must heed the prophecy of the book of Revelation. We do so by recognizing the majesty of God. We trust the Christ of God who is the King of history. We persevere in *the* faith made *our* faith by the sovereign God. We realize our privilege in receiving an invitation to the great Wedding Feast of the Lamb. We are blessed.

I hold Revelation has seven sections. It is a perfect and complete review of the history of the New Testament church. Beatitudes two, three and four come toward the end of sections four, five and six respectively. Coming as they do *at the end of these sections*, I think these beatitudes confirm the recapitulation theory of the book.

Beatitudes five, six and seven are in the final section of the book. This too is in keeping with the overall scheme of Revelation. As the last sections of the book deal with our spiritual conflict, the demise of the beast and the judgment of Babylon, they also hold forth our faith, our perseverance and our hope as given in three beatitudes.

The last section of Revelation, chapters 20-22, emphasizes the final consummation and blessing of believers. Everything leads to this. Three of the beatitudes are in this final section to emphasize this final blessing. As the trend in the book is to emphasize final glory, so also the beatitudes. This too seems to me to confirm the seven fold recapitulation theory of interpretation.

Revelation 20:6, "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power." We determined the first resurrection is spiritual resurrection, new birth, regeneration (Ephesians 2:5). The first death is physical death. The second death is spiritual, eternal torment, the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). The second resurrection is therefore physical resurrection. Those who are born again, are blessed in a twofold way. New birth brings new life which issues in the resurrection of the body. This person is also holy, not innately so, but by virtue of union with Christ.

Here we see the progression of the beatitudes. First there is the blessedness

of trusting Christ so as to look forward to death in Christ. Second there is the blessedness of perseverance in the faith, Christ with us in the midst of battle and spiritual conflict. Third there is the blessedness of having the invitation to the wedding feast, of being people marked out by God for consummate communion with Christ. Then the wedding comes, "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power." "This is the second death, the lake of fire. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14-15). Christ comes to claim His bride, the church. The dead are raised incorruptible. "Thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18). We are truly blessed.

In this way the beatitudes bring us to the culmination of earthly history. This is not the end of the story however. We learn by repetition. God constructed us in this way. The sevenfold repetition of Revelation reminds us of this. The beatitudes also repeat the refrain. The conclusion of the book reminds us of the primary purpose with which we began. "Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book" (22:7). Compare Revelation 1:3, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near."

As already said several times, we heed the prophecy of this book by recognizing the majesty, power and grace of God, coming before Him through Christ, the King of history, and bowing before His Majesty. This means our focus in faith and perseverance is preparation for the wedding.

Abraham sent his servant on a mission to procure a wife for his son Isaac (Genesis 24). The servant took an oath to perform this duty. He went to Abraham's homeland. There, guided by God's angel, he met Rebekah. The servant gave Rebekah gifts from father Abraham. He returned with her to present her to son Isaac as his bride.

Every pastor, elder and deacon in the church of Jesus Christ is as sworn ser-

vant of the Father. We are commissioned to enter the world to procure a bride for the Son. We bear the precious gift of the Father, the gospel. Our mission is to prepare the bride for Christ.

Much effort and planning goes into planning a wedding. It can be a daunting and exhausting task for the parents of the bride and for the bride herself. This is but a small picture of the overwhelming task of preparing for the wedding feast of Christ. If earthly weddings are a blessing, the Wedding Feast of the Lamb is ultimate joy and happiness. It is worthy of our life long focus and attention. We take heed to the prophecy of the Book of Revelation if we understand the preeminence of this blessing and prepare for it.

As beatitude six takes us back to the beginning of Revelation, beatitude seven at once takes us back to the beginning of the Bible, to Genesis, and forward to the beatific vision in heaven.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city (22:14). Those who wash their robes are sinners who mourn their lost condition and come to Christ to receive His righteousness. It is only clothed in Christ's righteousness that we may come to the tree of life and eat. Here, our saved, cleansed and sanctified condition is confirmed for eternity. Adam and Eve were barred from the tree of life because of their sin. The saved of Christ have free access to the Garden of Glory and the tree of everlasting felicity.

The city is New Jerusalem, the glorious dwelling place of God. Those wearing the pristine robes of Christ's righteousness enter by the gate of Christ into The City. They are the sheep of God. They find their comfort, peace and rest in God's presence. Restoration is accomplished. Reunion and communion with God through Christ is complete. The battles are over. The book of history is open. The trumpets have sounded. The vials are poured out. We are perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity (WSC, Answer 38).

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IN RESPONSE - ARISTOTLE AND CALVIN

by Dennis Prutow

Not long ago, a friend accused me, point blank, of abandoning the Reformed Faith. How so? I was leaning away from presuppositional apologetics. This, my friend intimated, is a move *away* from the Bible, *away* from the sovereign God, *away* from the Reformed faith and ultimately *away* from Christianity.

This indictment came with a caveat. Use of the categories of apostate thought entangle me in a compromise with the world. Examples would be the use of Aristotle or Aquinas. I thought of this criticism when a friend sent me an article declaring presuppositionalism as the apologetic of John Calvin.¹ Was Calvin a self-conscious presuppositionalist?

Calvin was not a fan of Aristotle. He references the Greek nine times by name in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Mostly, Calvin refers to the foolish Aristotle. Calvin commends the Greek only once. Would Calvin dare to use the categories developed by Aristotle to assist him in expounding the Scriptures?

I offer an example here. It is the example of Aristotle's views on causality. We often speak of proximate and ultimate causes. Aristotle speaks of four levels of causality.

Causality, in philosophy, [is the] relationship of a cause to its effect. The Greek philosopher Aristotle enumerated four different kinds of causes: the material, the formal, the efficient, and the final. The material cause is what anything is made of—for example, brass or marble is the material cause of a given statue. The formal cause is the form, type, or pattern according to which anything is made; thus, the style of architecture would be the formal cause of a house. The efficient cause is the immediate power acting to produce the work, such as the manual energy of the laborers. The final cause is the end or motive for the sake of which the work is produced—that is, the pleasure of the owner. The principles that Aristotle outlined formed the basis of the modern scientific concept that specific

stimuli will produce standard results under controlled conditions.²

Calvin uses this analysis of cause to discuss our salvation. Ephesians 1: 5 and 6 speaks about God the Father, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will to the praise of the glory of His grace”

Calvin says of this text.

Three causes of our salvation are mentioned in this clause, and a fourth is shortly afterward added. The efficient cause is the good pleasure of the will of God; the material cause is Christ; the final cause is the praise of His grace.³

This is Aristotle. *Calvin does not hesitate to use the categories of Aristotle to help us understand God.*

Calvin goes on,

To the first belongs this whole context. God has predestinated us in Himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.... Hence the cause of our salvation did not proceed from us but from God alone.⁴

This is the efficient cause of our salvation. “The efficient cause is the immediate power acting to produce the work, such as the manual energy of the laborers.” The efficient cause of our salvation is therefore the predestinating work of God. “God did not seek a cause outside of Himself, but predestinated us because such was His will.”⁵

Calvin then says,

The material cause, both of eternal election, and the love which is now revealed, is Christ, whom he names *the Beloved*, to tell us that by Him the love of God is poured out to us.⁶ “The material cause is what anything is made of—for example, brass or marble is the material cause of a given statue.” The

material of which God fashions our salvation is the incarnate Christ.

“The final cause is the end or motive for the sake of which the work is produced—that is, the pleasure of the owner.” Calvin therefore says,

The highest and last purpose is immediately added, the glorious praise of such abundant grace. Every man, therefore, who hides this glory, is endeavoring to overturn the everlasting purpose of God.⁷

We say, Amen!

How does this glorious salvation come to us? It is the formal cause. Ephesians 1:8-9, “In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will.”

He [Paul] now comes to the formal cause, the preaching of the Gospel, by which the goodness of God flows out to us.... He gives to the Gospel the titles of *wisdom and prudence*, so that the Ephesians may despise all contrary doctrines.⁸

“The formal cause is the form, type, or pattern according to which anything is made; thus, the style of architecture would be the formal cause of a house.”

Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “See,” He says, “that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain” (Hebrews 8:5).

God gives the pattern of truth in Scripture. We must preach Scripture. We must preach the gospel. Men and women will not be saved without this preaching. It is the formal cause of our salvation, according to Calvin.

Is Calvin's use of Aristotle apostasy? I do not think so. I also think it is presumptuous for Reformed pastors to accuse their fellow pastors of apostasy when they follow Calvin in the proper use of Aristotle or Aquinas. At least do not tell them they are not Calvinists.

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⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 128

² “Causality,” Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c) 1994 Microsoft Corporation. Copyright (c) 1994 Funk & Wagnall's Corporation.

³ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, Torrance and Torrence, Editors (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 11, p. 126.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 127

⁶ *Ibid.*

¹ Robert R. Booth, “Of Taste Buds: Calvin's Apologetic,” *Penpoint*, November 1996.

IN RESPONSE - NAKED REASON? NEVER!

by Dennis Prutow

Along with many of you, I received some unsolicited e-mail advertising an apologetics conference in Maryland. My interest was peaked. As I read the announcement, I found those committed to classic apologetics were misrepresented, slandered actually, by inferring they are rationalists.

The advertisement indicates those taking the classic approach to apologetics need to “stop rationalizing.” The ad further states these apologists think,

the existence of God can be proven on rational grounds—that man can reason to the existence of God using the naked intellect, instead of the only solid and immovable foundation—the Word of God found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Note how the announcement describes the rational ground: “man can reason to the existence of God using the naked intellect.” This *is* rationalism. It is the rejection of revelation. This rational ground opposes “the only solid and immovable foundation—the Word of God found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.” If the accusation is true, it is devastating.

However, the allegation is a slanderous misrepresentation. Those holding to a classic approach to apologetics are not rationalists by definition. Here are two dictionary meanings for rationalism.

in *philosophy*, the theory that the reason, or intellect, is the true source of knowledge rather than the senses. In *theology*, the doctrine that rejects revelation and the supernatural, and makes reason the sole source of knowledge.¹

Plainly, rationalism in philosophy and theology declares reason or intellect is the *sole*, exclusive, source of knowledge.

The accusation comes in connection with so-called natural theology. Natural theology is the product of naked reason. Is this allegation true? Absolutely not. Listen to modern proponents of classic apologetics, Sproul, Gerstner and Lindsley. I quote at length. Read carefully. Note how these authors go to great length to show that natural theology does

not spring from naked reason. Note how they emphasize the necessary connection between natural theology and God’s revelation of Himself in creation.

Simply stated, natural theology refers to knowledge of God acquired through nature. Classically, natural theology does not stand in contradistinction to divine revelation nor does it exclude divine revelation. In fact, natural theology is *dependent* upon divine revelation for its content.... Christian approaches to natural theology are established upon the foundation of a prior divine revelation. For the Christian, natural theology does not mean that humans, in their natural state, have the intrinsic ability to rise to a knowledge of God by the sheer force of intellect unaided by divine revelation....

Natural theology, then, is dependent upon prior revelation or self-disclosure from God. This prior revelation is revelation in nature. Natural theology refers to a knowledge of God acquired from God’s revelation of Himself in nature. This revelation is sometimes called *natural revelation* but is more frequently referred to as *general revelation*. There is a crucial difference between natural (general) *revelation* and natural *theology*. Natural revelation refers to an activity of God. Natural theology refers to a human activity. Natural revelation is objective in the sense that it exists independent of human activity. Natural theology is subjective (though not subjectivistic), in the sense that it involves the human subject’s apprehension and appropriation of natural revelation. Thus, natural theology may be defined as human knowledge derived from God’s natural revelation.

Though natural revelation and natural theology may and must be *distinguished*, they must never be *separated*. This distinction is crucial to our evaluation of natural theology. They must not be separated precisely because natural theology is dependent upon natural revelation. To separate them is to move from rationality to rationalism, from natural theology

to naturalism, from Christianity to secularism.²

Beyond doubt, natural theology is an understanding of God derived from God’s revelation of Himself in creation. Biblical theology and systematic theology arise out of an interaction with Scripture, special revelation. In like manner, natural theology arises out of an interaction with creation, general revelation. This is not rationalism.

Biblical theology and systematic theology are rational in their approach to God’s revelation in Scripture. Natural theology is rational in its approach to God’s revelation in creation. Rationalism is the theory that all knowledge arises from the naked intellect. There is no interaction with God’s revelation. Rationalism repudiates revelation. In the cases of biblical theology and systematic theology on one hand and natural theology on the other hand the theology is derived from revelation not naked reason.

Here is the crucial indictment: *man can reason to the existence of God using the naked intellect*. Is this really the position of those who hold to the legitimate existence of natural theology?

[N]atural theology does not mean that humans, in their natural state, have the intrinsic ability to rise to a knowledge of God by the sheer force of intellect unaided by divine revelation....

Here is a repudiation of the allegation. On what basis? Human beings can know God only as He reveals Himself. How does God reveal Himself? God reveals Himself in two great books. They are creation and Scripture. They are general revelation and special revelation. Human beings in their natural state have no intrinsic ability to rise to a knowledge of God without revelation. Those who hold to the existence and legitimacy of natural theology are not rationalists as alleged.

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¹ Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition.

² R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley, Classic Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1984), pp. 25-26.