

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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OF THE BEATITUDES (FOUR ARTICLES)

We must now consider the beatitudes: under which head there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether the beatitudes differ from the gifts and virtues?
 - (2) Of the rewards of the beatitudes: whether they refer to this life?
 - (3) Of the number of the beatitudes;
 - (4) Of the fittingness of the rewards ascribed to the beatitudes.
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Whether the beatitudes differ from the virtues and gifts?

Objection 1: It would seem that the beatitudes do not differ from the virtues and gifts. For Augustine (De Serm. Dom. in Monte i, 4) assigns the beatitudes recited by Matthew (v 3, seqq.) to the gifts of the Holy Ghost; and Ambrose in his commentary on Luke 6:20, seqq., ascribes the beatitudes mentioned there, to the four cardinal virtues. Therefore the beatitudes do not differ from the virtues and gifts.

Objection 2: Further, there are but two rules of the human will: the reason and the eternal law, as stated above ([Question \[19\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#); [Question \[21\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)). Now the virtues perfect man in relation to reason; while the gifts perfect him in relation to the eternal law of the Holy Ghost, as is clear from what has been said ([Question \[68\]](#), [Articles \[1\], 3](#), seqq.).

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [FS](#) » [FS069.html](#)les the virtues and gifts. Therefore the beatitudes do not differ from them.

Objection 3: Further, among the beatitudes are included meekness, justice, and mercy, which are said to be virtues. Therefore the beatitudes do not differ from the virtues and gifts.

On the contrary, Certain things are included among the beatitudes, that are neither virtues nor gifts, e.g. poverty, mourning, and peace. Therefore the beatitudes differ from the virtues and gifts.

I answer that, As stated above ([Question \[2\]](#), [Article \[7\]](#); [Question \[3\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)), happiness is the last end of human life. Now one is said to possess the end already, when one hopes to possess it; wherefore the Philosopher says (Ethic. i, 9) that "children are said to be happy because they are full of hope"; and the Apostle says ([Rm. 8:24](#)): "We are saved by hope." Again, we hope to obtain an end, because we are suitably moved towards that end, and approach thereto; and this implies some action. And a man is moved towards, and approaches the happy end by works of virtue, and above all by the works of the gifts, if we speak of eternal happiness, for which our reason is not sufficient, since we need to be moved by the Holy Ghost, and to be perfected with His gifts that we may obey and follow him. Consequently the beatitudes differ from the virtues and gifts, not as habit, but as act from habit.

Reply to Objection 1: Augustine and Ambrose assign the beatitudes to the gifts and virtues, as acts are ascribed to habits. But the gifts are more excellent than the cardinal virtues, as stated above ([Question \[68\]](#), [Article \[8\]](#)). Wherefore Ambrose, in explaining the beatitudes propounded to the throng, assigns them to the cardinal virtues, whereas Augustine, who is explaining the beatitudes delivered to the disciples on the mountain, and so to those who were more perfect, ascribes them to the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Reply to Objection 2: This argument proves that no other habits, besides the virtues and gifts, rectify human conduct.

Reply to Objection 3: Meekness is to be taken as denoting the act of meekness: and the same applies to justice and mercy. And though these might seem to be virtues, they are nevertheless ascribed to gifts, because the gifts perfect man in all matters wherein the virtues perfect him, as stated above ([Question \[68\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#)).

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Whether the rewards assigned to the beatitudes refer to this life?

Objection 1: It would seem that the rewards assigned to the beatitudes do not refer to this life. Because some are said to be happy because they hope for a reward, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)). Now the object of hope is future happiness. Therefore these rewards refer to the life to come.

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6:25, where we read: "Woe to you that are filled; for you shall hunger. Woe to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep." Now these punishments do not refer to this life, because frequently men are not punished in this life, according to Job 21:13: "They spend their days in wealth." Therefore neither do the rewards of the beatitudes refer to this life.

Objection 3: Further, the kingdom of heaven which is set down as the reward of poverty is the happiness of heaven, as Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix) [*Cf. De Serm. Dom. in Monte i, 1]. Again, abundant fullness is not to be had save in the life to come, according to Ps. 16:15: "I shall be filled [Douay: 'satisfied'] when Thy glory shall appear." Again, it is only in the future life that we shall see God, and that our Divine sonship will be made manifest, according to 1 Jn. 3:2: "We are now the sons of God; and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is." Therefore these rewards refer to the future life.

On the contrary, Augustine says (De Serm. Dom. in Monte i, 4): "These promises can be fulfilled in this life, as we believe them to have been fulfilled in the apostles. For no words can express that complete change into the likeness even of an angel, which is promised to us after this life."

I answer that, Expounders of Holy Writ are not agreed in speaking of these rewards. For some, with Ambrose (Super Luc. v), hold that all these rewards refer to the life to come; while Augustine (De Serm. Dom. in Monte i, 4) holds them to refer to the present life; and Chrysostom in his homilies (In Matth. xv) says that some refer to the future, and some to the present life.

In order to make the matter clear we must take note that hope of future happiness may be in us for two reasons. First, by reason of our having a preparation for, or a disposition to future happiness; and this is by way of merit; secondly, by a kind of imperfect inchoation of future happiness in holy men, even in this life. For it is one thing to hope that the tree will bear fruit, when the leaves begin to appear, and another, when we see the first signs of the fruit.

Accordingly, those things which are set down as merits in the beatitudes, are a kind of preparation for, or disposition to happiness, either perfect or inchoate: while those that are assigned as rewards, may be either perfect happiness, so as to refer to the future life, or some beginning of happiness, such as is found in those who have attained perfection, in which case they refer to the present life. Because when a man begins to make progress in the acts of the virtues and gifts, it is to be hoped that he will arrive at perfection, both as a wayfarer, and as a citizen of the heavenly kingdom.

Reply to Objection 1: Hope regards future happiness as the last end: yet it may also regard the assistance of grace as that which leads to that end, according to Ps. 27:7: "In Him hath my heart hoped, and I have been helped."

Reply to Objection 2: Although sometimes the wicked do not undergo temporal punishment in this life, yet they suffer spiritual punishment. Hence Augustine says (Confess. i): "Thou hast decreed, and it is so, Lord--that the disordered mind should be its own punishment." The Philosopher, too, says of the wicked (Ethic. ix, 4) that "their soul is divided against itself... one part pulls this way, another that"; and afterwards he concludes, saying: "If wickedness makes a man so miserable, he should strain every nerve to avoid vice." In like manner, although, on the other hand, the good sometimes do not receive material rewards in this life, yet they never lack spiritual rewards, even in this life, according to Mt. 19:29, and Mk. 10:30: "Ye shall receive a hundred times as much" even "in this time."

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meanwhile they are, in a manner, begun, even in this life. Because the "kingdom of heaven," as Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xiv; *Cf. De Serm. Dom. in Monte, i, 1), can denote the beginning of perfect wisdom, in so far as "the spirit" begins to reign in men. The "possession" of the land denotes the well-ordered affections of the soul that rests, by its desire, on the solid foundation of the eternal inheritance, signified by "the land." They are "comforted" in this life, by receiving the Holy Ghost, Who is called the "Paraclete," i.e. the Comforter. They "have their fill," even in this life, of that food of which Our Lord said ([Jn. 4:34](#)): "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me." Again, in this life, men "obtain" God's "Mercy." Again, the eye being cleansed by the gift of understanding, we can, so to speak, "see God." Likewise, in this life, those who are the "peacemakers" of their own movements, approach to likeness to God, and are called "the children of God." Nevertheless these things will be more perfectly fulfilled in heaven.

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Whether the beatitudes are suitably enumerated?

Objection 1: It would seem that the beatitudes are unsuitably enumerated. For the beatitudes are assigned to the gifts, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#), ad 1). Now some of the gifts, viz. wisdom and understanding, belong to the contemplative life: yet no beatitude is assigned to the act of contemplation, for all are assigned to matters connected with the active life. Therefore the beatitudes are insufficiently enumerated.

Objection 2: Further, not only do the executive gifts belong to the active life, but also some of the directive gifts, e.g. knowledge and counsel: yet none of the beatitudes seems to be directly connected with the acts of knowledge or counsel. Therefore the beatitudes are insufficiently indicated.

Objection 3: Further, among the executive gifts connected with the active life, fear is said to be connected with poverty, while piety seems to correspond to the beatitude of mercy: yet nothing is included directly connected with justice. Therefore the beatitudes are insufficiently enumerated.

Objection 4: Further, many other beatitudes are mentioned in Holy Writ. Thus, it is written ([Job 5:17](#)): "Blessed is the man whom God correcteth"; and ([Ps. i, 1](#)): "Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly"; and ([Prov. 3:13](#)): "Blessed is the man that findeth wisdom." Therefore the beatitudes are insufficiently enumerated.

Objection 5: On the other hand, it seems that too many are mentioned. For there are seven gifts of the Holy Ghost: whereas eight beatitudes are indicated.

Objection 6: Further, only four beatitudes are indicated in the sixth chapter of Luke. Therefore the seven or eight mentioned in Matthew 5 are too many.

be observed that beatitude has been held to consist in one of three things: for some have ascribed it to a sensual life, some, to an active life, and some, to a contemplative life [*See Question [3]]. Now these three kinds of happiness stand in different relations to future beatitude, by hoping for which we are said to be happy. Because sensual happiness, being false and contrary to reason, is an obstacle to future beatitude; while happiness of the active life is a disposition of future beatitude; and contemplative happiness, if perfect, is the very essence of future beatitude, and, if imperfect, is a beginning thereof.

And so Our Lord, in the first place, indicated certain beatitudes as removing the obstacle of sensual happiness. For a life of pleasure consists of two things. First, in the affluence of external goods, whether riches or honors; from which man is withdrawn---by a virtue so that he uses them in moderation---and by a gift, in a more excellent way, so that he despises them altogether. Hence the first beatitude is: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," which may refer either to the contempt of riches, or to the contempt of honors, which results from humility. Secondly, the sensual life consists in following the bent of one's passions, whether irascible or concupiscible. From following the irascible passions man is withdrawn---by a virtue, so that they are kept within the bounds appointed by the ruling of reason---and by a gift, in a more excellent manner, so that man, according to God's will, is altogether undisturbed by them: hence the second beatitude is: "Blessed are the meek." From following the concupiscible passions, man is withdrawn---by a virtue, so that man uses these passions in moderation---and by gift, so that, if necessary, he casts them aside altogether; nay more, so that, if need be, he makes a deliberate choice of sorrow [*Cf. Question [35], Article [3]]; hence the third beatitude is: "Blessed are they that mourn."

Active life consists chiefly in man's relations with his neighbor, either by way of duty or by way of spontaneous gratuity. To the former we are disposed---by a virtue, so that we do not refuse to do our duty to our neighbor, which pertains to justice---and by a gift, so that we do the same much more heartily, by accomplishing works of justice with an ardent desire, even as a hungry and thirsty man eats and drinks with eager appetite. Hence the fourth beatitude is: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice." With regard to spontaneous favors we are perfected---by a virtue, so that we give where reason dictates we should give, e.g. to our friends or others united to us; which pertains to the virtue of liberality--and by a gift, so that, through reverence for God, we consider only the needs of those on whom we bestow our gratuitous bounty: hence it is written ([Lk. 14:12,13](#)): "When thou makest a dinner or supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren," etc... "but... call the poor, the maimed," etc.; which, properly, is to have mercy: hence the fifth beatitude is: "Blessed are the merciful."

Those things which concern the contemplative life, are either final beatitude itself, or some beginning thereof: wherefore they are included in the beatitudes, not as merits, but as rewards. Yet the effects of the active life, which dispose man for the contemplative life, are included in the beatitudes. Now the effect of the active life, as regards those virtues and gifts whereby man is perfected in himself, is the cleansing of man's heart, so that it is not defiled by the passions: hence the sixth beatitude is: "Blessed are the clean of heart." But as regards the virtues and gifts whereby man is perfected in relation to his neighbor, the effect of the active life is peace, according to Is. 32:17: "The work of justice shall be peace": hence the seventh beatitude is "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Reply to Objection 1: The acts of the gifts which belong to the active life are indicated in the merits: but the acts of the gifts pertaining to the contemplative life are indicated in the rewards, for the reason given above. Because to "see God" corresponds to the gift of

Reply to Objection 2: In things pertaining to the active life, knowledge is not sought for its own sake, but for the sake of operation, as even the Philosopher states (Ethic. ii, 2). And therefore, since beatitude implies something ultimate, the beatitudes do not include the acts of those gifts which direct man in the active life, such acts, to wit, as are elicited by those gifts, as, e.g. to counsel is the act of counsel, and to judge, the act of knowledge: but, on the other hand, they include those operative acts of which the gifts have the direction, as, e.g. mourning in respect of knowledge, and mercy in respect of counsel.

Reply to Objection 3: In applying the beatitudes to the gifts we may consider two things. One is likeness of matter. In this way all the first five beatitudes may be assigned to knowledge and counsel as to their directing principles: whereas they must be distributed among the executive gifts: so that, to wit, hunger and thirst for justice, and mercy too, correspond to piety, which perfects man in his relations to others; meekness to fortitude, for Ambrose says on Lk. 6:22: "It is the business of fortitude to conquer anger, and to curb indignation," fortitude being about the irascible passions: poverty and mourning to the gift of fear, whereby man withdraws from the lusts and pleasures of the world.

Secondly, we may consider the motives of the beatitudes: and, in this way, some of them will have to be assigned differently. Because the principal motive for meekness is reverence for God, which belongs to piety. The chief motive for mourning is knowledge, whereby man knows his failings and those of worldly things, according to Eccles. 1:18: "He that addeth knowledge, addeth also sorrow [Vulg: labor]." The principal motive for hungering after the works of justice is fortitude of the soul: and the chief motive for being merciful is God's counsel, according to Dan. 4:24: "Let my counsel be acceptable to the king [Vulg: to thee, O king]: and redeem thou thy sins with alms, and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor." It is thus that Augustine assigns them (De Serm. Dom. in Monte i, 4).

Reply to Objection 4: All the beatitudes mentioned in Holy Writ must be reduced to these, either as to the merits or as to the rewards: because they must all belong either to the active or to the contemplative life. Accordingly, when we read, "Blessed is the man whom the Lord correcteth," we must refer this to the beatitude of mourning: when we read, "Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly," we must refer it to cleanness of heart: and when we read, "Blessed is the man that findeth wisdom," this must be referred to the reward of the seventh beatitude. The same applies to all others that can be adduced.

Reply to Objection 5: The eighth beatitude is a confirmation and declaration of all those that precede. Because from the very fact that a man is confirmed in poverty of spirit, meekness, and the rest, it follows that no persecution will induce him to renounce them. Hence the eighth beatitude corresponds, in a way, to all the preceding seven.

Reply to Objection 6: Luke relates Our Lord's sermon as addressed to the multitude ([Lk. 6:17](#)). Hence he sets down the beatitudes according to the capacity of the multitude, who know no other happiness than pleasure, temporal and earthly: wherefore by these four beatitudes Our Lord excludes four things which seem to belong to such happiness. The first of these is abundance of external goods, which he sets aside by saying: "Blessed are ye poor." The second is that man be well off as to his body, in food and drink, and so forth; this he excludes by saying in the second place: "Blessed are ye that hunger." The third is that it should be well with man as to joyfulness of heart, and this he puts aside by saying: "Blessed are ye that weep now." The fourth is the outward favor of man; and this he excludes, saying, fourthly: "Blessed shall

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temperance, which is unmoved by delights; hunger, to justice, since who hungers is
compassionate and, through compassion gives; mourning, to prudence, which deplores
perishable things; endurance of men's hatred belongs to fortitude."

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Whether the rewards of the beatitudes are suitably enumerated?

Objection 1: It would seem that the rewards of the beatitudes are unsuitably enumerated. Because the kingdom of heaven, which is eternal life, contains all good things. Therefore, once given the kingdom of heaven, no other rewards should be mentioned.

Objection 2: Further, the kingdom of heaven is assigned as the reward, both of the first and of the eighth beatitude. Therefore, on the same ground it should have been assigned to all.

Objection 3: Further, the beatitudes are arranged in the ascending order, as Augustine remarks (De Serm. Dom. in Monte i, 4): whereas the rewards seem to be placed in the descending order, since to "possess the land" is less than to possess "the kingdom of heaven." Therefore these rewards are unsuitably enumerated.

On the contrary, stands the authority of Our Lord Who propounded these rewards.

I answer that, These rewards are most suitably assigned, considering the nature of the beatitudes in relation to the three kinds of happiness indicated above ([Article \[3\]](#)). For the first three beatitudes concerned the withdrawal of man from those things in which sensual happiness consists: which happiness man desires by seeking the object of his natural desire, not where he should seek it, viz. in God, but in temporal and perishable things. Wherefore the rewards of the first three beatitudes correspond to these things which some men seek to find in earthly happiness. For men seek in external things, viz. riches and honors, a certain excellence and abundance, both of which are implied in the kingdom of heaven, whereby man attains to excellence and abundance of good things in God. Hence Our Lord promised the kingdom of heaven to the poor in spirit. Again, cruel and pitiless men seek by wrangling and fighting to destroy their enemies so as to gain security for themselves. Hence Our Lord promised the meek a secure and peaceful possession of the land of the living, whereby the solid reality of eternal goods is denoted. Again, men seek consolation for the toils of the present life, in the lusts and pleasures of the world. Hence Our Lord promises comfort to those that mourn.

Two other beatitudes belong to the works of active happiness, which are the works of virtues directing man in his relations to his neighbor: from which operations some men withdraw through inordinate love of their own good. Hence Our Lord assigns to these beatitudes rewards in correspondence with the motives for which men recede from them. For there are some who recede from acts of justice, and instead of rendering what is due, lay hands on what is not theirs, that they may abound in temporal goods. Wherefore Our Lord promised those

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mercy, lest they be busied with other people's misery. Hence Our Lord promised the merciful that they should obtain mercy, and be delivered from all misery.

The last two beatitudes belong to contemplative happiness or beatitude: hence the rewards are assigned in correspondence with the dispositions included in the merit. For cleanness of the eye disposes one to see clearly: hence the clean of heart are promised that they shall see God. Again, to make peace either in oneself or among others, shows a man to be a follower of God, Who is the God of unity and peace. Hence, as a reward, he is promised the glory of the Divine sonship, consisting in perfect union with God through consummate wisdom.

Reply to Objection 1: As Chrysostom says (Hom. xv in Matth.), all these rewards are one in reality, viz. eternal happiness, which the human intellect cannot grasp. Hence it was necessary to describe it by means of various boons known to us, while observing due proportion to the merits to which those rewards are assigned.

Reply to Objection 2: Just as the eighth beatitude is a confirmation of all the beatitudes, so it deserves all the rewards of the beatitudes. Hence it returns to the first, that we may understand all the other rewards to be attributed to it in consequence. Or else, according to Ambrose (Super Luc. v), the kingdom of heaven is promised to the poor in spirit, as regards the glory of the soul; but to those who suffer persecution in their bodies, it is promised as regards the glory of the body.

Reply to Objection 3: The rewards are also arranged in ascending order. For it is more to possess the land of the heavenly kingdom than simply to have it: since we have many things without possessing them firmly and peacefully. Again, it is more to be comforted in the kingdom than to have and possess it, for there are many things the possession of which is accompanied by sorrow. Again, it is more to have one's fill than simply to be comforted, because fulness implies abundance of comfort. And mercy surpasses satiety, for thereby man receives more than he merited or was able to desire. And yet more is it to see God, even as he is a greater man who not only dines at court, but also sees the king's countenance. Lastly, the highest place in the royal palace belongs to the king's son.