

Russell Kelfer

God's Truth About Success

540-B

Series: The Beatitudes

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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The issue we have been studying is double-mindedness, which is spiritual adultery and falling in love with the world's philosophy. In James 4:8 we have seen that we are adulterers and adulteresses. Friendship with this world is, in essence, enmity with God. We have been looking at the lies that Satan tells to draw us away from our basic convictions. A conviction is a principle from the Word of God that we would rather die for than repudiate. The problem is that, by and large, the church has lost its convictions. We are being, as James puts it, "*driven by the waves and tossed, double-minded and unstable in all our ways*".

Lie #1- Satan has told and is telling us the lie that man is basically, innately good. His goal is to deny the need for the cross. Man is not basically good. Man is basically a sinner. He is a sinner by birth and a sinner by choice. The Scripture says very simply and plainly that there is a solution: you must be born again.

Lie #2- Satan has told us and continues to tell us is that man is his own authority. Thus, science can define truth. Education can teach truth. Philosophy can interpret truth. Psychology can apply truth. History can confirm truth. But, this is all a lie, because all of them teach that there is no real truth. Satan's goal is to avoid the reality that God alone is truth, and apart from Him, there is no truth.

Lie #3- Satan tells us is that man can do whatever he sets his mind to. This, of course, was to discredit the power of God by replacing dependence and faith with self-motivation and self-determination. This, too, is a lie, because apart from Him, we can do nothing. He can do in us whatever pleases Him.

Satan's second batch of lies builds on the first. These lies tell us that we are good, and basically we are our own authority and in control of our own destiny. If we believe this, then it really doesn't matter what we believe so long as we believe in these things. Secondly, if this is true, eternity, if it exists at all, isn't important, because what counts is now. So Satan's motto is to live life to its fullest and give it all of the gusto we've got. The truth is that everyone will spend eternity somewhere, either in heaven or in hell. The only deciding factor is what will we do with Jesus

Christ?

So we take up in this lesson with the third lie about God in His relationship with man. My goal is not to go into extreme detail about these subjects, but to try to uncover the basic premise of the lie and the truth that corresponds to it.

This third lie is that freedom of religion includes freedom from religion or freedom from obedience to the living God. In other words, by freedom of choice, man has a choice whether or not to obey God and still live. This is why there is no prayer in our public schools. This is why people actually listen to those who held the same ideas as Madalyn Murray O'Hair. She, at one point, wanted the government to take "In God We Trust" off of the coins. She thought it was a violation of her rights. What right? The right to ignore the presence of the living God.

Satan's lie to Eve was just the same. He said, "Eve, you have a choice." Eve didn't have a choice, Eve had a challenge. The challenge was to ignore the voice of a stranger and obey the living God. Satan's goal is to discredit God's righteousness which demands the judgment of God. The world has painted a picture of God as a saccharine sweet man upstairs. The world pictures Him as an old man with a milk toast mentality who turns His back on flagrant disobedience among men, flagrant disobedience of a nation, of a church, of a people. They mistake the patience of God for weakness. The Scripture doesn't teach that. The Scripture teaches something different in Exodus 19.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.

And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."
(Exodus 19:5,6 NKJV)

The key is, if you obey His voice, you will be a special people unto Him. The choice never was whether or not to choose God or some other alternative. The choice was whether or not to choose God or reject Him. The consequences that go with it are eternal. In John 8 we read,

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."
(John 8:32,36 NKJV)

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Now, what is truth? What is freedom? Freedom is the ability to move freely, to make choices within the scope of the will of God, as defined by the Word of God. To be outside of the will of God, as defined by the Word of God, is to be in bondage. To be set free is not to have the freedom to choose, not to have the freedom to decide whether God is God or not. To be free is to have the freedom to obey. Satan is a liar. He has been from the beginning. His lie is that it really doesn't matter what you believe, all that matters is that you believe, whatever makes you happy.

Lie #4- Satan wants us to believe that in regards to God's relationship to man, the church is not unified or perfect, therefore, the church is irrelevant. I don't know how many movies or television programs you have seen recently that have had any semblance of reference to the church. There are a few, but the ones that do always pick the pastor as a quiet, weak, little, ineffectual soul. The church has very little meaning except to expose, of course, on occasion its own hypocrisy. The message is that maybe fifty years ago we needed church, but our young people are convinced by all of the means available to Satan today that, if anything, we have outgrown our need for the body of Christ. Satan is trying to discredit the body. Christ is the head, and we are its members. If man has progressed to the point that the church is no longer relevant, what it really means is that we have regressed to the point that we do not know the will of God.

I don't know about you, but I miss the days when as congregations and with our children, we used to sit around and sing songs like "Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before." There is a certain vitality about the victory that the body of Christ is ultimately going to have. We and our children need to remind ourselves of this. There is a modern song along those lines that I think is just fantastic. It is called "The Church Triumphant". It goes "God will always have a people, let the church be the church, let the people rejoice, let the anthems ring out, songs of victory swell, for the church triumphant is alive and well."

The truth is that if you read 1 Kings 19:18, Elijah had a problem. God came to him and found him under a tree moaning, groaning and feeling sorry for God. He said, "God, the church is irrelevant today. I'm the only one you have left." God said, "I'm sorry, you haven't seen the rolls. There are 7,000 knees that have not yet bowed before Baal."

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I think we need to remind ourselves of the principle and the fact that the church is alive. The church may have a few leaks in the roof, a few holes in the door, and the plumbing may not be what it ought to be, but my friend, look at the odds and look at the alternatives. It is either the church, the body corporate, standing against this evil world which is, at its best, more evil than ever in history, or are we going it alone? What do you think the will of God is?

What Brings Man Happiness?

Satan's third major area of deception involves what brings man happiness. He convinced Eve that no God who is a God of love could possibly limit the physical satisfaction of one of His creatures. Does that sound familiar? Satan told Eve that the fruit that was forbidden by God was really good for food, pleasant to the eyes and would make her wise. This is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Satan said, "Eve, you are missing the good life." What satisfies your body? The lust of the flesh. What satisfies your imagination? The lust of the eyes. What satisfies your ego? The pride of life. "That, Eve, is happiness," said Satan. The lie goes on and on.

Two lessons ago we discussed that this lie has so permeated our society that the media reports that it is natural. Education teaches it as reality. Secular counseling reinforces it as redeeming. Entertainment demonstrates it as fulfilling. Organized religion accepts it as progressive.

Listen to Satan as He challenged Jesus. Satan took Jesus to an exceedingly high mountain. Satan showed Him all of the kingdoms of the world and all of their glory. He said, "Here's where it's at, Jesus. It's all yours. All you have to do is put this life as your objective—the physical realm, not the spiritual. This is where happiness is Jesus." Jesus rejected Satan's offer. He emerged from that wilderness, called a multitude around Him, sat them down and said, "Do you want real happiness? It is not found here. Happiness is to be poor in spirit. Happiness is to learn to mourn. Happiness is to learn to be meek, to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Happiness is to be merciful and pure in heart. Happiness is to be a peacemaker."

Today we are like Jesus in a wilderness of worldliness where we are being tested by Satan. What he says is that if we want acceptance, we need to use Ultra Bright Toothpaste. Are we

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having problems? Things go better with Coke. Satan wants us to believe that we can find happiness in a bottle or in a tube or on a mountain top or by a stream with friends in a canoe. Satan says, "It is all yours, if you make it your god." The problem is that on the other side of that trek to the mountains with Budwieser, beyond the good times with the case of Cokes, after the physical attraction and the physical experience which all started with that glistening smile and that hair that flips without flopping, there still comes the harsh realities of life. Loneliness. Emptiness. Guilt. Confusion. The good life is like a bad dream. It leaves you like you were, but disillusioned, because inside your heart is not satisfied.

Why has Satan always been caught up in this philosophy? Because it is the best way to discredit the essence of God which is spiritual. The disciples until Pentecost never quite got the picture, did they? They were just like us. They wanted a physical kingdom with physical benefits and physical, tangible evidences that God was God. God's truth is, has been, and always will be that happiness comes from the Holy Spirit within. In John, Jesus explained to us that the good life, God's life, is spiritual. He said,

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24 NKJV)

This is what it means to be in the realm of the spirit.

In John 3, we see the same teaching as He spoke to Nicodemus,

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" (John 3:3-7 NKJV)

This is where the good life begins. The good life begins when God comes into your heart. The source of that good life is His Spirit. In Mark 8 Jesus said,

For what shall it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36)

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In other words, if you put it all on a scale, and you put everything the world has to offer on one side of the scale, it could not possibly measure up to one drop of the blood of Jesus Christ. Colossians 3:1-16 talks about this. I will only read verses 1-5 from the Living Bible,

Since you became alive again, so to speak, when Christ arose from the dead, now set your sights on rich treasures and joys of heaven where He sits beside God in a place of honor and power.

Let heaven fill your thoughts. Don't spend your time worrying about things down here.

You should have as little desire for this world as a dead person. Your real life is in heaven with Christ and with God.

When Christ who is our real life comes back again, you will shine with Him and share His glories.

Away then with sinful, earthly things. Deaden the evil desires lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, shameful desires. Don't worship the good things of this life for that is idolatry. God's terrible anger is upon those who do. (Colossians 3:1-5 TLB)

Do you see the principle? I want you to think about someone who is not a Christian, but who has accomplished everything in life that Satan says would make them happy. Consider the kinds of things that you fantasize about, but you think nobody ever knows. Fame. You are the president, and in the midst of a crisis, you make the right decision. Parties. You dream of the parties you can go to in which you are on the front page of the society section of the newspaper in living color. Lovers. Possessions. A movie star. An athlete. A powerful business tycoon. A rich kid with all of life's benefits. You may think this is the life. Let's be honest with ourselves, and then seriously ask ourselves this question. Is this what we really want? Is this what we really want for our kids?

We need to take Mr. and Mrs. Average Jones. He or she has none of these things. But, this person has found a walk with God. They have learned the ways of God. They have discovered the Word of God and marveled at the worth of God. They have seen the works of God. Who is happy? This is happiness. Satan is a liar, so don't let the world squeeze you into that mold.

Another one of Satan's lies is that he reinforces his lie about the "good life" with the second lie. This is as big of a whopper as

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the first. He says that the good life is Utopia, and money is the bus that gets you there.

I'm not sure how many of you are old enough to do this, but I want those of you who can to remember the early days when you got married. You moved into an apartment with no furniture. You may have had one car that sometimes ran and sometimes didn't. You got a paycheck twice a month, and you had to squeeze it so hard that you would wring all of the ink out of it. You ended up on the last two days of the month sharing a can of beans with another Christian couple who didn't have anymore than you had. For an air conditioner you had a fan with three speeds, off, on and maybe and a window with two positions, up and down.

Some of you who started your marriages out that way have now progressed to the "good life". You have a big house with four bedrooms or more. You have a television set in each room. You have a huge den. You have three cars, some of which run and some don't. You have the "good life". Now ask yourselves honestly, are you really any happier? Really? Are your kids really any better off? Are they as well off? Satan says that the "good life" is Utopia, and money is the way to get there.

God's goal is not money. His goal is character. Sometimes character grows better in the shade. It is hard to realize and accept, but poverty builds more quality in your life than prosperity. Poverty creates dependence. Prosperity creates independence. Poverty creates humility. Prosperity creates pride. Poverty creates compassion. Prosperity creates self-centeredness. Poverty demands submission. Prosperity demands authority.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that we all quit work and become poor. I am suggesting that we do as the Word says and labor but not to get rich. The Scripture has a lot to say about money. Let's turn to I Timothy 6. There is a series of questions dealing with God's perspective of money. I love to read the first couple of verses even though they have nothing to do with this subject.

Christian slaves should work hard for their owners and respect them; never let it be said that Christ's people are poor workers. Don't let the name of God or His teaching be laughed at because of this.

If their owner is a Christian, that is no excuse for slowing down; rather they should work all the harder because a

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brother in the faith is being helped by their efforts. Teach these truths, Timothy, and encourage everyone to obey them. (I Timothy 6:1,2 TLB)

Now that I've got that out of the way, let's continue:

Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,

storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

(I Timothy 6:6-12;17-19 NKJV)

There are a series of questions to consider.

Question #1- What did you have when you came into this world? The answer is, zilch, nothing. There is probably nothing more helpless than a little baby when first introduced into the world. Some of you have had that experience recently enough to have a vivid picture of that in your mind. They are helpless and naked. They have no possessions and certainly no dignity. They have no clothes on and some big doctor is hitting them on the backside eliciting a scream from them. They are totally dependent upon you. Jesus tells us that this is how we came into this world, with nothing.

Question #2- What is it that we can take with us when we

go? Strangely enough, the answer is the same, nothing. He said that we had nothing when we came into this world, and we can certainly take nothing when we leave. We can take no stocks, no bonds, no assets, no house, no car, nothing. All of these things we labor so diligently for, Jesus said, will all be for nought, because one of these days we will be gone, and it won't make a bit of difference what we leave behind. We may say we want to leave all of these things to our kids. But is it better to leave to our kids money or character?

Question #3- What are two things that we do need? (verse 8) Food and clothes. We need enough to fill our stomachs and cover our bodies. That is a natural desire, and we have a right to expect that.

Question #4- What does the desire for riches do? (verse 9) The answer is that it brings us into temptation, a snare, draws us into foolish lusts and things that hurt us.

Question #5- What does an attachment for things produce? (verse 10) The answer is every kind of evil. We can find many examples of people who are so tangled up in getting things, that they have lost the reality of their faith, their first love. Things have become too important to them.

What course of action does Paul encourage us to take? In verse 11 he tells us to flee these things. He says that if you see that things or possessions are beginning to possess you, do something about it. We are to set new goals, new standards and follow after qualities of life that please the Lord.

In verse 12 he tells us to concentrate on spiritual things. In verse 17 he gives advice to the rich or to those who have possessions to be sure that their possessions don't possess them. The word contentment used in this passage means a state of sufficiency that requires no additional resources.

Now don't get me wrong. There is nothing wrong with having money. I love it. You love it. The point is do we have it, or does it have us? The whole idea that Satan puts on this earth is that the way to have a full, rich life is to have things. It is to accomplish things and possess things. Money is the vehicle that gets us there.

I want to give you five reasons why Satan gives you money.

Satan's Reason #1- To satisfy the flesh. So many people say, "God prospered me." God is not the only one who can prosper

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you. Satan can give you money to satisfy the flesh through food, drink, houses, cars and gadgets. Since Satan lives in the realm of the flesh, he wants to satisfy the realm of the flesh.

Satan's Reason #2- To create a greater appetite for things. The flesh is insatiable. How many of you have moved from a little house to a middle-sized house? You may go to visit someone who has a bigger house and all of a sudden, your middle-sized house doesn't look nearly as big as it did. Furthermore, you wouldn't even be caught having breakfast in the little house. How many of you used to drive an old, worn-out car? Next, you got a newer used car. Then, you got a brand new car. Now you wouldn't be caught dead in an old car. The flesh has an insatiable appetite. It always wants more and more and more. Satan gives us money, so he can create a greater appetite, so that we can't handle it.

Satan's Reason #3- To divert our minds from spiritual things. I John 2 says,

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

(I John 2:15 NKJV)

Satan's Reason #4- To focus attention on ourselves. We think that we did it. We want it. We use it. It is ours.

Satan's Reason #5- To store up for the future so that we can be self-sufficient. We can build bigger barns so that if anything happens we won't have to cry out to God, we can just empty the barns.

I want to give you five reasons why God gives you money.

God's Reason #1- To provide the essentials of life. We just read this passage. The Scripture says that if a man doesn't work, he ought not to eat. If he doesn't provide for his own family, he is worse than an infidel. God gives us money to feed and clothe our family.

God's Reason #2- To test our stewardship. He may give you one talent, two talents, five or ten, because He wants to know what you will do with what you have.

God's Reason #3- To teach us how to have a grateful spirit. This gives us an opportunity to learn to be thankful for every good and acceptable gift that comes from God.

God's Reason #4- To give an opportunity to give it away. This is the real crux of Christianity. The reason God gives Christians

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more is so that they can give more away. We think God prospers us so that we can have more. I'm not sure we fully understand this principle, or at least we don't live like it. The principle is not, "God gave me more, because He loves me, and now I can buy this and that." Maybe you can, but the real basic reason God gives us more money is so that we can share.

God's Reason #5- To glorify Himself. So you see, money doesn't buy happiness. Money is a tool in the hands of God to be used in the kingdom of God to do the will of God to bring glory to God. For some unknown reason, we have devoted our lives to making it and spending it as though this life was where it all was. It is a lie. But, don't we believe it sometimes?

Satan's third lie about success is that physical attractiveness brings success, happiness, and lasting friendships. The lie is that the prettier you are, the happier you are. This nation alone spends billions of dollars a year to pamper, primp, and petrify this rotten body we live in. How many television commercials do you see that have homely people in them like us? Be honest. There are not very many. Man's way is to dress up the body to attract the flesh. God's way is to adorn the spirit to draw men to Himself. In I Peter 3 we see that there are two ways to be beautiful. One is the plaiting of the hair and wearing of expensive clothing and fancy jewelry, so that men will be drawn to the attractiveness of the appearance of the body beautiful. The other way is to adorn the spirit, that radiant inner beauty that comes from within. This is what pleases the heart of God.

In I Samuel 16:7, we see that man looks on the outward appearance to make a judgment, but God is not fooled, He looks on the heart. In II Corinthians 12:9, we are told by Paul that God's strength is made perfect in weakness. If you apply this principle, the less attractive you are, the more attractive you can become, because the more grace there is available to you.

Perhaps Satan's next and most prevalent area of deception is in the area of morality. If he can create a huge question mark here, he is shaking the foundations of our faith. Two of our most precious treasures lie here, the holiness of God and the immutability of His Word. Satan's lie is that the standards of morality change with the times as man becomes more enlightened and less inhibited. The lie is that man is basically good, and his only authorities are those of his own inventions. He also feels

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that he has the power to chart his own destiny. This good, self-reliant, enlightened creature has the right and the power to decide morally what is right and wrong. Now we must remember that what may be right in Africa may be wrong in England. What may be right at Harvard may be taboo in Oklahoma. But the lie is to let every man do what is right in his own eyes, for after all, good and evil are relative says Satan.

The age in which we live is filled with politicians whose morals have sunk to new lows, yet they desire to lead our nation. Yet, the point is that from the standpoint of the American public, from what the polls say, these standards of morality don't make these leaders any less qualified to lead our nation. Satan says that man doesn't need to be able to lead his family in order to lead the nation. The Scripture says that a man who cannot lead his family cannot lead the church, and the man who cannot lead the church cannot lead the nation. So this is a lie Satan wants us to believe.

Here is the problem. The standards of God never change. They are built on a rock and are found in the Word. The standards of man fluctuate, usually downward. The church is caught in between with a magnet drawing them in each direction. You and I, as part of the body of Christ, justify our spiritual adultery in four ways.

We can take the example of adultery. It is no longer looked upon as it was 20 years ago. Why is this? It seems in the body of Christ that this is the prevalent perspective.

Lie #1- God maybe changed his mind. In other words, God grew up. Perhaps it really does say in the Bible that God hates adultery, but God has become more modern in His thinking. He has come uptown. He has read some books and watched human nature. He has decided that these things aren't really that bad after all.

Lie #2- We misunderstood. We took the Bible too literally. Maybe it was true in the old days that God felt that way about adultery, but we misunderstood, and God really didn't feel that way.

Lie #3- God isn't relevant for today. God didn't change His mind or was misunderstood, He is just old-fashioned. He can't relate to what is going on in this modern world in which we live.

Lie #4- God is more flexible than all that. He hasn't changed

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His mind or been misunderstood, but He basically sets these standards, but He knows we can't live by them. God is the God of love, and love means compromise.

Do you see the lie? We will continue this line of thought in the next lesson. We will look at some more lies that are told in these areas. We will discuss marriage, divorce, the physical relationship outside of marriage, and what it says to the church and to the world. We have begun to look at some of the issues surrounding Satan's lies and have revealed them for what they are. I hope they have also revealed his motive, which is always the same, to discredit God. Most important, I pray, we have been reminded of the truths of God that reveal these lies for what they really are. The key is that you and I listen to these lies all day long. The key is that many times we believe them. You and I must begin to have more sincere convictions. We must stand on those convictions, if we are going to make a difference in this world, because the enemy is a liar.

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