

QUESTION 69

The Beatitudes

We next have to consider the beatitudes. On this topic there are four questions: (1) Do the beatitudes differ from the gifts and the virtues? (2) Do the rewards attributed to the beatitudes have to do with this life? (3) How many beatitudes are there? (4) Are the rewards attributed to the beatitudes appropriate?

Article 1

Do the beatitudes differ from the virtues and the gifts?

It seems that that the beatitudes do not differ from the virtues and the gifts:

Objection 1: In *De Sermone Domini in Monte* Augustine attributes the beatitudes enumerated in Matthew to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, whereas in *Super Lucam* Ambrose attributes the beatitudes enumerated in Luke to the four cardinal virtues. Therefore, the beatitudes do not differ from the virtues and the gifts.

Objection 2: As has been established (q. 19, a. 3-4), there are just two rules for the human will, viz., reason and the eternal law. But as is clear from what was said above (q. 68, a. 1), the virtues perfect a man in relation to reason, whereas the gifts perfect him in relation to the eternal law of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, there cannot be anything other than the virtues and the gifts that has to do with the rectitude of the human will. Therefore, the beatitudes do not differ from the virtues and gifts.

Objection 3: Meekness, justice, and mercy, which are said to be virtues, are posited in the enumeration of the beatitudes. Therefore, the beatitudes do not differ from the virtues and gifts.

But contrary to this: Certain things enumerated in the beatitudes are neither virtues nor gifts, e.g., poverty, mourning, and peace. Therefore, the beatitudes differ from both the virtues and the gifts.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 2, a. 7), beatitude is the ultimate end of human life. Now someone is even now said to have an end because of his hope of attaining that end. Hence, in *Ethics* 1 the Philosopher says that children are called happy because of their hopefulness, and in Romans 8:24 the Apostle says, “We are saved by hope.” But hope with respect to attaining an end arises from the fact that one is moving in the right way toward the end and approaching it—and this is accomplished through certain actions.

Now one moves toward and approaches the end of beatitude through the works of the virtues—and especially through the works of the gifts, if we are speaking of eternal beatitude. For reason is insufficient for this end; instead, one is led toward it by the Holy Spirit, and it is through the gifts that we are perfected in being obedient to Him and in following Him. And so the beatitudes differ from the virtues and gifts not in the sense that they are habits distinct from those habits, but rather in the way that acts differ from their corresponding habits.

Reply to objection 1: Augustine and Ambrose attribute the beatitudes to the gifts and virtues in the way that acts are attributed to their corresponding habits.

Now as was explained above (q. 68, a. 8), the gifts are more eminent than the cardinal virtues. And this is why Ambrose, in explaining the beatitudes proposed to the crowds, attributed them to the cardinal virtues, whereas Augustine, in explaining the beatitudes proposed on the mount to the disciples, who were more perfect than the crowds, attributed them to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Reply to objection 2: This argument proves that there are no habits that rectify human life besides the virtues and the gifts.

Reply to objection 3: Meekness is being taken here for an *act* of meekness, and the same should

be said of justice and mercy. And even though they might seem to be virtues, they are nonetheless attributed to the gifts, since, as has been explained (q. 68, a. 2), in all the things in which the virtues perfect a man, the gifts likewise perfect him.

Article 2

Do the rewards attributed to the beatitudes belong to this life?

It seems that the rewards attributed to the beatitudes do not belong to this life:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), some are said to be happy because of their hope of attaining rewards. But an object of hope is something future. Therefore, the rewards in question belong to the future life.

Objection 2: In Luke 6:25 punishments are posited in direct contrast to the beatitudes, when it is said, “Woe to you who are filled, for you shall hunger. Woe to you who are now laughing, for you shall mourn and weep.” But these punishments are not understood to belong to this life, since men are frequently not punished in this life—this according to Job 21:13 (“They spend their days in wealth”). Therefore, the rewards of the beatitudes do not belong to this life, either.

Objection 3: As Augustine points out in *De Civitate Dei* 19, the kingdom of heaven, which is posited as the reward for poverty, is a heavenly beatitude. Again, full satisfaction (*saturitas*) is had only in the future life—this according to Psalm 16:15 (“I shall be satisfied when Your glory appears”). For the vision of God and the manifestation of our divine filiation belong to the future life—this according to 1 John 3:2 (“We are now the children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be; for we know that when it does appear, we shall be like Him, because we will see Him as He is”). Therefore, the rewards in question belong to the future life.

But contrary to this: In *De Sermone Domini in Monte* Augustine says, “These promises can be fulfilled in this life, as we believe they were fulfilled in the case of the apostles. For the many-faceted change promised after this life—a change even into an angelic form—cannot be expressed in words.”

I respond: Commentators on Sacred Scripture have expressed diverse opinions about the rewards in question. Some, like Ambrose in *Super Lucam*, claim that all of these rewards belong to future beatitude, while Augustine claims that they belong to the present life. Chrysostom, however, claims in *Homiliae* that some of them belong to the future life and some to the present life.

In support of this last claim, note that there are two ways in which the hope for future beatitude can exist in us, viz., (a) because of some sort of *preparation for* or *disposition toward* future beatitude, and this is the mode of *merit*, or (b) through the *imperfect beginning* of future beatitude, even in this life, in holy men. For the hope one has for the fruitfulness of a tree when the tree is becoming green with leaves is different from the hope one has when the first fruits have already begun to appear.

So, then, the things mentioned in the beatitudes as *meritorious* (*merita*) are certain preparations for or dispositions toward beatitude, whether perfect beatitude or the beginnings of beatitude. On the other hand, the things posited as *rewards* can be either (a) perfect beatitude itself, in which case they belong to the future life, or (b) a certain beginning of beatitude, as occurs with men of perfection, in which case the rewards belong to the present life. For when someone begins to be proficient in the acts of the virtues and gifts, he can have the hope of attaining both the perfection of the pilgrimage (*ad perfectionem viae*) and the perfection of heaven (*ad perfectionem patriae*).

Reply to objection 1: Hope for future beatitude as the ultimate end can also be hope for the assistance of grace as the means leading to that end—this according to Psalm 27:7 (“My heart hoped in

God, and I was assisted”).

Reply to objection 2: Even if it sometimes happens that bad men do not suffer temporal punishments in this life, they nonetheless suffer spiritual punishments. Hence, in *Confessiones* 1 Augustine says, “Lord, you have commanded—and so it is—that the disordered mind should be a punishment unto itself.” And in *Ethics* 9 the Philosopher says of evil men, “Their soul struggles with itself; this part pulls this way and that part pulls that way.” And afterwards he concludes, “If it is thus miserable to be evil, then one should avoid wickedness with all one’s strength.”

The same holds in reverse for good men. Even if it sometimes happens that they do not receive corporeal rewards in this life, they are never lacking in spiritual goods, even in this life—this according to Matthew 19:29 and Mark 10:30 (“You will receive a hundredfold even in this world”).

Reply to objection 3: To be sure, all the rewards in question will be perfectly consummated in the future life; yet they are also initiated in some way even in this life. For as Augustine says, the kingdom of heaven can be understood as the beginning of perfect wisdom insofar as the Spirit begins to reign in men. Again, possession of the earth signifies the good affections of a soul that through its desire is at rest in the stability of a perpetual inheritance, signified by the earth. Moreover, they are consoled in this life by participating in the Holy Spirit, who is called the Paraclete, i.e., the Consoler. Again, in this life they are filled with the food of which our Lord says, “My food is to do the will of my Father.” Again, in this life men seek God’s mercy. Likewise, even in this life, with one’s eyes cleansed by the gift of understanding, God can in some sense be seen. Again, even in this life those who pacify their own movements, becoming more like God, are called children of God. Yet these things will exist more perfectly in heaven.

Article 3

Are the beatitudes appropriately enumerated?

It seems that the beatitudes are not appropriately enumerated:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), the beatitudes are attributed to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But certain of the gifts, viz., wisdom and understanding, pertain to the contemplative life, whereas there is no beatitude posited for the act of contemplation; instead, all the acts involved in the beatitudes have to do with the active life. Therefore, the beatitudes are not appropriately enumerated.

Objection 2: It is not only the executionary gifts that pertain to the active life, but the directive gifts as well, e.g., knowledge and counsel. But none of the posited beatitudes seems to pertain directly to the act of the gift of knowledge or to the act of the gift of counsel. Therefore, the beatitudes are not adequately touched upon.

Objection 3: Among the gifts that are executionary with respect to the active life, fear is thought of as pertaining to poverty, whereas piety seems to pertain to the beatitude concerning mercy. But there is nothing posited that pertains directly to fortitude. Therefore, the beatitudes are not adequately enumerated.

Objection 4: There are many other beatitudes mentioned in Sacred Scripture. For instance, Job 5:17 says, “Blessed is the man who is corrected by the Lord.” And Psalm 1:1 says, “Blessed the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked.” And Proverbs 3:13 says, “Blessed the man who has found wisdom.” Therefore, the beatitudes are not adequately enumerated.

But contrary to this: It seems that the number of beatitudes is too great:

1. There are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. But eight beatitudes are mentioned.

2. In Luke 6 only four beatitudes are posited. Therefore, the seven, or eight, enumerated in Matthew are too many.

I respond: The beatitudes are enumerated most appropriately. To see this, note that various authors have posited three kinds of beatitude. For some have posited beatitude in the pleasurable life (*vita voluptuosa*), some in the active life (*vita activa*), and some in the contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*).

Now these three kinds of beatitude are related in different ways to future beatitude, the hope for which is said to make us happy here and now. For the beatitude of pleasure, which is a false beatitude and contrary to reason, is an obstacle to future beatitude, whereas the beatitude of the active life disposes one toward future beatitude. On the other hand, contemplative beatitude, if it is perfect, is in essence future beatitude itself, whereas if it is imperfect, it is a certain beginning of future beatitude.

And so our Lord first posited certain beatitudes which, as it were, remove the obstacle posed by the *pleasurable life*. For the pleasurable life consists in two things.

First, it consists in an affluence of exterior goods, whether riches or honors. A man is drawn back from these goods by the virtues in such a way that he uses them with moderation, whereas he is drawn back from them by the gifts in such a way that he has total contempt for them. Hence, we have the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” which can be taken to refer either to the contempt for riches or to the contempt for honors that results from humility.

Second, the pleasurable life consists in following one’s passions, whether the passions of the irascible part of the soul or the passions of the concupiscible part.

Virtue draws a man away from following the passions of the irascible part by keeping them from abounding in him, in accord with the rule of reason; the gifts, on the other hand, do this in a more excellent way, viz., in such a way that the man is rendered wholly undisturbed by them, in accord with God’s will. Hence, we have the second beatitude, “Blessed are the meek.”

Virtue keeps one from following the passions of the concupiscible part by making use of those passions with moderation, whereas the gifts accomplish this by totally casting them aside, if this is necessary—or even by taking on a willful sorrow, if this is necessary. Hence, we have the third beatitude, “Blessed are they who mourn.”

On the other hand, the *active life* consists principally in what we render to our neighbors, either as a debt or as a spontaneous gift.

Virtue disposes us toward the former in such a way that we do not refuse to render what we owe to our neighbors, and this pertains to justice. On the other hand, the gifts induce us to do the same thing with a more abundant affection, so that it is with a fervent desire that we fulfill the works of justice, in the way that the hungry and the thirsty fervently desire food or drink. Hence, we have the fourth beatitude, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice.”

As for spontaneous gifts, virtue perfects us in such a way that we make gifts to those to whom reason dictates that they should be given, viz., friends or others who are joined to us, and this pertains to the virtue of generosity (*liberalitas*). On the other hand, out of reverence for God, the gifts take only necessity into account in those on whom free gifts are bestowed. Hence, Luke 14:12-13 says, “When you fix a dinner or a supper, do not invite your friends or brothers but invite the poor and the maimed” And this is, properly speaking, to show mercy. And so we have the fifth beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful.”

Now anything that pertains to the *contemplative life* is either final beatitude itself or some beginning of it, and so these things are posited in the beatitudes not as merits, but instead as rewards. However, those effects of the active life by which a man is disposed toward the contemplative life are indeed posited as merits. As regards the virtues and gifts by which a man is perfected in himself, the effect of the active life is the cleansing of the heart, so that a man’s mind is not defiled by his passions.

Hence, we have the sixth beatitude, “Blessed are the clean of heart.”

On the other hand, as regards the virtues and gifts by which a man is perfected in relation to his neighbor, the effect of the active life is peace—this according to Isaiah 32:17 (“The work of justice is peace”). And so we have the seventh beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Reply to objection 1: The acts of the gifts pertaining to the active life are expressed in the merits themselves, but the acts of the gifts pertaining to the contemplative life are expressed in the rewards, and this for the reason just explained. For to see God corresponds to the gift of understanding, and to be conformed to God by a certain type of adoptive filiation pertains to the gift of wisdom.

Reply to objection 2: As even the Philosopher says in *Ethics 2*, in the case of what pertains to the active life, cognition is sought not for its own sake but for the sake of acting. And so since ‘beatitude’ connotes something ultimate, the beatitudes do not include acts of those gifts that are directive in the active life, i.e., the acts that those gifts elicit in the way that giving counsel is an act of the gift of counsel and that judging is an act of the gift of knowledge. Rather, what are attributed to these gifts are the operative acts with respect to which they give direction; for instance, mourning is attributed to the gift of knowledge, and being merciful is attributed to the gift of counsel.

Reply to objection 3: There are two things to take into consideration in the attribution of the beatitudes to the gifts.

The first is conformity to the *subject matter*. In this regard, the first five beatitudes can all be attributed to the gifts of knowledge and counsel insofar as those gifts are *directive*. On the other hand, these beatitudes are distributed among the *executionary* gifts, viz., in such a way that (a) hungering and thirsting for justice, as well as being merciful, pertain to the gift of piety, which perfects a man in those matters that have to do with others, and that (b) meekness is attributed to the gift of fortitude, since Ambrose says in *Super Lucam* that “the role of fortitude is to conquer anger and to control indignation,” given that fortitude has to do with the passions of the irascible part of the soul, and that (c) poverty and mourning are attributed to the gift of fear, by which a man draws himself back from the desires and pleasures of the world.

Second, we can consider the *motives* embodied by the beatitudes. If we do so, then in the case of some of the beatitudes we have to attribute them to the gifts in a different way. For it is reverence for God that principally moves one to meekness, and this pertains to the gift of piety. Again, what moves one to sorrow is mainly knowledge, through which a man knows his own defects and the defectiveness of worldly things—this according to Ecclesiastes 1:18 (“He who adds knowledge, adds also sorrow”). Again, it is mainly fortitude of mind that moves one to hunger after the works of justice. On the other hand, it is mainly God’s counsel that moves one to be merciful—this according to Daniel 4:24 (“Let my counsel be pleasing to the king, and redeem your sins with alms and your iniquities with works of mercy to the poor”). And this is the mode of attribution that Augustine follows in *De Sermone Domini in Monte*.

Reply to objection 4: All the beatitudes posited in Sacred Scripture must be traced back to the beatitudes in question, either with respect to the merits or with respect to the rewards. For it is necessary that all beatitudes have something to do with either the active life or the contemplative life. Hence, the saying, “Blessed the man who is corrected by the Lord,” has to do with the beatitude concerning sorrow. And the saying, “Blessed the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked,” has to do with cleanness of heart. And the saying, “Blessed the man who has found wisdom,” has to do with the reward of the seventh beatitude. The same thing is clear with all the other beatitudes that might be cited.

Reply to argument 1 for the contrary: The eighth beatitude is a confirmation and manifestation of all the preceding ones. For the fact that someone is confirmed in poverty of spirit, in meekness, and in the others results in his not withdrawing from those goods because of persecution of any sort. Hence, the

eighth beatitude pertains in some sense to the seven that precede it.

Reply to argument 2 for the contrary: Luke reports that our Lord's sermon was delivered to the crowds. Hence, he numbers the beatitudes in keeping with the capacity of the crowds, which knew only pleasurable and temporal and earthly beatitude. Hence, by the four beatitudes our Lord rules out the four things that seem to pertain to this sort of beatitude. The first is an abundance of exterior things, which he rules out by saying, "Blessed are the poor." The second is a man's being well off with respect to his body, in food and drink and other such things; and he rules this out in the second beatitude by saying, "Blessed are those who hunger." The third is a man's being well off with respect to hearty enjoyment (*cordis iucunditas*), and he rules this out with the third beatitude by saying, "Blessed are they who are now mourning." The fourth is external favor in the eyes of men, and he rules this out with the fourth beatitude by saying, "Blessed will you be when men hate you." As Ambrose puts it, "Poverty has to do with temperance, which does not seek enticements; hunger pertains to justice, since one who hungers is compassionate and, by being compassionate, is generous; mourning pertains to prudence, which laments perishable things; and suffering men's hatred pertains to fortitude."

Article 4

Are the rewards of the beatitudes appropriately enumerated?

It seems that the rewards of the beatitudes are not appropriately enumerated:

Objection 1: All goods are contained in the kingdom of heaven, which is eternal life. Therefore, once the kingdom of heaven is posited [in the first beatitude], there is no need to posit any other rewards.

Objection 2: The kingdom of heaven is posited as a reward in both the first beatitude and the eighth beatitude. Therefore, for the very same reason, it should have posited in all the beatitudes.

Objection 3: As Augustine puts it, the beatitudes proceed in ascending order. The rewards, however, seem to proceed in descending order. For possessing the earth is something less than the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, these rewards are not appropriately assigned.

But contrary to this is the authority of our Lord Himself, who proposed the rewards.

I respond: The rewards in question are assigned in a most appropriate way if we consider the relation of the beatitudes to the three kinds of beatitude noted above (a. 3).

For the first three beatitudes involve withdrawing from that which constitutes *pleasurable beatitude*, which a man desires by seeking what is naturally desired, but seeking it where he ought not to seek it, viz., in temporal and perishable things.

And so the rewards for the first three beatitudes correspond to the things that some men look for in earthly beatitude. For in exterior things, viz., riches and honors, men seek a certain excellence and abundance, both of which are signified by the kingdom of heaven, through which a man attains an excellence and abundance of goods in God. And so our Lord promised the kingdom of heaven to those who are poor in spirit.

Again, fierce and wild men seek to acquire security for themselves by destroying their enemies through conflicts and wars. Hence, to the meek our Lord promised the secure and peaceful possession of the land of the living (*terra viventium*), which signifies the solidity of eternal goods.

Again, in the desires and pleasures of the world men seek consolation in the face of the hardships of the present life. And so our Lord promised consolation to those who mourn.

On the other hand, two of the other beatitudes have to do with the works of *active beatitude*, i.e., the works of those virtues which order a man toward his neighbor and which some men draw back from

because of their disordered love for their own good. And so for these beatitudes our Lord assigned rewards for the sake of which men draw back from these works of virtue.

For some men draw back from the works of justice by not repaying their debts, but by instead taking advantage of others in order to be filled up with temporal goods. And so our Lord promised satisfaction to those who thirst for justice.

Again, some draw back from the works of mercy by not immersing themselves in the sufferings of others. And so to the merciful our Lord promised mercy, through which they are liberated from all suffering.

The two last beatitudes pertain to contemplative happiness or beatitude, and the rewards are given in a way corresponding to the dispositions posited in the merits.

For the cleansing of the eye disposes one toward seeing clearly, and so the vision of God is promised to those who are clean of heart.

On the other hand, making peace, either within himself or between others, shows a man to be an imitator of God, who is the God of unity and peace. And so as a reward he is given the glory of divine filiation, which is consummated through wisdom in a perfect union with God.

Reply to objection 1: As Chrysostom says, all these rewards are one thing in reality, viz., eternal beatitude, which the human intellect cannot grasp. And so it was necessary to describe it by means of the different goods known to us, while preserving a correspondence with the merits to which the rewards are assigned.

Reply to objection 2: Given that the eighth beatitude is a certain confirmation of all the beatitudes, the rewards of all the beatitudes should be assigned to it. And so this beatitude goes back to the beginning, in order that all the rewards might be thought of as being attributed to it as consequences.

An alternative reply is that, according to Ambrose, the kingdom of heaven is promised to the poor in spirit with respect to the glorification of the soul, whereas it is promised to those who suffer bodily persecution with respect to the glorification of the body.

Reply to objection 3: The rewards are likewise ordered to one another by addition. For it is more to possess the land (*terra*) of the kingdom of heaven than simply to have the kingdom of heaven, since we have many things which we do not possess peacefully and with security. It is also more to be consoled in the kingdom than to have and possess the kingdom, since we possess many things with sorrow. Likewise, it is more to have one's fill than simply to be consoled, since having one's fill implies an abundance of consolation. Yet mercy exceeds having one's fill, in the sense that a man receives more than he has merited or could desire. And it is still greater to see God, just as it is greater for someone not only to dine in the king's court but also to see the king's face. Moreover, the king's son has the highest place in the royal household.