

# Every Spiritual Blessing

M. W. Bassford, 12-5-11

We live in a world in which the benefits of righteousness are minimized, and the benefits of unrighteousness are maximized. If we listen to the voices of our culture, they will tell us that sin is where the fun is at, that premarital and extramarital sex, pornography, drunkenness, and the love of money are where it's at. Christians, by contrast, are the wallflowers in the ballroom of life. All we can do is look on while others are having fun, powerless to participate.

Just like everything else that the devil says, this is a lie, and it's a lie for two main reasons. First of all, sin cannot provide long-term happiness. Sin is a drug, and just like other drugs, it's addictive. The first sin is the best, but it's not quite as good as the devil promised us it was going to be. Then, the next time we sin, it's a little less good, and so on, until we reach the point where what was once so enticing can no longer satisfy, and we must move on to greater sins to maintain our high. No one who gives his life over to sin is going to benefit from the exchange.

Second, being a Christian is about far more than merely sin avoidance. When we become disciples, we don't pledge ourselves to a moral code. We form a relationship with our Creator, and that is a very different thing. If the Bible is nothing more than a self-help book, we can only expect it to benefit us via the logical consequences of following its advice. The Bible certainly does benefit us in that way, but the benefits we can expect as Christians extend beyond that.

Instead, the greatest blessings we find in Christianity are not the result of our own efforts. They are the result of the blessing of the God we have taken as our Father. Paul defines just how great these blessings are in Ephesians 1:3. Let's look this evening, then at what it means that in God through Christ, we can expect every spiritual blessing.

## Immediate Blessings.

The first and most noteworthy of these spiritual blessings is **REDEMPTION**. In fact, Paul brings this idea up just a few verses down in the same context, in Ephesians 1:7. This is extremely important because despite the best efforts of our society to pretend otherwise, sin is a very real thing. God isn't like a doting grandparent who smiles down on us from above and thinks we're cute, even though we're engaged in the spiritual equivalent of setting the cat on fire. Even though He is our Father, He is also our Judge. He expects every human being who draws breath to obey His laws, and when we fail Him, we earn the spiritual death penalty for our transgressions. God is so perfect, so pure, that He cannot tolerate sinners in His presence. If we come before Him as sinners, we can expect to be banished from Him forever.

Only if we appreciate this, only if we grasp how significantly awful sin is, can we fully appreciate the blessing of redemption. Redemption isn't cheap. In fact, the only way that God could redeem us was by giving His Son in our place, so that Jesus paid the death penalty we had earned. If there had been any easier way, if God could have saved us without paying such a steep price, He would certainly have done that. However, because Jesus did pay the price that was necessary, our spiritual future has been transformed. We don't have to worry any more about offending God with the stain of our guilt, because that stain has been washed out by the blood of Jesus. In Christ, we are just as pure as a newborn baby. We have nothing with which to purchase such a blessing, but God gives it to us freely.

We learn about this blessing, and a thousand other things beside, through the blessing of **THE WORD**. Peter tells us where the word came from in 2 Peter 1:20-21. The Bible is not the result of fraud, nor even of the earnest ponderings of wise men. Instead, it is the inspired word of God, and we can rely on it fully. Anyone, Christian or no, can read the Bible, but its truths belong most completely to His faithful disciples. To the unbeliever, the story of Jesus may be of some passing interest, but to us, it means the difference between life and death, and it will govern our lives until we die. The promises of Scripture aren't the quaint artifacts of some kind of myth; instead, they tell us that through God, we can receive blessings greater than we could ever imagine. God's word has its greatest power for God's people.

From this, we learn how diligently we should seek blessing in the word. How much we get out of the Bible depends on how much time we put into it, and if we ignore the Scripture in favor of other pursuits, we are wasting the blessing we have been given. It's the spiritual equivalent of getting a hundred-dollar Best Buy gift card for Christmas, using it to buy a stick of gum, and then tossing the gift card with its remaining 99-dollar credit into the trash. Technically, that decision didn't cost us anything, since we got the gift card for free, but that doesn't make it any less of a waste. Let's make sure that we aren't wasting our blessing. Let's make sure that we get everything we can from the word.

We should have the same attitude toward **PRAYER**. Christ promises us that we have this blessing through Him in John 16:23. As Edwin Crozier observed during last year's gospel meeting, this doesn't mean that any time we conclude a prayer with "in Jesus' name, Amen", that we are praying in Jesus' name. Instead, prayer is the means by which we seek the blessings that God has already promised. Prayer is the key that unlocks the door to every guarantee to God's people in Scripture. If we sin, we can pray and trust that God will forgive us. If we suffer, we can seek heavenly comfort through our prayers. If we fear for the future, we can seek God's blessing and trust that He will work all things out for good. The list of things that we know we can pray for and receive is nearly endless. What's more, we have the right even

beyond that to pray for things that God has promised, and be assured that He will give them to us if they are good for us. There are infinite reasons for us to devote ourselves to prayer, and none at all to remain silent.

### **Blessings Throughout Life.**

As part of this, we can trust that God will bless us with **PROVISION** for our needs. Jesus defines the boundaries of this promise in Matthew 6:32-33. First of all, this passage tells us that God knows what we need. This may be a source of confusion to us. Just like the little girl who is convinced that she needs one of every kind of Barbie doll that has ever existed, we are often convinced that we need things we could actually get along fine without. God, on the other hand, doesn't have any trouble distinguishing between our needs and our wants. He may give us even the wants, but He will certainly give us what we need, provided that we spend our lives seeking Him instead of seeking the needs. If we choose God over work, or God over school, or God over family, our lives won't fall apart. However, if we begin to put those other things first, disaster may well be right around the corner, and it will certainly be down the road. On the other hand, this doesn't mean that we have no responsibility to do anything. God isn't going to bless us through the slot machines down at the Empress. He expects us to be hard-working people who do the best we can on the job or in the classroom or in taking care of our loved ones. However, only if we put Him first can we be certain that we will succeed.

Likewise, God extends **PROTECTION** over His people. We learn about this from a well known verse, 1 Corinthians 10:13. When we read this passage, we often think in terms of temptation to pleasure, that God isn't going to allow Satan to pile more allurements on us than we can handle. That is true, but it's also incomplete, and it understates the size of the diabolical toolbox. The devil doesn't just use pleasure to tempt us. He also uses sorrow and suffering. Many Christians must walk the path of the patriarch Job and suffer blow after blow until those close to them cry out for them to curse God and die. However, just as God limited the pressure that the devil could put on Job, He limits the pressure that the devil can put on us. In a way, then, the trials of our lives are back-handed compliments. They come our way only because God is confident that we can handle them. However, for those outside of Christ, this is emphatically not true. God protects His children, not strangers. People who live in Satan's dominion can expect to feel the full force of Satan's fury. However, through Christ, we can always find shelter, a refuge that the storm cannot defeat.

In fact, God even promises us **JOY** that the unbeliever will never know. Peter describes the depths of this joy in 1 Peter 1:8. Even in the midst of trials, we can still rejoice, and do it with a joy that is too great for us to put into words. A couple of weeks ago, Lauren had the refrigerator door open, and Zoë got into the bottom rack, grabbed a can of whipped cream, and promptly dropped it on her bare foot. She howled like someone had cut her foot off and proceeded to do so until I came out of the shower and gave her a kiss. Then, she stopped. I don't think that my kisses have magic healing powers. I think that Zoë stopped crying because the kiss reassured her that Daddy was going to take care of her, no matter what. How happy and safe does it make us feel to know that our heavenly Father is going to take care of us, no matter what? Without God, life would be unbearable. We would plunge from disaster to disaster until we were finally overwhelmed. With Him, though, we can rejoice, assured that all of our trials will have a happy ending.

God also blesses us with **MEANING** for our lives. Solomon sums this up in Ecclesiastes 12:13. What are we here for? To fear God and keep His commandments. That is the goal for which we were designed, and we can only find true satisfaction in our lives when we are dedicated to achieving that goal. The people of the world invest their time in all kinds of things. Sometimes, they make poor choices, as when they give their lives over to pleasure or the love of money. At other times, they make better choices. Many unbelievers are wise enough to recognize the satisfaction they can derive from their families. However, apart from God, everything that we do in this life, whether wise or unwise, is ultimately meaningless. None of the works of mankind on earth can stand the test of time. The only way for us to find eternal meaning is by giving our lives over to the Lord. Only that can reserve us a place in the city which has foundations.

It is there that we find God's greatest blessing, the blessing of **LIFE**. Jesus speaks of this in John 11:25-26. I think everybody, if they live long enough, comes to the realization that they are really, really going to die. I had to grapple with this unwelcome revelation in the aftermath of my mother's death. One way or another, all of our days are numbered. What a relief it was for me, as I was working through that, to recognize that I already had the answer! As long as I remain faithful to the Lord, death for me is not the end. I can look forward to the promise of endless life that is better than anything I have ever experienced. Although I should use my days wisely and fully, I don't have to scramble around, feverishly trying to accomplish as much as possible before night falls. I can focus my efforts on the things that I know will yield an eternal reward, not because I know how to cheat death, but because I trust in the promise of Jesus.