

THE BLESSING OF GOD

"The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22).

It is astonishing how much the Bible has to say about the blessing of God. Some form of the word "to bless" is to be found at least five hundred times. The term has become one of the most common heard among Christians. We ask God to bless our food, our loved ones, and our churches. We talk of receiving a blessing from a meeting, and we often sing about what God has done for us. This is perfectly Biblical, but constant repetition seems to have made the word nearly meaningless to many believers who use it frequently.

Whether or not we could define the term, most of us have an earnest longing to know the fullness of the blessing of our God. Nothing could be more appropriate than a study of some of the wonderful truths set forth in the Bible about what this means and how we may attain it.

The blessing of God is a specific, recognizable manifestation of the divine favor. It is far removed from the notion that a "blessing" is a warm feeling of happiness or well-being, or something vague and indefinable.

As Christians we are blessed with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). Nothing can take these blessings away from us. We shall enjoy them forever, but the Lord also has other manifestations of His favor for us to enjoy in the present, upon the earth.

"The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22). "The Lord will bless his people with peace" (Psalm 29:11). "The Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that he had" (I Chronicles 13:14). Numerous passages of this kind make it clear that the Lord had often blessed His children, their farms, their substance, and the work of their hands. Sometimes the Lord sends a particular kind of blessing to match some special circumstance. It may be what could be termed spiritual, or it may be physical. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:4, 7). "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble" (Psalm 41:1). Nothing could be more definite than the specific conditions or blessings given in the book of Revelation, "Blessed is he that readeth ... he that watcheth ... they which are called unto the marriage supper of the lamb ... that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book ... they that do His commandments" (1:3; 16:15; 19:9; 22:7, 14). In a greatly loved passage in Psalm 24 the Lord's people are told, "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, or sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord" (Psalm 24:4-5).

It is evident that the very practical, earthly tokens of God's favor to which we are addressing ourselves have a time of definite beginnings. "From this day will I bless thee" (Haggai 2:19). "And Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok answered him, and said, Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the Lord hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store" (II Chronicles 31:10).

God's blessings are continuous, for He "daily loadeth us with benefits" (Psalm 68:19). His blessings are innumerable: "A faithful man shall abound with blessings" (Proverbs 28:20). "There shall be showers of blessings" (Ezekiel 34:26). God's blessings cannot

be disannulled: "He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it" (Numbers 23:20).

Many a Christian has been greatly challenged by the prospects of a recognizable outpouring of God's favor in this present life. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10).

The first thing recorded in the Bible after God created mankind is the fact that He blessed them (Genesis 1:28; 5:2). The first promise of blessing to a man is found in Genesis 12:2, where Abraham was the recipient, and the second promise was given to his wife (17:16). A woman's greatest blessings are related to her children. Do Christian housewives seem to occupy an obscure place where they can offer little in service to God? They may accomplish far more through their daily work within the home than through some program outside. Neglect of one's children in favor of a lesser form of Christian service can have tragic results.

Of the five hundred references to blessing in the Bible, some of them speak of spiritual matters, others of unseen realities such as peace of mind, quiet assurance, the certainty of knowing the mind of God. We do not lessen the importance of these wonderful truths by thinking more particularly about their visible counterparts in the practical world in which we live. It is undoubtedly true that the conditions for receiving any blessing, spiritual or material, are identical.

Some one hundred and fifty of the texts dealing with our subject are to be found in the book of Psalms. John Donne, dean of Saint Paul's, London, in the seventeenth century, said "How abundantly is that word blessed multiplied in the book of Psalms! The book seems to be made out of that word, and the foundation raised upon that word, for it is the first word of the book."

Of the one hundred texts in Psalms, eighteen stand out from all others. They contain a form of the word for blessing which does not appear earlier in the Bible. It is the word ashray, from a root meaning to go well, to prosper, to be happy. A strange fact about this word is that it is found only in the plural construction, where it takes the nature and force of an interjection. It may be rendered literally, "O the blessednesses ..." or, "O the blessings ...".

Out of the eighteen occurrences of this remarkable word in the Psalms, three have to do with the law of God, that is, the Bible. These three passages provide practical instruction for believers who long for some degree of the visible blessing of God in their lives and it is these three to which I invite your attention.

The first text is found in the opening verses of the book of Psalms, "O the blessednesses of the man" whose "delight is in the law of the Lord: and in his law doth he meditate day and night." How few of us can claim the benediction of that text!

How does one delight in the law? The Hebrew root for delighting in the word is kawfates, meaning to take pleasure in, to desire, to consider valuable. A careful reading of Psalm 119 reveals how its author delighted himself in the law of his God. He hid it in his heart (verse 11), declared it with his mouth (verse 13), rejoiced in it as much as in all riches (verse 14). He prayed, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (verse 18).

The psalmist longed for the word (verse 20), meditated upon it (verse 23), sought counsel from it (verse 24), loved it (verse 47), believed it (verse 66), hoped in it (verse 81), stuck to it (verse 31), valued it above gold (verse 72), sang about it (verse 54), and found comfort in it: "Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction" (verse 92).

We can all do likewise if we wish. We can read it by day, meditate upon it by night, and search its pages as for hid treasure. If we thus delight ourselves in the Bible, we shall sing its psalms and hymns and spiritual songs in the day of prosperity and comfort ourselves with its promises in the night of affliction.

Should we be satisfied with our own Christian service if we do not have any evidence that Psalm 1:3 is true of us, "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper"? The history of God's people confirms and illustrates this text; our personal history should do so. God said to Joshua, "Do according to all the law, ... that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua 1:7). He said to Moses, "Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do" (Deuteronomy 29:9). The Lord's work prospered through the ministry of the Word in Ezra's day (Ezra 6:14). It is written about Hezekiah that "the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth" because he honored what he found written in the Word of God (II Kings 18:7).

Our second text is an arresting statement: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law" (Psalm 94:12). The Hebrew yawsar rendered "chastenest" here is remarkable. It means literally to chastise with blows, to punish with the rod. The Holy Spirit uses it in the sense of instruction which it gives so powerfully that it is like being dealt a series of blows. Isaiah said, "The Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people" (8:11).

Would we like to have the Lord speak to us as forcefully as He has spoken to others? He is seeking to do that very thing when He chastens us. O the blessednesses of the individual whom the Lord chastens so that He may teach him out of His Word! "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). Doubtless there are some who shrink from the divine chastisement, but those who are truly exercised by it as a special manifestation of the divine favor receive blessings from God that others miss. (Hebrews 12:11).

Trials are the precursors of great blessings. If they are received as from the hand of a loving heavenly Father, they are followed by tokens of divine favor we could not otherwise know. In James 1:2 we are admonished to "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations," or testings.

For the third use of the wonderful word ashray, let us look at three places in the Psalms where it is used in connection with the walk of the believer. "O the blessednesses of the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly" (1:1). "O the blessednesses of the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord" (119:1-2). "O the blessednesses of every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways" (128:1).

Perhaps the most remarkable verse in the New Testament about how we may experience the blessing of God in the practical things of daily life is James 1:25: "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." The previous verses describe a man who glances into the Word and goes his way just as though he had not seen

himself in God's mirror. But verse twenty-five uses a different word for looking into the perfect law of liberty. It is a word meaning to stoop down and to gaze intently, as in the case of John when he stooped down and gazed into the empty tomb.

It describes those Christians who bend low over the Word, scrutinize what they find with care, then rise from their search of the Bible to obey its precepts. These persons are blessed in their deeds. They prosper in the practical activities of life.

O the blessednesses of the Christian who is described by such passages as we have examined! Doubtless each of us is saying in his heart, "Lord, I want to be that person." We can be, if we delight ourselves in the Word, if we are willing to be taught the Word through chastening, if we honor the Word by walking in obedience to it.

If it should be that having known the blessing of God, we have lost it in some measure, let us pray as William Cowper did in the old hymn:

"Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and His Word?
The dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne, and worship only Thee!
So shall my walk be close with God, calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road that leads me to the Lamb!"