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All These Blessings...

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Series: The Mind of Christ

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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All These Blessings...

Little Angie knelt by her bed; her mom and dad by her side. It was evening prayer time, and her dad, a six-foot, three-inch football player, looked especially uncomfortable as he tried to fold himself up and assume a prayerful position by the bed. He had been there before; many times before.

Angie always began by asking God to bless her parents. That was nice. Then she began to “bless” her frog, her dog, her lizard, and her fishbowl. There were no longer any live fish, so the bowl got the brunt of the blessing. Following that, the long-lost relatives began to make their way, one by one, into little Angie’s list of potentially “blessed” ones. Aunt Othelia was her favorite. She had never met Aunt Othelia, but she thought the name was a riot. So she got blessed and blessed and blessed.

Once all the relatives, dead and alive had been in the blessing pool, Angie started on countries. She had heard in Sunday school about the children in Angola, Ethiopia, Romania, and Hungary. God was implored to bless them as well. By now, Dad was usually either asleep or planning his next trip to the chiropractor. It was no longer a matter of if he could get up, but how.

And on and on it went. Every child in kindergarten got blessed. All the Volkswagens in the world got blessed. The pastor got blessed along with his dog, Zenith, and his cat, Ferdinand. Finally, in desperation, Dad would say, “Angie, I think God has heard enough.” To that, she would take a deep breath and say, “Oh, yeah, and God, bless you too, Amen.”

One night, after just such a moving experience, Dad sat by Angie’s bed and asked her a question: “Dear,” he began, “what does it mean for God to bless someone?” There was an eerie silence. Angie sat bolt upright in bed and stared at her dad. “I don’t know,” she answered. “That’s God’s problem. My job is just to ask.” With that, she flipped over on her side, fluffed her pillow and proceeded to go to sleep. She had been taught the

All These Blessings...

words, but not the meaning.

Her dad was somewhat annoyed that he had spent an entire evening listening to his daughter ask God to bless the spider on the wall and the extra hubcap for the car, when she didn't even know what a blessing was. Disgruntled, he went into the den and proceeded to unload on his wife, who was trying to get her knees to work again after the long vigil by Angie's bed.

"That kid is blessing everything in China and beyond, but she doesn't know what it means for God to bless someone," Dad grumbled. "We've got to do some Bible teaching." Without missing a beat, mom replied, "What does it mean, Ed?" Ed was now more frustrated than ever. He started to blurt out an answer, and suddenly he realized he didn't know either.

Do you? Does God bless someone just because you ask? Is He obligated? What is a blessing anyway? Does it mean nothing bad will happen to them? Then why did the goldfish die? Why did Aunt Othelia have that car wreck? Why did the pastor's dog, Zenith, have to be rushed to the vet? Did Angie not have enough faith? Did her dad offset her prayers with his unbelief? Was she wrong to ask God to bless someone, or did she just need to better understand how God works? Are God's blessings physical or spiritual? Do we have to do anything before we receive them, or are they automatic? Does our rebellion prevent Him from blessing us, even if the little Angies of this world are imploring Him to do so?

How would you answer if you were Ed? That is the subject of this study, a look at the blessings of God: what they are, how we get them, how we lose them, and why we lose them. It might help some of our little children or grandchildren pray aright. It might also help some of us big children to pray with more understanding, as well.

We are looking at the subject of obedience. Thus far, the questions we have asked and the answers we have received, in their most abbreviated form, are these:

1- What are we to obey?

Answer: The absolutes of Scripture, the principles of Scripture, and the authorities God places over us.

All These Blessings...

2- Who should obey?

Answer: Those “who have ears to hear.” Only Christians can obey Christian principles, because only Christians have Christ.

3- When should we obey?

Answer: Immediately. Today is the day. Scripturally speaking, there’s no tomorrow. This applies to our salvation, to our calling, to obeying the obvious, to obeying God’s leading, and to obeying when temptation comes calling.

Simple, isn’t it? *All* Christians are to obey *all* the absolutes always, immediately (if not sooner). Okay, then what does all this have to do with “blessings”? Simply this: *Most of God’s “blessings” are spiritual in nature, are conditional in scope, and come as a result of some form of obedience.*

God heard little Angie’s prayer to bless Othelia. But Othelia wasn’t a Christian. So for her to become a “blessed” one, Othelia had to be born again. What would that do for Othelia? Would it make her life easier? No. Would it make her life more meaningful? You bet. Would it affect her eternal destiny? Most assuredly. Then her blessings would be primarily *internal* and *eternal*? Right.

As Ed began to think about it, he began to be confused. He had asked God to bless his brother, Sam, and about a week later, Sam lost his job. What kind of blessing was that? In due time, he might find out. God was working in Sam’s life. Ed didn’t know it, but because of losing his job, Sam had humbled himself before God and a new relationship was developing between this somewhat wayward brother and his Savior. He was appropriating the mind of Christ for the first time in his life. He was becoming “blessed”.

Perhaps we ought to begin by understanding what it means to be blessed. Then we can more accurately determine how to pray and what to expect. The word translated *ble*ss in many Old Testament passages has a literal meaning, “to walk straight on.” It is also translated or interpreted in many cases as “to be filled with happiness.” As one Old Testament word study book indicated, “our happiness is determined by the way we walk.”

God’s people, meanwhile, were called blessed just because they were God’s people (Deuteronomy 7:14). The way they would

All These Blessings...

be blessed was by receiving God's presence. In Exodus 33:14, God told Moses, "My presence shall go with you and I will give you rest." He blessed the children of Israel with His presence in the wilderness. The cloud of glory preceded them and guided them and led them in the way. They knew where to go and how to walk, so long as they followed His presence. When they did, the blessings of God were theirs.

There are two New Testament words that translate into language as *to bless* or *blessed*. The first is eulogia, the word from which we get our English word "eulogy." It means "to be thankful for and speak well of." The other word, makarios, means "to bring about happiness." It speaks of a gift that brings happiness. In summary, it is a gift you give thanks for because it brings you happiness. The ultimate gift which would guarantee God's people happiness is described in Psalm 118. That gift is Jesus Christ. There we read:

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have
blessed you from the house of the LORD.

God is the LORD, and He has given us light;

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy
endures forever. (Psalm 118:26,27a,29 NKJV)

Jesus was the light that came into the world who came in the name of the LORD. He came as a gift to teach God's people how to walk. He came to bring in a totally new kingdom, a kingdom of the Spirit. It would be a kingdom which would redefine the word blessing as something that brought spiritual happiness as it brought in that kingdom. He would call out a new generation of people, give them a new covenant, and bless them with His presence in a new way.

He would give them His Spirit to indwell them. So Christ would be the blessed gift, and His Spirit would be the enabler who would allow His people to walk in His ways. Then they would be blessed indeed. With His Spirit to guide them, "His presence would go with them, and give them rest." Suddenly there was a tangible expression of this attribute of God called grace, and man could experience on a constant basis, a taste of heaven on his way to heaven. And every time he allowed God the freedom to be Himself, he would be blessed.

Would blessings then be primarily temporal? If little Angie

All These Blessings...

prayed for her parents, ought her parents to be blessed with the absence of problems? We have to look at Jesus' definition of the blessed life. It is found in Matthew, chapter five. There we read that familiar passage:

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.

Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
(Matthew 5:1-12 NKJV)

So a gift awaits certain Christians, the gift of being able to walk with God in a special way. They are called "blessed ones" because they qualify for this special relationship with their God. Who are they? They are those who are poor in spirit, humble in their circumstances. They are those who mourn the loss of people or things and are grieving. They are those who are noted for their meekness, not their success; those noted for their mercy, not their aggressiveness; those noted for their purity, not their accomplishments; those noted for their peacemaking, not their authority; those who have been unjustly persecuted, made fun of, reviled, and had false rumors spread about them.

These are God's "blessed ones": those for whom the circumstances of life seem less than fair. The ones who mourn, the ones who weep, the ones who are misunderstood, reviled,

All These Blessings...

and scorned. Someone may have prayed for God to “bless” them. God answered their prayers. He let them lose their job through a misunderstanding so they could become meek. He may have allowed them to suffer loss so they could mourn and come to know the Comforter more intimately. He may have let them be misunderstood to invoke in them a merciful heart to reach out to others. He may have allowed them to become involved in conflict, to teach them the joy of peacemaking. He was answering someone’s prayers. He was blessing them.

Do you want God to bless Uncle Charley? Then don’t expect God to necessarily give Uncle Charley a new house or a better job. Expect God to do *whatever it takes* to get Uncle Charley’s attention so he can deepen his walk with God. Then he will be “blessed” indeed.

Blessings, then, are the things God does, the things God gives, and things God takes away that bring about the mind of Christ in the Christian. When you pray for God to bless someone who is not a Christian, you are asking God to bring whatever pressures or circumstances necessary into that life to draw them to an acknowledgement of sin and the need for a Savior. It may simply mean sending someone into their life to share the gospel. It may mean losing something or someone that has become an idol. It may mean freeing Satan to drag them to a place where sin no longer satisfies. It may be simply to allow the reaping of what they have sown. But whatever it takes, it is a blessing.

If Mary is not a believer, and you ask God to bless her by giving her that job she wants, God will not answer no if it will satisfy a need in her that Christ alone is meant to satisfy. Should she get the job, be successful, and not be born again, would she be blessed? Not on your life. “What would it profit Mary if she were to gain the whole world and lose her own soul?” No, the only happiness that is blessed is eternal happiness. That comes from “walking straight” with God.

Praying for God to bless Christians is a different matter. You are asking Him to bring or allow in their lives anything and everything necessary for them to walk more perfectly with God. So when you view them circumstantially, you may not see blessings as the world sees them. You may even see tribulation or distress. Paul gloried in “tribulations, distresses, weaknesses and difficulties” (2 Corinthians 12:10), because they brought the

All These Blessings...

blessing of God's power into his life. So when you ask God to bless a Christian, re-read Matthew 5 first. You may be asking God to humble them, to do what it takes to make them meek, to bring them into conflict so they can become peacemakers, or to allow them persecution, misunderstanding, and abuse so they can be accumulating rewards. Those are the things God calls "blessings", and those are the people God calls "blessed ones." Granted, this may be a bit too heavy for little Angie. But it shouldn't be too heavy for you.

If that's how we pray for the blessings of God for others, how can we accumulate the blessings of God for ourselves? That question brings us back to the subject of obedience, and how it produces the mind of Christ. The "blessed" life, even in the Old Testament where physical blessings were given as a portrait of the spiritual treasures to come, was the direct result of obedience. So long as God's people obeyed, certain blessings were theirs. Now the kingdoms have changed and the nature of the blessings have changed, but the place of obedience in receiving those blessings has not changed. What, then, does God promise in the way of "blessings" when believers are obedient to the absolutes, promises, and authorities they are given?

1- Obedient believers are given a special place in God's heart. He sets them apart unto Himself.

God said this to Israel:

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then [and only then] out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,

you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

(Exodus 19:5,6a NIV)

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth.

All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:

(Deuteronomy 28:1,2 NIV)

God had chosen Israel. He had called them out from among all the nations of the world. Deuteronomy tells us:

The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people,

All These Blessings...

for you were the least of all peoples;

but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand...

(Deuteronomy 7:7,8 NKJV)

So God called Israel for the same reasons He calls us. Paul said, “His strength is made perfect in weakness.”¹ He said, “Not many mighty, not many noble have been called.”² He saw in us a kind of weakness through which His glory could be poured. He called us, not because we were so great, but because in spite of our weakness, He loved us, and He chose to set us apart and give us a special place in His heart. He *sanctified* us. He made us *holy ones*. To be sanctified means “to be set apart.” But there is a catch. Though our *position* with Him cannot change, the depth of our *relationship* with Him is dependent upon our obedience. That’s why He wrote:

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

(John 14:21 NKJV)

Obedience opens the door for God to have a special love relationship with you. It allows Him to open His heart to you, to make Himself known to you. But that level of love isn’t available to every believer. It is available to those who have His commandments and keep them. Obedience is the key that opens the door to the heart of God. And if you long for a level of intimacy with God that so few seem to find, if your real desire is for the kind of personal fellowship with Christ in which your hearts beat as one, here is the key: Obey what you know to obey. Don’t tarry. Don’t delay. Don’t argue. When God reveals from His Word something He wants you to do, *do it*. And do it immediately. We have a wrong concept of grace. Because it’s free, we think it’s given without regard to our response to His commandments. It is free. It is undeserved. But the fountain flows through a pipeline that must be free from the corrosion of disobedience or we do not benefit from the grace. The level of your intimacy with God will be in direct proportion to your obedience and to the humility that accompanies it. He resists the proud, and He does not make Himself known to those who

¹ II Corinthians 12:9

² I Corinthians 1:26

All These Blessings...

have His commandments and do not keep them.

2- The level of your obedience affects your children and your grandchildren.

Genesis 22:18 says this:

“and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” (NIV)

The children would be fruitful because the parents had been obedient. It is not a divine law. This was a special promise. But the principle is threaded throughout Scripture, proving that God pours His Spirit through the offspring of those who have His ear.

Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the LORD your God.

(Deuteronomy 12:28 NIV)

But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children—

with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.”

(Psalm 103:17-20 NIV)

Even the holy angels are examples of obedience. They live to serve Him. Their only goal is to worship Him. They never resist His leading. And while there is no guarantee that your children or grandchildren will follow Him, there is an indication that God has a level of intensity in the way He draws the next generation and those to follow just because the parents were obedient.

Your obedience does not overrule your children’s free will. It does, however, apparently guarantee them that God will seek their hearts with all of His. What a wonderful reason to obey!

3- A level of spiritual wisdom awaits those who continually, immediately obey.

The one thing most of us want more than anything else is wisdom. We want the mind of Christ. We want spiritual insight

All These Blessings...

that allows us to see life from God's perspective: to make right decisions, to discern right motives. We pray for it. We seek after it. Psalm 119 gives us the secret:

I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. (Psalm 119:100 NIV)

Obedience opens the heart valve, rids it of the contaminants that prevent God's Spirit from transforming the thought life, and allows God the kind of soil in which His Truth will prosper. No wonder the Psalmist wrote:

Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!

Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. (Psalm 119:5,6 NIV)

God longs for us to have the kind of wisdom the disciples had. He wants it to be said of us:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13 NKJV)

He desires Christ in us to manifest the same power they saw in Him.

And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching,

for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (Matthew 7:28,29 NKJV)

Power in your ministry and wisdom in your counsel come from two things: the Word in your heart, and purity and obedience in your walk with God. You can have so much Bible knowledge your friends call you "King James", but unless you are obedient to what you know, your wisdom will be superficial and your authority will be without supernatural power. Obedience is the key.

4- The joy in your life will be proportionate to the level of obedience to the known will of God.

Listen to Jesus' words:

If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

All These Blessings...

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:10,11 NIV)

The reason Jesus remained so filled with the love of His Father and so experienced the joy of His Father even amidst the rejection of men was because He never disobeyed His Father. Obedience produces fellowship with God; fellowship with God produces joy. If you simply cannot find that measure of spiritual happiness, that blessed life Jesus promised us, it may simply be an area of known disobedience in your life that has robbed you of the intimacy with God that produces joy. Jesus' joy was complete. It had no limitations. It never waned. It remained constant, unaffected by the storms of life. Why? Because He did always those things that pleased the Father. That level of intimacy with the Father gave the Son such inner confidence that He always remained filled with the joy of the Lord. And what a promise! He said that same joy can be in you and it will be complete if you obey my commands.

There are many more spiritual benefits that are considered blessings from God that are available to any child of God who simply obeys what He knows to do. The secret of success in the Christian life then, is no great mystery. We will have intimacy with God, fruitfulness to hand over to generations to come, wisdom beyond that of men and women much older than we, and a kind of unspeakable joy that transcends all of life's pressures. It all hinges on our willingness to obey what we know to do. James reminds us:

...to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:17 NKJV)

The mystery, then, is not in the process. The mystery is why we have allowed Satan to so blind us that we cannot see the balance between grace and obedience, and why we cannot see that we will never become the men and women we long to be in Christ unless and until we become obedient even in the tiny areas of life that others do not deem important. If they are important enough for God to put in His Word, those who want His best will not go to the right or to the left. They will simply obey.

Some have left the battlefield and ceased to be effective because of areas of disobedience that plagued them for years, and finally were yielded to. Others were walking along seeming to be

All These Blessings...

growing in grace when “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things”³ choked out the life that the Word had infused into their hearts, and little by little the power diminished, the wisdom subsided, the desire to please God was desensitized by the quiet diversion that comes when you “entangle yourself with this world’s goals.” It’s so insidious. It’s so deceptive.

Many of us know that point of disobedience, be it overt or simply by neglect, that began to rob us of God’s best. Those who don’t can be assured that God is more interested in our knowing than we are. Ask Him. Spend a day alone with Him and if need be, fast and ask for Him to open up to you a picture of when and how you first compromised what could have been His best.

Tell Him no matter what it takes, you want to be blessed. You want the gift of His Spirit to be free to lead you in a straight walk. You want the blessed life. It may take you down a path that leads to humiliation. It may break you to make you meek. It may take from you to make you hunger and thirst for righteousness. It may lead you into conflict, that peacemaking may be your blessing. It may even allow you to be tested, tried, misunderstood and taken advantage of even as Jesus was. He had every reason to resist. But instead, He became obedient unto death.

The result? He became the most blessed one of all.

³ Matthew 13:22

All These Blessings...

OH, THE BLESSING OF GOD

Oh, the blessings of God
How oft' we claim their power,
Yet often do not understand
What blessings really are.

Blessed are the humble,
They the kingdom claim.
Blessed are the mourners,
They find comfort in His name.

Blessed are the merciful,
Whose hearts have broken been,
And by the love that they've received,
Can comfort other men.

Blessed are the meek ones,
Who simply know their place,
Blessed are the pure in heart,
They only see God's face.

Blessed are the peaceful ones,
Who bond two hearts as one,
The persecuted, blessed are,
Who suffer for the Son.

Oh, to know when e'er we cry,
"Bless me, Lord, I pray!"
We're really saying, "Change me Lord,
And teach me to...obey!"

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