

BLESS and Be Blessed

Intro: Aren't colds so annoying. How many of you are prone to getting colds, especially in the winter months? I am! The stuffy head. The itchy eyes. Sometimes the sinus headache. The sinus drainage. Sometimes a sore throat. The feeling of being depleted of energy. The blowing of the nose. The discouragement and mental frustration knowing there is no cure, only symptom regulation. And then there is the dreaded sneezing fit. One sneeze after another that is uncontrollable. Often after one of these episodes someone will say with sympathy, "gesundheit" or "God bless you." Now where did that come from. There are many ideas about where this originated but with little consensus. It is somewhat irrelevant anyway because a more valuable question is "What does God say about being a blessing or what it takes to be blessed? Is this something that should characterize my life as a Christian? Let's look at two main passages today.

Galatians 3:13-14 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" – so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Context Observations

- The book of Galatians is about how the law and faith relate to God, Christ and the believer.
- The law is a teacher of what is right and wrong and calls for strict, perfect obedience. It contains the moral code of God and He takes it very seriously.

The Curse

- The law has demands that we cannot keep. No matter how hard we try, we mess up and sin.
- We are guilty before God because we cannot keep its demands. This is depressing but it is also the truth. Whether we feel the guilt or not, we are guilty before a holy God.
- The penalty is death. Sin is awful to a holy God because it states to God that we are not subservient to our Creator and my way is better than His.

The Remedy

- Redemption through Christ from the slave market of sin - To redeem means to deliver by paying the price
- Jesus died in our place as our substitute - He paid our penalty of death. Our sins were placed on Him as he died on the cross (1 Pet. 3:18, 2 Cor.5:21).
- Faith in Christ brings salvation from the curse - not trying to keep the law (Jn.6:37, Rom. 5:1).

The Blessing of God through Abraham

- The word bless in our passages today means to speak well of someone, we get our English word "eulogy" from this Greek word. A blessing is a positive statement. For a Christian, it's a request that God would help another person to succeed in some way, that he or she would experience God's favor or something beneficial.
- It has the sense of something that is said or done that is beneficial to someone
- Abrahams blessing extends to us through Jesus. In other words, the promised blessing is that salvation is available to all through God's grace and faith in Christ, who was of the lineage of Abraham. Let's look at Genesis 12:3 to see what God said to Abraham about being blessed.

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Some thoughts about this passage.

- Is for Jew and Gentile - All families can benefit from this blessing. God chose the Jews for a special role of revelation, but He loves all people and wants all people to be blessed. Aren't you glad for what John 3:16 says is in the Bible: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- The presence and work of the Holy Spirit through salvation – faith in Christ releases the Spirit into our lives. He can be with us, working in us every moment of every day. The Holy Spirit is the proof of God's salvation blessing to the world.
- Personal illustration: as a spiritually troubled young man in college I had sought out a person to share my doubts with. I will never forget walking away from that meeting and experiencing a spiritual blessing of God. Through that man, God used the promises of Scripture to give me immense spiritual benefit and blessing. A burden had been lifted. What a blessing to be forgiven, accepted in the family of God. What a blessing to know others who are traveling the same spiritual road and are offering support – all because of what God, through the Holy Spirit is doing through salvation to those who believe.

Let's look at another passage about blessing together.

1 Peter 3:8-9 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. REPEAT

Context Observations

- This was written during a time of persecution from the Roman Empire. Christianity was viewed as a threat. There are hints of the same atmosphere of persecution in America today.
- Christianity has always been at odds with worldliness and carnal values. But these have gone mainstream in America.
- Christian values are no longer the norm but viewed as restrictive and adversarial.
- Secular philosophies, other religions, and a rejection of the supernatural vie for supremacy of the heart and have worked their way into the legal system and framework of our way of life.
- Frustration, anger and anxiety is easily accepted as a mindset. But we cannot allow this to be our mode of operation in a world that needs Christ. So how should I respond when the world seems to be going the wrong direction and my values are denigrated.

The spiritual mindset

- Unity of mind – harmonious disposition, living in harmony with others, get along with fellow Christians because you are all on the same side, conflict does not characterize your life.
- Sympathy – entering into the pain of others (means to suffer with) put yourself in the shoes of others and suffer with them, seeing the needs that are behind the sins of others.
- Brotherly love – affinity because of common connections, as a closely related family member, as members of the same family, see one another as a brother or sister.
- Tender heart – being sensitive to the needs and feelings of others, the opposite is to be calloused, hard-hearted, indifferent to the needs of others.
- Humble mind – thinking that considers the needs of others, the opposite is prideful thinking which only emphasizes self, creating a servant notoriety, being gracious, serve others before self, rejoice in the success of others.

The spiritual lifestyle

- Don't retaliate with actions or words
 - Don't repay evil (quality of badness in attitude or actions) and reviling (insults, abusive language that rails against another, language that puts another person down).
 - People can be mean and nasty – our carnal reaction is to do the same to them, but this makes us as bad as them. The way of the world and our normal human impulse is to strike back with the same hurtful treatment we receive. Peter commands us to completely refuse that instinct.
 - Matthew 5:43-44 Jesus said, You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

- Find ways to bless with actions and words
 - This is a calling. It is God's voice speaking to us. It is an admonition from God almighty.
 - Love others unconditionally.
 - Pray for others, especially to be saved.
 - Be thankful for them, God has them here for a purpose.
 - Forgive - only forgiveness can break the cycle of revenge. The lack of forgiveness has many Christians stuck in the past and suffering from ill feeling. There are many Americans in this same sad lifestyle.
 - Yes, these are undeserved. But did we deserve Christ dying for us and taking our punishment? No, but He did. We have a mandate or calling to respond with Christlikeness – being just like the world is no redemptive message to those without Christ – you can't win unbelieving people to Christ by doing wrong, but you can influence some by being distinctively Christian.

- Look forward to being blessed – God sees it all and He will ultimately reward you. A caution: that blessing may not be financial or when you think it should come. It could happen here or in eternity. Let's leave what the blessing is and when it comes up to God.

How is this thought of “Bless and be Blessed” made practical?

Dave Ferguson, a pastor in the Naperville area, used these blessing principles to create a practical, easily followed strategy that helps us to have direction on how to love our neighbor as ourselves. It is not another program that is going to take a chunk of time. These principles are things that fit into our lives as we are living them. Here is what it looks like. We will use the acrostic BLESS and you have a bookmark in your bulletin that outlines this strategy. If you do not have one you can pick one up on your way out of the service today.

Next Steps: B.L.E.S.S. others

- Begin with prayer: “God, how do you want me to bless the people that you have placed in my life?” This gets us praying for specific people that God lays on our minds. On the back of your bookmark there are places to put names of people to start praying for. Aren't you glad someone prayed for you to come to Christ for salvation?
- Listen with purpose: Take the time to listen to the needs, struggles and pain of people around you. People who are struggling are often more open to spiritual answers.

- Eat together: Look for ways to have a cup of coffee, a meal, or a dessert in order to build a connection. We all eat many times during the week. Use some of them to connect with people over food. It helps break down barriers.
- Serve in love: Look for ways to respond to the needs, struggles and pain of the people around you. We should do this without a motive of reciprocation. Love is giving without expecting anything in return. But it creates a platform whereby people are more willing to listen to us because they have proof that we care.
- Share your story: When the time is right, share the story of how Jesus Christ has changed your life. Everyone likes to hear a story. If we are following Christ, we have stories of how God has impacted our lives.
- Personal Illustration: Let me tell you about Bill Jones. He was a man who invited me to have a coke with him. He told me stories of what God had done in his life. We worked on my car together, it needed a lot of help and I needed it so I could date this lady who played the piano. His concern for me and the stories that he told about how God was working in his life, made me want to open up and grow spiritually. Everyone needs a Bill Jones in their life, a person who prays, listens, eats with you, serves in love and shares the story of Jesus.

So let's begin to BLESS and we in turn will be blessed.

As followers of Christ we are called to be a disciple and make disciples. The BLESS strategy is a way to engage people who are already a part of our life or neighborhood. As we come to a close in this service, let's give our attention to this video that moves us in the direction of our Bless principles today.