

Blessings or Curses

by
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Upon hearing or reading the title of this article, a Bible student usually thinks of Deuteronomy 28. This instruction from God gives the blessings resulting from obedience and the curses resulting from disobedience. It is interesting to note that only the first 14 verses reveal blessings. The remaining 54 verses are about curses. I received an email from a financial advisor who reviewed the present economy in our country. He said that although the economy is very healthy and strong, that kind of news DOESN'T SELL. Doing a "Google" search I discovered that "bad news sells," had 14,200 hits, and "good news sells" only 437 hits.

Perhaps this is why we often major on the "do not's" and their consequences rather than the blessings and their results. Yet God really emphasizes blessings and covenants or promises. In Genesis 12, God promised to bless Abram as he went to a land (later called Israel) that He would show him. Abram's descendants would become a great nation and through him all families of the earth would be blessed. Abraham (his later name) became known as the father of faith even to us Gentiles as we join the family of God through Jesus. Jesus became a curse as He hung on a tree "in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Galatians 3:8-14.

In Deut. 30:19 God gave us a choice about life (blessings) or death (curses). He demands obedience because He desires blessings for us. As parents and grandparents or teachers and leaders we need to guide children toward God who desires blessings.

Jacob who had 12 sons - the 12 tribes of Israel - is listed in Hebrews 11, the hall of fame of faith, because on his deathbed he blessed his sons. Gen. 48-49. As a father, his most important task was to seek God's will for each child and to bless him by showing love and favor and speaking a word of confidence to thrust him into his divine destiny.

A story is told about a rabbi who was standing outside his yeshiva (school) in Jerusalem while the children were on a 15-minute recess break. His son, Chaim, a teacher in the yeshiva, was standing and observing, when suddenly his father turned to him. "What do you see my son?" asked the rabbi. "Why," he answered, "children 'playing!'"

"Tell me about them," said the rabbi. "Well," answered Chaim, "Dovid is standing near the door of the school with his hands in his pockets; he probably is no athlete. Moishie is playing wildly; he probably is undisciplined. Yankel is analyzing how the

clouds are drifting. I guess he was not counted in the game. But all in all they are just a bunch of children playing."

His father turned to him and exclaimed, "No, my son. You don't know how to watch the children. Dovid is near the door with his hands in his pockets because he has no sweater. His parents can't afford winter clothes for him. Moishie is wild because his teacher scolded him and he is frustrated. And Yankel is moping because his mother is ill and he bears the responsibility to help with the entire household. In order to be a Rabbi you must know each boy's need and make sure to give him the proper attention to fulfill those needs."

In Jewish homes at every Sabbath evening meal, the father lays his hand on each child and speaks a blessing. Surveys show that 90% of Christians have never received a father's blessing, the most important legacy any father can give a child. Blessings don't have to be formal or at a certain event.

John Eldrege, author of "Wild at Heart" and other books says that every boy needs to hear from his father that "he has what it takes." Every boy wants to be in some way a warrior/hero. Every girl wants to be a "princess." She needs to hear from her father that she "is lovely" or is "his princess." How many times do children grow up hearing only rebukes or pronouncements of failure?

My sister and I had a "dress-up" box. There was a blue satin formal dress that was the most sought after article. Whoever got to wear it (faded and forlorn as it became) was the "queen of the day." All the "play" revolved around her!

I recently did the teaching at a Bar Barukah, Son of the Blessing, a Christian rite of passage for a 13 year old boy, where he was affirmed and blessed. This ceremony can be patterned after a Jewish Bar Mitzvah (Son of the Commandments or Torah) when a boy at thirteen becomes a young man and is now accountable for his own actions. (The idea of teenagers was begun about 50 years ago and has postponed growing up and taking responsibility - another subject.) At this service the young man's 5-year-old niece was to be the "purity" ring bearer. When I saw her in her long white dress, her hair curled with a lovely hairpiece, I said, "And you are the ring bearer." She said, "No, I'm the princess!" And right she was!

Let's make 2006 a year of blessings. As I sought God for His Word for this year, I heard, this thought, "Keeping on and expecting more." Let our goal be that of Paul who "pressed on toward the goal for the prize of the upward or heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus," Phil 3:14.