

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THINGS DON'T GO RIGHT?

When we think about the blessedness that belongs to those who delight in God and his Word, there is an important issue that we need to reflect upon. There are times when things do *not* seem to work this way. (Psalm 73 and the book of Job deal with this issue in depth.)

Perhaps the greatest problem is our tendency to equate "blessings" with *only* physical things - health, prosperity, children, etc. But such a view is very shallow, and a half-truth, at best.

Physical blessings do exist, and need not be ignored. Under *ideal* circumstances (when other factors - described below - do not interfere) those who follow the ways of God will experience better circumstances than those who don't. But there are some things that we need to remember about "blessings," if we want a full perspective on the issue:

[Note: The word "Christian," as used below, refers to those people who delight in God and his Word. They follow Jesus and delight in righteousness. Matthew 6:33. This is the *original* meaning of that word. It was never intended to include those who merely *claim* to be "Christian" (with no change in their values and lives), or who are merely religious.]

1. Even non-Christians can experience some types of blessings.

This can happen for several reasons. First, they can experience some blessings because of God's love, which he shows to both the evil and the righteous. Matthew 5:43-47; Acts 14:17; Romans 2:4.

They can also experience blessings because of the "salt and light" influence of Christians around them. Matthew 5:14-16; Jeremiah 29:4-7 (Some of the Proverbs also mention the influence that the righteous have on those around them.)

Finally, if they simply "imitate" a wise lifestyle, they will experience blessings in this present life. They will benefit, even though their hearts are not right, if they do the types of things that the Bible says are good - example, many of the things mentioned in the book of Proverbs. *But we must realize that all these blessings will exist only in this present life.* At death they will lose everything.

The evil person may also *seem* to be experiencing blessing, because of exploitation, injustice, oppression, etc. Yet in reality, he is only increasing the cursing and judgment he will experience in the future. When he stands before God and is judged, things won't look so "blessed." James 5:1-6

2. Spiritual blessings are available ONLY to those who submit to God.

The wicked cannot prevent spiritual blessings from coming to the one who follows God. God guarantees that these blessings will continue to come. The concept of spiritual blessings includes salvation and everything related to it. The exact phrase "spiritual blessings" occurs in two places: Romans 15:27; Eph 1:3.

3. A Christian may *fail* to experience physical blessings under certain circumstances. But these circumstances are all temporary.

He may fail to experience physical blessings because of injustice, persecution, or sometimes simply because of the general effects of sin in this world. He can also fail to experience blessings, if he happens to live in a nation of people who are being judged for sin (as did the prophet Jeremiah). If he, himself, is living in sin, he may fail to experience blessings because of God's discipline. (*If he is a genuine Christian, and not a counterfeit, God will discipline him, to bring him to repentance - and then he can once again experience the blessings of God!*)

We must remember, however, that for the *true* (that is, authentic or genuine) Christian, the *lack* of blessings is *temporary* - just as the *presence* of blessings is temporary for the non-Christian. In the end (and forever after that), the Christian will experience both physical and spiritual blessings to the maximum; the non-Christian will have neither.

4. In this life, even circumstances that are "less than pleasant," are actually a blessing in disguise for Christians!

God is working in us, through these circumstances, to bring about a far greater blessing than we could ever imagine! He works *all* things for our good, though temporarily (like surgery) circumstances may be unpleasant. These temporary problems will result in permanent blessings which could otherwise have never been obtained. Even discipline is a blessing, for it proves that we truly belong to him! Romans 8:28-39; Hebrews 12:7-13.

5. We often misinterpret what is (and what is not) a blessing.

We tend to view things in a short-sighted manner; whereas God knows the final outcome - and that makes all the difference! The psalmist who wrote Psalm 73:22 learned this.

Furthermore, the person who does not know the ways of God, and who rebels against them, will be even less able to recognize what is (and what isn't) a genuine blessing. In the extreme, such a person may even have his perspective completely turned around. Isaiah 5:20.

SUMMARY:

The Christian:

Psalm 1:1-3 describes a person who avoids strong associations with the wicked and their ways, and who delights in God and his ways. The person whose life is characterized by this delight *is* blessed. This includes all spiritual blessings. It may also include physical blessings - though at the present time, they may sometimes exist only to a limited extent. (They will exist in full, in the future when Jesus returns.)

The Non-Christian, experiencing genuine blessings:

Some of the blessings that are ours in Christ can "overflow" to those who are unwilling to love and obey God. These blessings are an expression of love, either by God or by his people. (Remember that we ourselves did not deserve blessings. We were once numbered among the wicked. But God was gracious to us - and God has called us to follow his example in being gracious to them.) The non-Christian may also experience blessings because of the "restraining influence" of Christians in the world. Either way, he will give account to God for how he responds to these blessings.

The Non-Christian, experiencing "false blessings"

Some people may appear to have "blessings" which are actually only superficial, and are the result of their sin and exploitation of others. These superficial blessings (not actually real blessings at all) only serve to incur greater judgment against those who experience them.