

“10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. 11 I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain. 12 Brethren, I beseech you, be as I *am*; for I *am* as ye *are*: ye have not injured me at all. 13 Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. 14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, *even* as Christ Jesus. 15 Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if *it had been* possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.” (Ga 4:10-15)

A sad thing had happened to the church among the Galatians. They were not a happy church. There was bickering among them, and they had become followers of false doctrines. So much so, that Paul reproved them for having departed from Christ.

A pointed question is asked: "Where is the blessedness?" Christianity is very much about blessedness. It is very much about the favor and the approval of God. The word translated "blessedness" can also mean joy, or satisfaction, but it means the highest joy or the highest degree of satisfaction, and is very aptly translated by our English word "blessedness," for it includes more than simply great things or good things, but the greatest and most approved things.

The question, then, is very pointed. You talk about blessedness and the greatness of Christ; where is the blessedness? Why aren't you happy? It is one thing to claim to be blessed; it is quite another thing to be blessed.

I would like to try to answer this question. I hope that these remarks will be a help to you in your Christian faith, to stir you up, to encourage you, to push you [as well as myself] to be zealous in the things of Christ.

Why is it that people do not rejoice in Christ? Why is it that Christians so often are down in the mouth, complaining about one another, fretful and unhappy in the faith? Where is the blessedness? Where is the good in being a Christian?

I believe that there are three things that apply to the subject before us.

I. True blessedness cannot be lost, even if it be obscured for a while. God's highest blessing does not depend upon and human activity. Many lesser blessings do. Financial and economic blessings may depend upon your energy and good choices. Laziness and carelessness are sins that very often have brought economic ruin to people and families. Our labor and our efforts are not to be frittered away and scattered to the wind, but they are to be conserved and invested for the glory of God. The parable of the talents and many other like things are found in the scriptures for the purpose of teaching these things. But these are earthly things, that can be won by earthly, human activities. Good mental health; good social skills; good economic decisions; and such things are in this category.

The highest good of all is eternal life and fellowship with God. This is the highest blessing. It is the free gift of God and is attainable only by faith. All other goods are nothing compared to this, for this involves the salvation of the soul itself. "What shall it profit a man..." our Lord said.

This blessing is the subject of HC 57: Q58: What comfort do you receive from the article "life everlasting"?

A58: That, inasmuch as I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy,[1] I shall after this life possess complete blessedness, such as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man,[2] therein to praise God forever.[3]

God has placed immense value upon this greatest of all good, by making it attainable only by faith and showing it to be inaccessible to human effort. It shows how different the salvation of the soul is from all other goals that men seek.

Ephesians 2: "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourself, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

The Galatian church was being tempted to rely upon their good works. The danger is very subtle. When we rely upon our good works, we depart from Christ and His works. The problem is this: no man's works can ever be good enough to earn the highest blessing. This is the issue. How can my polluted and insufficient works be worthy of earning eternal life: how can I merit the favor and fellowship of God? The answer to that question is always: I can do nothing; I cannot merit the favor and fellowship of God. I gain it only by faith for it is the gift of God. I need to believe the record that God has given of His son, to trust in Him, to give myself to him.

Our values are revealed when we consider these things. Do we put such a small value on eternal life and fellowship with God, to think that these things could be purchased out of our bankruptcy? How small was the value that the Galatians placed upon eternal life, to think it could be purchased by observing days and times and by the use of ceremonies.

II. A sense of blessedness can be lost, and is often lost, by the saints. Very often God sends us through dark and troublesome times. Sometimes these struggles can last for years. David describes many personal experiences like this in the Psalms. The classic examples are Job and Joseph. Job suffered the loss of all things. So did Joseph, when he was sold by his brothers into Egypt. The scoffer might say, "Look at Job. Where is the blessedness that he used to talk about?" "Look at Joseph. He didn't have a friend, even among his brothers. There is something weird about him. He couldn't even make it in Potipher's household. There are some ugly rumors about him." You know how it goes.

But there is a difference between Job and Joseph. Job complained a lot and wanted to reason with God to find out what was going on. We never read about such things with Joseph. It appears that he maintained a cheerful and cooperative spirit wherever he was. He never gave up to the feelings of gloom that must have come over him during those black years.

Yet, in spite of their troubles, these two men were blessed of God, and those who spoke against them were thoroughly embarrassed and overcome. But it came about according to God's timetable, not by theirs.

III. Very often, however, we lose the consciousness of blessedness simply because we do not use the means that God has given us. We pretend that we are wiser than God. We do not read the Bible or good books. We do not pray. We drift along, and do not take a serious look at the way we live our lives or the way we approach God. Life pushes us around, and we have no joy in the Lord, not because God has some grand design as in the case of Job or Joseph, but because we are behaving badly and planning badly.

This is wonderfully expressed in Peter's Second Epistle:

By the way; I find a need to preach or refer to this text every couple of years. This passage is so critical to Christian health, that it needs to be repeated over and over again.

C. The practica: vs. 5-7:

1. This is not a ladder; for faith includes all of these, and they are developed together and perfected together; but this passage does show the relationship between the aspects of faith, and shows how each of them is perfected. But let us look at the passage:

2. Adding to Faith:

a. Add virtue to faith. "virtue" = "force, excellence" a life rightly and honestly formed. vs. 3. Manly righteousness; obedience to God. "Manly" is generic: the species. Be what you are created to be. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." We are under his rule and law; works make faith perfect; and good works are impossible without faith.

b. Add knowledge to virtue. Knowledge=practical wisdom. Good sense. We are not blind moralists, who close our eyes, grit our teeth, and stick to principles we know not from whence!! Lies and vain works and empty lives must be cured with truth. --Virtue is the foundation of knowledge. You cannot know until you do. "If ye continue in my word..." --Knowledge perfects virtue: (H.C. #91) Illus. Christmas Trees.

c. Add temperance to knowledge. "power within" self-control Without self-control, knowledge is destructive. "knowledge puffs up." Temperance helps us to see what is important, and what is not important. It brings things into proportion: it helps us to see the difference between gnats and camels. Self-control: controlling the passions. To the Greek in meant mind over emotions; it means more than that here: regulated by God's word: even the reason and the moral sense. --True knowledge is the foundation of self-control; Self-control grows out of knowledge, which grows out of good works, which grow out of faith. --Self-control regulates and perfects knowledge. Balance: not choosing extremes.

d Add patience to self-control. "Endurance" means not giving up when the going gets tough. "Staying under" is the Greek, here. Not stoicism, but laying hold on the promise of God. experiencing Christ's power. --Patience grows out of self-control, and is the result of tribulation.

--Patience perfects self-control, for self-control is no good without endurance. Self-controlled for one day?

e. Add godliness to patience. "Good reverence." Good religion. "Godward attitude" Patience without godliness is stubbornness and obstinacy. There must be a godly purpose for our enduring, and that cannot be self-will and pride. Illus. Jim Jones and Jonestown. They certainly toughed it out to the bitter end; but what good was it?

--through patience, we learn to direct our lives in terms of the will of God? Do you think that it is a simple matter to know the will of God? The testimony of all the saints refutes that idea. Neither does the will of God come to you in a flash of intuition: "Ask, and it shall be given; seek and ye shall find..." "search as for hid treasures." Is knowing God a light and frivolous matter? --w/o godliness, patience is just toughing it out; it becomes an end in itself; self-affirmation and pride.

f. Add brotherly kindness to godliness. "Philadelphia" = love of the brethren. Communion of the saints. Mutual affection. BE decent to each other. Godliness must never be separated from brotherly kindness: bearing one another's burdens; guarding against wickedness. How many injuries have been done to the people of God in the name of godliness: lying, slander, evil-speaking, betrayal, etc.

--Brotherly love depends upon godliness; w/o godliness and faith it becomes sentimental, and may do more harm than good.

--w/o brotherly love to perfect it, godliness is perverted--narrow and judgmental. We betray one another in the name of God. It may even cast the righteous into prison in the name of God.

g. Add Charity to Brotherly love. Three words for love: eros: sexual love; philadelphia: brotherly love; agape: divine love. The first two see something desirable in the object of love, and pursues that object. Agape love is unconditional love; w/o merit. Origin of this love is in the one who love; not the object who is loved. Love for the unworthy. This is what Christ's love is for us. --Charity rests upon brotherly love--communion of the saints. Communion and covenant is the foundation of this love, for you cannot discover this love by yourself.

--w/o charity, brotherly love becomes cliquish, sectarian--more and more restricted, as we associate more and more with our friends, and think only of the people we like. Charity for all men perfects my love for the saints.