

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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The Blessing of Fear

He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. (Psalm 103:10-18)

If God immediately responded to each of us based on our conduct, even our present conduct at its best, how would we fare? Indeed, would we survive? The theme of this psalm appears in the first verse, "Bless the LORD, O my soul..." In the sense in which the word is used here blessing God does not mean that we bestow a blessing on Him who is the source of all blessings. Rather it means that we bow in reverential respect before Him, quite similar to the New Testament word translated as "worship." "When the Lord 'blesses' us, he reviews our needs and responds to them; when we 'bless' the Lord, we review his excellencies and respond to them."¹

According to this psalm, the basis for our worship of God is not what we gain in the act, either in time or in eternity, but rather we worship God because of His inexplicable goodness toward us. One of the most selfish and self-serving attitudes you'll ever observe among Christians is the attitude that we are working frantically in our Christian service now so that we will have more stars in *our* crowns in heaven. This attitude is rejected throughout Scripture and should be equally rejected by thoughtful and Bible believing Christians of all stripe. Worship now and likely in heaven is based on God's goodness to us, not our goodness to Him.

Occasionally sincere Christians will claim that, since Jesus died for our sickness, we merely

need to "claim it" and find immediate healing. They are correct in their premise, but wrong in the timing of the blessing. "He *forgives and heals*, though, as Scripture carefully indicates, not in parallel ways: in 2 Samuel 12:13-23, forgiveness was instantaneous, healing was withheld; sin and sickness were alike laid on Jesus (Mt. 8:16, 17) but just as, in this present life, though forgiven we still suffer the plague of sin, so sickness is still our lot according to his sovereign appointment until, in heaven, every disability, like every moral infirmity, will be gone."²

Three times in this psalm the writer specifically mentions God's special blessings on "them that fear him."

1. *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.*
2. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.*
3. *But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.*

Each of these points emphasizes God's incredible goodness toward those who fear Him.

¹Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible Commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible Commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Ps 103:1). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

²Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible Commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible Commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Ps 103:1). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

Even a cursory reading will clarify the point that fearing God in this sense does not equate with our typical view of paralyzing dread. Respect, submission, obedience, bowing in worship all relate to the psalm's concept of fearing God.

"David compares the magnitude of the forgiving mercy of Yahweh to the height of the heaven. That mercy is extended to those that fear him, i.e., godly souls. Sins are completely removed from the penitent "as far as the east is from the west." Yahweh's attitude toward the shortcomings of his people is that of a father toward his young children. His mercy is motivated by the human condition. "He knows our frame," i.e., he understands that man is weak. His body ultimately returns to the dust from which it came."³ Occasionally sincere Christians so emphasize God's goodness as to exclude His chastening. God is never unreasonable or arbitrary in dealing with His people, but neither is He so lax as to ignore our sins. On one hand pure justice could annihilate us instantly for our sins. On the other hand emotional based believers make divine goodness so prominent that they reject Biblical chastening. In our permissive society where one's "self-image" is preeminent the child often becomes the centerpiece of the family, and indulgence of the child's every desire is viewed as a parent's primary obligation. This concept is producing a generation of self-centered adults who enter life wholly unprepared for the reality of responsible, productive conduct. Not only should we thank God daily for His incredible kindness, as expressed in this psalm, but we should also thank Him daily for His severe judgments against our sins (Romans 11:22). This psalm does not indicate that God does not chasten, but rather that He always tempers justice with mercy in dealing with His children.

Increasingly in our permissive, self-centered culture professing Christians mold their lives and decisions around themselves and what they want. They have lost the foundational Biblical concept that true discipleship builds on self-denial, not self-indulgence. If Scripture sets rules that they are unwilling to obey, they presume that they can simply ignore the rules, live their compromised lifestyle, and retain God's blessings. God is always kind, but He faithfully honors the law of sowing and reaping. If we sow compromised discipleship and fail to live according to His Word, we shall surely reap the whirlwind of our own confusion. God doesn't promise blessings

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³Smith, J. E. (1996). *The wisdom literature and Psalms*. Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co.

regardless of how we live, but only as we live according to His Word. When Jesus taught the lesson regarding the high price of discipleship (Luke 14:28-33), He closed the warning with these solemn words, "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." "*All that he hath,*" what a frightening warning confronts us in these words. Often you will hear sincere Christians who have chosen to ignore this solemn teaching say, "I'm waiting to learn the will of God for my life." If we truly seek God's will for our lives, we need to go to Scripture, not "wait." We discover God's will for our lives in Scripture, not in compromised decisions and values that contradict Scripture. More than once in counseling believers who faced difficult choices, I've heard this response, "I know what Scripture teaches, and I tried to do it, but the price is too high. Maybe God will bless the best that I can do." They never consider that God has promised to bless our obedience to Scripture, but never to bless our convenient compromises. "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Obedience in actions, not merely the window dressing of words, ensures God's blessings in our endeavors. The idea that sincerity and good intentions alone guarantees God's blessings grows out of the relativism of our corrupted culture, not out of Scripture.

Balance is an incredibly difficult thing to accomplish and maintain. We readily reject the self-serving idea that man earns his salvation by good works. We equally reject the idea that God causes all things that occur, both good and bad. We seem to have lost sight of the Biblical truth that God requires more than sincere words and good intentions. He requires submissive obedience to His will and Word. He promises no blessings upon our compromised and anemic professions of submission to Him. In Ephesians 5 Paul used the analogy of marriage to exemplify the godly Christian life. Christ loved the church as husbands should love their wives. The wife is to submit to her husband as the church is to submit to Christ. This simple truth would transform many homes, not to mention churches, in our upside-down culture. As the home goes, so goes the church. For that reason Paul made a man's leadership of his family a prerequisite for his filling the role of minister. Submission is as taboo in the contemporary family as it is in the contemporary church. Only by a return to God's model will we ever regain the refreshing vision of God that we discover in this psalm. Fearing God means obeying God. How novel!

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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