

Conditions of Blessings

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[Matthew 5: 3-10] 3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

1. Gospel of Grace and the Conditions for Blessings

A renowned biblical scholar said that there are only two religions categorically. The first is evangelical Christianity which espouses the belief that salvation comes by the grace of God; and the other is all the rest of the religions, including Catholicism, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism, which promise salvation to humanity through their works. The gospel of grace, which is clearly declared in the Bible, calls all people to God through faith in Jesus Christ, who gave His own life on a cross as the ransom for their sins so that God accepts all repenting sinners because of the precious blood of His own Son. On the other hand, the gospel of works tells people that they have to work for their salvation, to earn their salvation by doing good works and making contributions to their church or temple.

Martin Luther, who was a Catholic priest of Germany in the early 16th century, opposed the wrong Catholic doctrine and practices of imposing the works-based salvation doctrine on the believers. He declared that people are saved by grace only and that the Bible is the only source of the truth instead of the church interpretations and traditions. Today, most evangelical Christian churches espouse the doctrine of salvation by grace only. The apostle Paul declares this truth in Romans and other epistles.

[Romans 11:6] And if by grace, then is it no more of works : otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace : otherwise work is no more work.

Today, we wish to examine how the words of our Lord's 'Sermon on the Mount' are related to the gospel of grace. The core of the gospel of grace is that we can be saved by the grace of God if we believe in the blood of Jesus. However, these words of Jesus to His disciples on the mount seem to imply that we must satisfy certain conditions to win God's blessings. So, there is seemingly confusion between the free gift of grace and having to meet certain conditions to be saved and blessed. Let us clarify this issue here and have a clear understanding of the conditions for salvation and blessings.

2. Sanctification and Our Rewards

The conclusion of our inquiry is, if we repent and believe in the blood of Jesus Christ as our savior, God forgives us and accepts us as His children. In other words, we become saved, and this salvation is granted to us as a free gift from God. We are now on the way of truth, walking daily with Christ Jesus under the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit.

[Romans 5:1-2] Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

As we begin our journey of faith as newborn Christians, the Spirit of God, more commonly called the Holy Spirit, resides in us and begins the work of sanctification, which is the work of transforming us into a new creature, mentally, morally, and spiritually. As a child is born and grows, the child is enrolled in a kindergarten, then in an

elementary school and higher schools to gain the knowledge, ethics, and wisdom to live as a contributing citizen of the society. The process of sanctification is much like the education a child goes through during its formative growth period.

As students go through schooling, they must pass the graduation examination to be qualified for the graduation diploma. The sum of grades a student gets throughout his/her schooling determines the rewards at graduation. Likewise, the sum of a Christian's sanctification during his/her walk in life determines what rewards he/she will receive from Christ at His judgment seat. Although we are already saved by God's grace through our faith in Christ, the result of sanctification in us will determine what prizes, privileges, and rewards we will enjoy in the heavenly kingdom. The bible makes this distinction very clear.

[1 Corinthians 3:12-15] 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

What Paul says in this epistle is as follows:

- 1) The works of our life will be subject to a fiery test at the coming judgment of Christ.
- 2) If our works survive the test of fire, what remains will bring us corresponding rewards.
- 3) If what we have achieved during our life fails this test and is vaporized through the fire, then our works will be in vain and we won't have any rewards, though we will still be saved.

What is the truth regarding our salvation and the rewards after life? We do not need to do anything but believe in Jesus to win God's salvation because it is given by grace. However, we must achieve works of eternal values that can survive the test of the Lord's fire if we aspire to win the Lord's rewards on the last day because the Lord Jesus has promised to reward those who strive to lay up treasures in heaven.

[Revelation 11: 16-18] We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come Because You have taken Your great power and reigned. 18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth."

3. The Promised Rewards

When we were in school, we studied for exams using textbooks and reference books, and materials. What if a fellow student somehow secures a copy of the exam and shares it with you? That would make the exam preparation much easier than without the cheat copy, wouldn't it? We would very likely get a high score in the exam. Very much like this scenario, Lord Jesus has given us the examination copy for the coming judgment to make it easy for us to prepare for the judgment. The Bible contains the exam copy. In it, we may find what the test will be, and what tasks we must do to win coveted rewards from the Lord on Judgment Day. The criteria in Matt 5 are some of such conditions for the blessings promised to us by God. Now, let us examine these conditions in detail:

Verse 3 tells us that we must have a poor spirit if we covet the kingdom of God. A poor spirit means the absence of haughtiness, pride, and falsehood in us. Have you ever observed the faces of homeless people waiting in line to be fed at a free meal service station? A poor, hungry and distraught expression is evident in their faces and demeanor. If your heart is filled with self-conceit in your achievements, an attitude of despising others, or an oppressive spirit as a strong person over others, then all your achievements, no matter how much money you have contributed to your church or temple, how generously you have given to charities, and how high you have risen in the political and social ladder, will not survive the fiery test of the Lord Jesus on Judgment Day. None of such works will prove worthy of praise or reward but be only a dross before the judgment seat.

Verses 4, 6, and 10 present the Lord's promise that those who weep in grief upon losing all due to social injustice, discrimination, extortion, or calamities during the present life, will receive true consolation and comfort

from Lord Jesus. We live in an era where evil forces are in dominant political positions of the nation. They oppress and persecute innocent, righteous people through their unjust, anti-godly, and evil policies, destroying the principles of God and moral standards in our society. Seeing such oppressive and sad conditions of the nation, do we grieve over them and implore God to take vengeance on such evil forces? The grieving and pleading Christians will truly be comforted by the Lord in His time when He brings on just punishments to the evil out of His great wrath and implement His justice to the whole world for all peoples to see. When this day comes, the Lord's righteous people will be truly comforted for all the suffering and grief they had to endure during their earthly life. On the other hand, if there is no such grieving spirit in you over the injustice and depravity in the world and no pleading for God's justice to rule in this world, you will not share in the joy and comfort on the Day of the Lord, nor will you receive the invitation to take part in the governance of the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Verse 5 gives us the promise that Lord Jesus will share the governance of His Millennial Kingdom with those who possess meek spirits, who have subjected their human nature to the Lord's power and become broken as sheep that are led by the shepherd, looking up to His leadings, responding to His voice daily and loving to follow Him wherever He leads. The prerequisite of the rulers of the Millennial Kingdom is the meek spirit of serving the Master as King of kings and Lord of lords.

[Luke 19:15-17] He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. "The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.' "Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

Verse 7 tells us what the blessing will be for the merciful. Although we see merciless, cruel, and Satan-serving people are overtly demonstrating their evil intentions to turn this world into Satan's hands, if the righteous people of God show merciful spirits to those around them, thus manifesting their identity as disciples of Jesus Christ on earth, they will be welcomed by the Lord on Judgment Day despite the many mistakes and foolish acts in their lives. On the other hand, if we fail to apply the moral standards of God to ourselves but seek to impose them on others without mercy and kindness, the Lord's judgment on such people will be far from kind and forgiving and our worldly achievements, no matter how grandiose they might be viewed by the world, will be consumed in the heat of the judgment fire.

Verse 8 promises rewards for those who keep their pure faith until their last day, keeping true to the 'first faith' that confessed, "Yes, Lord, I believe in Your sacrifice on the cross for me and repent. Please accept this sinner." When we are faithful in keeping this pure faith to the end, we will see the face of our Lord Jesus, who is the Almighty God. However, if we are persuaded by Satan and our fleshly desires, making compromises in our moral and spiritual standards and losing the purity of our faith, we lose our testimony before the Lord, will be banned from His presence on Judgment Day, and be banished to a far corner of His kingdom. Such persons will hardly have any reward, though they may have salvation.

The meaning of being a peacemaker in verse 9 is bringing peace in people's hearts by speaking the gospel message and helping them become friends instead of enemies with God. When we act as God's messengers and bring the message of peace to seeking souls, we will be called 'God's children,' who are heirs of God's kingdom. If you are in responsible positions of the society of the government and you strive to bring peace in the society or between nations, such an achievement will be honored by God as well. Many brave warriors have fought in wars to bring peace to the world. And some have prevented conflicts through wise godly counsel between adversaries. May we seek to become messengers of peace so that people come to terms with God and surrender their will to Him. This is the only way that the souls of men and women can have true peace in their lives and families.

4. Our Hope for Blessings

If you have surrendered to God through your faith in Jesus Christ, you are already saved and are called the children of God. However, the rewards we will receive from Lord Jesus when we stand before His judgment seat

will depend on our spiritual achievements, which may be quite different from the physical, material, political, or social achievements we make. The rewards, according to the Lord's specifications, are very different from what this world deems praiseworthy. Their values are per God's value system and have meaning from eternity's viewpoint. Lord Jesus has declared what such standards are in the Sermon on the Mount. If a saved Christian neglects in building on the foundation of Christ and wastes his/her life in seeking own interests only, such a soul will receive a harsh scolding from the Lord when he/she stands before His judgment seat, "You useless soul, I do not know you as my friend; depart from my presence!"

Scripture defines clearly the standards of the eternal rewards. And it is the responsibility of every saved Christian to apply them to one's life and produce the spiritual qualities that mature to the beautiful image of Jesus Christ. For this purpose, God has granted the Holy Spirit who desires to dwell, teach, guide, mold, protect, and transform us each day. Let us be diligent in seeking His help each day so that we may grow to the full stature of Jesus Christ and receive abundant rewards on Judgment Day! Amen.