

BENEFITS OF OBEDIENCE

NATIONS, CHURCHES, INDIVIDUALS

Turn with me to Deut. 28.

- 1 ¶ If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands that I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth.
- 2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:
- 3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.
- 4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.
- 5 Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.
- 6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.
- 7 The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.

(Plus seven more verses of blessings.)

Are these blessings worth having? Are these meant only for the Nation of Israel in their time? Would they apply to an individual, to our churches or are they only for nations? (We'll come back to this question.)

When we see such great promises in the God's word, do we stop and think that there is another side to this "coin?" What happens if we don't obey?

- 15 ¶ However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:
- 16 You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.
- 17 Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed.
- 18 The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.
- 19 You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.
- 20 The LORD will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him.
- 21 The LORD will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess.

There are 47 more verse similar to these of the problem that will result when a people go away from God. I'd like call your attention to verse 66.

- 66 You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life.

A lot of people have felt such emotions during the past several years.

Are these benefits worth having and problems worth avoiding? You're probably thinking, "That's a dumb question." It would be if it were not for the fact the evidence shows that so few people believe it because they ignore the word of God!

Moses is talking to the people God chose in Abraham and saved out of Egypt. These are they who have come through the wilderness. These are the new generation – the old generation having passed away. Notice that nowhere does God (through Moses) say to them, "You will stop being my chosen people."

I believe these are what I would call universal truths. That is, they apply to individuals, to churches and to nations. They apply to the situation nearly 3400 years ago when Moses spoke these words and they apply to our situation today.

Let's look at our nation. We see signs everywhere that say "God Bless America."

In 1620 when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, the House of Burgesses was in session at Jamestown, Virginia. The Plymouth Rock Pilgrims were not the first, yet we find great significance in the New England history primarily because of the motives of the people who came to the new land. We mark the beginning of our nation not with an act of commerce but with an act of conscience.

It is not without reason that we call these early settlers "Pilgrims" They were Pilgrims: they journeyed a long distance for a sacred purpose. We know that purpose was **Freedom to Worship**. Notice that it was not just Freedom; but Freedom to Worship. The Virginia Company of London came looking for financial treasure, while those on the Mayflower came looking for a far greater treasure and that of freedom to worship God and to avoid being persecuted for their beliefs.

Many times we think of these early settlers as somewhat primitive people, yet it is we who came after them who substituted the ignoble idea of freedom from worship for that sacred purpose for which those pilgrims came. We have grabbed the word "freedom" (forgetting we are to worship God in our freedom) and have worshipped instead the concept or idea of "freedom." The idea that many have of "freedom" is nothing more than unrestrained irresponsibility to do anything they want to do, anyway they want to do and anytime they want to do it.

I have often thought that if some future civilization were to find the remains of our civilization that they would conclude that we worshipped at the Shrine of Freedom and that we worshipped the goddess Liberty -- in fact, we even erected a huge statue of this goddess in the harbor near one the large cities. One glimpse at our daily lives, one introspective examination of what really motivates us and we too can conclude that freedom is high on our list of priorities. For some, "freedom" as they define it, is more important than family, community, country, the church, the Kingdom of God, and the God of the Kingdom.

When we see what we have done with the concept of freedom, we see a great need for a change of attitude of what freedom means so that God will bless America.

In Congress, on July 4, 1776, in a unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America, fifty six men signed their names to a document that helped change the course of world history. In the second paragraph they stated:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights..."

Wait a minute! You mean that the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence – the Founding Fathers of our country, the architects of our government were Creationist?

" we are endowed by our Creator!" they said.

It is our generation who have moved from these self-evident truths and tolerated an untruth that denies the God of Creation and makes mankind a chance happening of some highly improbable scheme called evolution. Surely we do not honor God by denying Him the credit for creating this His universe and suggesting that it all "just happened". He who honors God; him will God honor.

Considering what we have done with the concept of "God our Creator" we see a great need to return to truth so God will continue to bless America.

Among the unalienable rights are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These men believed in the sanctity of LIFE. They believed that it is a Creator-God given right to not be denied life. This concept is God honoring. It is our generation that has moved from this God-honoring concept to a hellish, devil-inspired idea that life is cheap. NOT SO!

Jesus warned us that the devil came to steal, kill, and destroy. Since Roe vs. Wade, scores of millions of unborn human lives have been destroyed because they would have been an inconvenience to someone who valued freedom above someone else's life. While it may be noble to value freedom above your own life, it is ignoble to sacrifice unborn children on the altar of irresponsibility, falsely called freedom.

When we consider our national disregard for God-given life we can see a great need to return to the sure foundation of the Word of God so that God will bless America.

There is no question that God has blessed American. Surely God has blessed our nation – it began well. It began with great and noble ideals, God honoring ideals. We began in Godliness – obedience - faithfulness and we shall continue only in Godliness. We must have a change in attitude regarding freedom, we must not deny the truth of the God of Creation, and we must see the word of God as foundational for our society.

In Galatians 3:3 Paul asks the question:

Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

We might ask ourselves as a nation:

Are we so foolish? Having begun in Godliness, are we now being perfected in Godlessness?

There is still hope. We are a nation of people who embrace the concept of simple solutions to complex problems. There is a simple, one-word solution that would allow us to answer "Yes" to the question of "Will God bless America?" That one word is REPENT. We, as a nation, must turn back to God who is the author of true, responsible freedom that is founded on the truth of the Word of God. We, who are the Church, must lead the way.

Let's look at the Church. Our present day concept of the church is that we are a loose collection of individuals who believe that Jesus is God's Son and that He died to save us from an eternity in hell. That is a true statement; but, I fear that the emphasis is on "individuals" rather than on our being the cohesive, unified body of Christ and Christ being the head of the Body. I fear that the emphasis is on escaping hell rather than having "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

Many of our churches are weak and anemic because they are fed a diet of a watered down gospel. Many have filled themselves with "feel-good" religious platitudes and have no room left and no appetite for the meat of the word of God. We have lost sight of our purpose. We have little or no concern about our performance related to accomplishing the Great Commission and seeing God's will done. In some churches services are designed to entertain those in the pews and the only performance we can about is how well is the sermon delivered and how well did the choir and the soloist sing.

Look back to the words of God through Moses in Deuteronomy 28 and apply them to the church.

1 ¶ If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands that I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the **institutions** on earth.

2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:

3 You will be **highly esteemed** in the city and in the country.

4 **Many people will come to God through your ministry and the land will prosper because of godliness.**

5 **Your members will be eager and willing to do the work to which I have called them.**

6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

7 The LORD will grant that the **ACLU and godless humanists** who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.

Look at the other side of the coin:

15 ¶ However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these **problems** will come upon you and overtake you:

16 You will be **despised and ridiculed** in the city and in the country.

17 **You will find yourselves expending your energy and resources and seeing no results.**

18 **People will join your churches because it is socially acceptable and they will be a hindrance to the growth of the Kingdom.**

19 You will **encounter problems** when you come in and when you go out.

20 The LORD will send on you **frustrations**, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you **turn into a social club** because of the evil you have done in forsaking him.

21 The LORD will plague you with **false philosophies** until he has **diminished your influence** from the land you are entering to possess.

Which condition do you think describes many of the churches of the 21st century?

Have you noticed the letters to the editor during the past couple of weeks regarding the plaque with the Ten Commandments that is to be displayed in the courthouse in Blountville? A woman from Hawkins County is all upset about it and wrote a letter protesting this display because she does not believe in the existence of God. Of course, she drew a lot of counter opinions in letters others wrote. I remember a comment in one of the letter that said something to effect that "It is people like that woman who is responsible for what is wrong with this country." That writer was playing the blame game. Where does the responsibility lie? Is the problem the atheist? Not according to the word of God. Turn to 2 Chronicles 7:14.

if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

If a nation is not obedient and faithful and the problem can be traced the churches, then can we say if our churches are not obedient and faithful that the problem can be traced to individual Christians?

Does Deut. 28 apply to individuals? It obviously applied to the nation of Israel. They had been saved out of Egypt, they had crossed the Red Sea, they had gone through 40 years of walking in the wilderness and the old generation had passed away and the new generation was ready to occupy the Promised Land.

We read the history of the Children of Israel and we see how God saved them.

We know how God saved us. Don't we? A couple of years ago when several of us were studying evangelism, we were given a question to asked people so we could determine their understanding about salvation. That question is quite simple and it goes like this:

"In your personal opinion, what do you understand it takes for a person to go to heaven?"

I would guess that almost everyone here would get 100% if this were a Pop Quiz. Let me ask you to do this: along the edge of your bulletin, write a brief answer to that question. Just take a few moments and jot down a few words that captures the idea.

Many times the answers that people give you go something like this:

Live by the Golden Rule. Be a good person. Treat everybody fairly. Keep the Ten Commandments. Love your neighbor. Serve God.

These are all good things to do, but they do not agree with God's word regarding the "How" of salvation.

As good students of the Bible most of us would know that the answer of "How" we are saved and "How" we become eligible to go to Heaven is found in such scripture verse as Eph 2:8-9.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

That's "HOW" our salvation is made available to us. Does this mean that everyone is saved? NO! We also need to receive or appropriate that salvation. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. (Acts 16:31) That if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. (Rom 10:9)

That's HOW! If you recall going to school and the things you were taught, most of them were about **how** things work. How to spell, how to punctuated, how to add, how to divide, how electricity flow through conductors, how water evaporates, how, how.

What about WHY? Let's ask the WHY question about the most significant thing that has ever or will ever happen in your life. WHY DID GOD SAVE YOU?

If this were a pop quiz, what would you write down on your paper? There are many possible answers that can be considered good, truthful answers. One that should be obvious is that "God saves us because He loves us." We see this clearly in John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

That answers the motive (on God's part) of Why He saved you. But WHY can also refer to PURPOSE. So let's ask the question again. WHY (meaning for what purpose) did God save you?

We started out looking at How and found the answer in Eph 2:8-9. The answer to "WHY" is immediately after the answer to HOW. Look at verse 10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

The purpose is fairly simple and we can reduce to just a few words. **God has jobs for you to do. God has jobs for me to do.**

How would you characterize the jobs He has for us? Paul called them "Good works." Do you remember the list we talked about early – the typical answers you get to the question of how does a person go to heaven: Live by the Golden Rule. Be a good person. Treat everybody fairly. Keep the Ten Commandments. Love your neighbor. Serve God. These are **not** how we earn salvation, they are how we **respond** to our salvation. Since we are in Christ Jesus and He is living His life through us, then we are now able to do all these things that speak to the purpose for which we are saved. If the Spirit of God is in us and the life of Jesus is being lived out through us, then we should be doing the works that Jesus did and still does. Two thousand years ago, when Jesus ministered to people He was in His physical body. How does Jesus minister to people today? Through His Body! What do we call His Body? The Church. Who makes up the Church? We do! So, if God has jobs for us to do, then where should we look for expression of these jobs? In His Body. In the Church.

So how can it be that churches can't find members in their congregations to do the work of the ministry? How many times have you notice that someone has to have his arm twisted before he will say yes. Often, we do the jobs we do reluctantly. Where is the joy of our salvation? I am reminded of a verse in Malachi chapter 1 where he speaks about the contempt the people had for their service of worship. In verse 13, we see

And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty.

How often do we find ourselves thinking of our jobs at church as "What a burden!" He goes on to say, in this same verse

"When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD.

We don't bring animals for sacrifice as our service of worship but we do bring ourselves and our abilities and we do bring a portion of the material blessing God has entrusted to us.

What would be the equivalent of bringing an injured or diseased animal for a sacrifice? Doing less than your best. I believe that the call to service in the church is a call to excellence (bringing the best of the flock). It is not a call to mediocrity (bringing what doesn't sell well at the stock yard). [Being on a committee and not doing your share of the work. Teaching a class and not being prepared. Taking a Bible study and not even reading the material. Failure to give first priority to the things of God in your life. Ignoring a call for help in some ministry or service in the church when you are not involved in anything.]

If we can't get this business of faithfulness, obedience, and excellence right in our individual lives, then we won't see faithfulness, obedience and excellence being worked out in our churches. It follows then that if our churches do not lead the way, our nation will go in a way of dissipation and loss. It has to start with us – with all of us.

We sing God Bless America, we pray God Bless our Church, and we desperately want God to Bless our very lives and yet time after time we fail to realize that God's blessings are already there for us. It is a matter of being in position to receive those blessings. If you had a map to where someone was giving out \$100 bills do you think you would be able to read the map and get to that place? You'd surely give it a try. If I gave the address of where God is handing out blessings, would you go there? You need to turn off World Expressway and go right on Grace Blvd and follow the signs to Faith Street and stay on that. It changes names several times but it's still Faith Street. At times it will be called Faithfulness Street and sometimes the street sign will simply say "Obedience." The blessings are located along this street. God wants to bless us as a nation, as a church, as individuals. But His blessings are accessible through obedience. God's Blessings are the Benefits of Obedience. (Pray with me.)

Quietly stand and close out the distractions around you by closing your eyes. As Tom begins to play softly, let me ask you some questions.

Where are you today? Are you still on the World expressway? The good news is that you maybe making good time, the bad news is that you are going in the wrong direction. If you have never received God's grace gift of salvation purchased for you at the Cross of Calvary by the death of Jesus Christ, then today is the day of salvation. As you recognize His grace, His free gift, then take a step of faith and receive what God has for you in Christ Jesus. You come and share with us a decision you have made. If you want some help in taking that step, you come and someone will show you through the word of God.

Some of you may have made the right turns initially and then you lost your way. Some turn off Faith Street when the name changes to Obedience or Faithfulness. If you are stuck off on a side road and are having problems and not making any progress because you are not on the right street, then you too need to take a step of faith to come back to where you belong and realize that you can't separate faith and faithfulness.

Some may be here and are looking for a place where their faith can find expression in the Body of Christ. If you believe that God is calling you to find your place of ministry and service in this place by moving your membership here, then you come.

If God has been dealing with you and your relationship to Him then do what you know He wants you to do. If you would, share your decision it will be an inspiration to others who need to let God have His way in their lives.