

Life: Blessings of holiness

April 13, 2013

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for April 28 focuses on Leviticus 26:3-13, 40-42, 45*

Leviticus 26 is a difficult passage to read and apply from one context to another and from one time period to another. One must listen to the Holy Spirit, discuss in community and prayerfully consider how passages such as this one are interpreted and applied in our world today. Many questions rise to the surface as we read this list of blessings and curses. We must read this passage in the context of Scripture as a whole in order to stay away from dangerous theological ground and assumptions

There are several comments we can make on this passage that are clear when we look at Scripture as a whole. First, God is faithful and full of grace, even in the Old Testament. Second, the point of the blessing is not the content but the status of the relationship between the parties. And finally, the blessings of living a holy life are very real, even today.

Old Testament grace

Many people wonder why God did not have grace in Old Testament times. Why was he so concerned with obedience and works during that time period, but focused on grace after Jesus came? Clearly, God was full of grace in the Old Testament. The Israelites failed time and again, but God remained constant and faithful.

In Leviticus 26, even after the list of curses regarding disobedience, Scripture says, "But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors ... I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land" (26:40, 42).

It sounds so simple. He is not asking for ceremonies or sacrifices, just a confession. God's desire was simple—for his people to be loyal in dependence on him. Let us not become distracted by the curses and miss the fact that despite their repetitive disobedience—and despite ours today—God remembers his covenant and remains faithful.

Relationship

Second, the point of the blessing was not the content but the state of the relationship between God and his people. No doubt, rain for crops, peace in the land and safety were of great concern to the Israelites. But the focus on the content of the benefits is secondary. The primary factor of blessings in the Old Testament is the statement of relationship between parties. The blessings show the relationship is right. The blessings mean the covenant is being fulfilled on both sides. The blessings mean the Israelites are walking in harmony with their Creator, and he is able to guide, direct and protect them.

Finally, although physical blessings and curses do not always line up with obedience and disobedience in our world today, the reality of spiritual blessings and curses is impossible to miss. Scripture tells us in this life, we will face trials of many kinds, but when we are connected to Christ, he will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5). We are never alone.

Hope

Whatever illness, suffering or loss we face on Earth, we know it is not the end of the story. We have a hope—a belief in things unseen—given to us by Christ. We can be confident in Christ, despite our fear and hurt here in the world. We all will face heartache and hardship as a result of our disobedience or, at times, as a result of living in a fallen world. When we face those dark days, there is no better place to be than in relationship with

Jesus. He is our comforter, our hope and our way through it all

Commentary writer Roy Gane uses an example from the popular old TV game show Let's Make a Deal. At the end of every week, each contestant was given the opportunity to choose between Door No. 1, Door No. 2 or Door No. 3. They could give up what they already had won to acquire really big money. But in taking the risk, they could also end up with nothing at all

Often, we care little about God's guidance and our obedience until we face a major decision like who to marry, which house to buy or which job to take. We want inside information from God so we will make the right choice. We want happiness, success and blessing. But we fail to pay attention to his guidance and direction in the little things.

Jesus said: "I am the door; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture" (John 10:9). Jesus is the only door. When we choose to follow and obey him, there is no risk or uncertainty. He provides "pasture," that is, real happiness and joy. He does not just provide treasures here on Earth, but the eternal kind that last forever. There is true blessing found when we are obedient to Christ—both on earth and echoing into eternity.