



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

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More than the Good Life

Christians often speak of living the “blessed life” in an effort to demonstrate the benefits of following Christ. Books are written; sermons are preached; spiritual guides are offered, all in an effort to help us leverage the benefits of living right.

There is some confusion, however, regarding how obedient one must be in order to get the benefits. For instance, does partial obedience gain partial blessings? Does God accept our best efforts even when they are grossly imperfect? Why was it necessary for Jesus to achieve perfect obedience for our salvation?

For the sake of clarity, let's use two different descriptions for what we try to express in the term “the blessed life.” First, there is the “good life.” It is the life that tries to align with the divine order of creation. Even without acknowledging the existence of a Creator, some have discovered the benefits of living the way life on earth was designed to work. After the big flood, God declared that creation would work in the rhythms he established

(Genesis 8:22). For instance, the ground has been faithful to feed millions because humans learned to plant the seeds they wanted to harvest. We also learned to manage according to the seasons of the year. There are many other principles that govern how creation is developed and sustained and how relationships with others are fruitful. When we align with these principles, we find life to be better—even good.

These principles are reflected in the covenant with Moses and Israel. Life works better when we don't murder, don't steal, don't commit adultery, honor our parents, etc. Trying to keep those commandments can make for a better life. It is better not to have someone trying to exact vengeance on us because we have

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murdered their family or friend, or to be in jail because of laws of justice. It is better not having to pay back fourfold the things we have stolen, and to be scorned in the community because we are thieves. The more we know of the laws of design, the more we can align with them and find the accompanying benefits. This kind of wisdom is precious and necessary if we are to succeed as inhabitants on God's earth. If we ignore them, or deny they exist, we will eventually experience the rewards of a fool.

At this level, partial alignment can still produce positive results. For instance, a farmer can sloppily plant a part of his field with grain. It will still produce some harvest, albeit not what it could have produced if he had fully aligned with the laws of planting and reaping. A person can be healthier if he or she cuts out some of the toxic foods they have previously been consuming, though they still don't eat properly. So, it is easy to assume that all dealings with God can be viewed in such a manner, and that we can gain all blessings by doing our best to live by the principles.

But is there an even better life? One can live right, work right, be nice, give to the poor, and align himself with the laws of the tithe, Sabbath, and fasting, and still miss the life God has for us. Adam's sin not only brought darkness to our

understanding of how creation works, but also alienated us from God. We were not designed to live apart from him. The second description is the "shared life." We were designed to share God's life, and the good life of leveraging principles can't produce that. To share the life of God who is absolute goodness, we must have perfect obedience. God has acted on our behalf by sending his Son as the new

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Adam who lived a perfectly obedient life, even paying the perfect penalty for our disobedience. He transfers that to our account, and we are reconciled to God so that we can share his eternal life. All the promised blessings relating to obedience toward God have been bestowed upon Jesus. He gets them all. None are left unclaimed for us to earn. All the curses related to disobedience toward God have been cast upon Jesus, and he canceled them. There are none left to threaten us. We don't get such blessings based on our partial and imperfect obedience. We don't have to. We receive them based on the common life we share with Jesus. He is in us, and we are in him. We are blessed

in Christ! Any kind of submission to regulations that does not proceed from a heart of faith and love is not obedience at all. It is a fleshly attempt to negotiate with God without consideration for the Mediator. In other words, we cannot neglect to trust Jesus for our standing with God while meticulously following biblical laws and expect to be blessed. The only blessed life possible is the one lived from the position of the already finished work of Christ. Because we are so blessed, we are free to live by the same love that captured us. This otherworldly love will fulfill all things the laws require and more.

The conclusion is therefore: The “blessed life” is not the one characterized by what we do to trigger God’s blessings on us—serving, giving, tithing, fasting, praying, etc. Neither is it measured by the temporal fruit yielded by a bountiful creation as principles of design are honored. Those are benefits that both believers and unbelievers can receive. The “blessed life” is, however, characterized by the partnership we share with God through the Spirit. It displays a peace that exists even without understanding. It includes a love beyond human capability. It is based on a hope anchored at the right hand of the Father. It exudes a faith that sees the invisible world as clearly as the visible one. It fears no fires of hell. It

walks through the fire of testing without the smell of smoke. It is not intimidated by the accusations of a deposed prosecutor. It is not paralyzed by guilt nor disqualified by lies. It waits for God’s timing

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and works in his power. It exalts the one hero of history and exults in the privilege of knowing him. It rejoices in prosperity and is grateful when times are lean. It is positioned to bless others and is generous at all times. The riches of this world are only tools for compassion. The symbols of success in this society do not grace the trophy case of the truly blessed. They have died with Christ and now live with him to honor him. It is the shared life.

It is not like we have an option here and can either choose the best or just settle for the good. History testifies that humans cannot long sustain the good life. For instance, after the cleansing of the big flood, it wasn’t long, relatively speaking, until people were trying to leverage religion to build a tower all the way to heaven—seeking to be gods and making a name for themselves. Israel proved over and over again after being

delivered by various judges that they would again turn against the laws of God and be enslaved by another nation. Without the shared life of Christ, people will pervert the laws of nature as well as the specific laws of God and turn society into chaos. If we are looking for a kind of revival that only establishes some of the principles of created design, we are fooling ourselves. Those principles can only be understood properly in light of the revelation of Jesus as the last Adam and obedient Son. It is the supernatural love of God that issues forth from the shared life that establishes functional societal structures and empowers enough people to embrace them.

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Without this gospel-inspired virtue, human interaction will become more and more toxic, and for survival, people will bow to a dictator or to a complex central government for regulation. So, the fantasy that we can have small limited government while ignoring the eternal life offered in Jesus will be exposed amidst

great disillusionment. The hope for a peaceful and productive society does not lie in small government or in a revival of elemental principles. The only hope for a sustained society where freedom is enjoyed is the unashamed embrace of the reconciliation to God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. The good life is temporary simply because humans beset with sin cannot follow for very long even the elementary principles of created design. If that were possible, then Jesus' appearance as the Savior was unnecessary.

God has commissioned his people to infect the whole world with the message of eternal life in Jesus Christ. It is the only hope of personal salvation, the only hope of heaven, and the only hope of a peaceable society now.



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