CHAPTER XI: Heavenly Mindedness

The scriptures offer many comforts and blessings to make this life not only bearable but a happy foretaste of the life God has promised would belong to his people eternally. When a person becomes a Christian they are made a part of the family of God, they are delivered out of the world and the effects of the curse that came about by sin are reversed. We are given the inestimable benefit of restored fellowship with our creator and the promise of victory over sin in this life and eternal life in the next. The blessings of God that are brought into our lives by this restoration are of such magnitude however, that it is sometimes difficult for the Christian to remember that we need to focus our attention on the giver, not on the gifts. In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, we are warned of the perils of earthly prosperity to an immature and carnally minded people “When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. BEWARE that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments and his statutes, which I command thee this day. Lest when thou hast eaten AND ART FULL and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, AND THY SILVER AND THY GOLD ARE MULTIPLIED, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.” (Deuteronomy 8:10-14) By this we are taught two things; that God's people are assured of his blessing; and that they need to be on their guard against an unseemly fascination with the good things that God gives them (for such is the perversity of our nature that we need to constantly subdue the flesh), which would certainly become enamored with the blessings God gives, and forget to be grateful to the God who gives them.
Never underestimate the old sin nature. As it is a parent's ideal will to always give good things to their children and never have to raise a voice to them, so it is our heavenly Father's ideal will to do the same; and just as it is a parent's necessary duty to withhold good things from their children sometimes because they aren't mature enough to handle them yet, just so does our Father withhold some good things from us until we have matured enough spiritually to be able to handle them. My 13-year-old nephews may think they should be allowed to drive a car but it would not be an act of responsible parenting to let them. Do not confuse God's ideal will with his will for your specific situation. It is a parent's ideal will never to have to spank their children, but only ideally, not in reality are there children who are so perfect they don't need discipline. The new convert who comes in the doors of the church down and out and backslides six months later with a new wife and pickup truck has become proverbial.

The cure for an intemperate love for this world is to fix our eyes upon Jesus and to appreciate not what he can do for us in this temporal life only but to become more grateful for the chief benefit of being a Christian—eternal life. When the disciples came back from ministering unto the people they were excited that even demonic spirits were subject unto them through his name and Jesus told them not to get excited about that for there was something far more worthy of their excitement, "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written down in heaven." (Luke 10:19)

In other words not the power or gifts that God gives in this life but the bigger benefit of forgiveness of sins, restored fellowship with God and everlasting life are the causes to rejoice in. Jesus would have them look upward to their reward in heaven, not simply at the earthly power and authority that was theirs in his name. The same holds true for all of the temporal blessings, which are ours in his name.

**NECESSITY OF RESTRAINT**

The scriptures uniformly teach restraint and moderation in all the lawful uses of this life, lest by a too great attachment to this world our longing towards heaven becomes blunted."All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." (1 Corinthians 6:12)

It should be the lifelong study of all Christians to form a greater and more affectionate tie to where our real treasure is laid up for us."If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. SET YOUR AFFECTION on things above, not on things on the earth." (Colossians 3:1)
I have referred elsewhere to the old songs that were so heavenly looking. Everybody Will Be Happy Over There, Just Over In The Glory Land, and I'll Fly Away are just a few of the hymns which were sung by a hopeful people, who showed through their songs that their affection was set on things above and their hearts were where their treasure was-over yonder. To set our affection on things above then is nothing less than to restrain ourselves from becoming overly attached to this world and all the good things of it. The things above we are to set our affection on are those things which we do not enjoy in this life, for what is above? Christ our savior. There is no healing above, healing is for this life and above there is no sickness to be healed from. There is no need for financial blessings above, where the very streets are paved with gold. Who cannot see then that by this the apostle means to turn our thoughts more to gratitude for the promise of a better and eternal life, than to the temporal blessings in this one?

As a certain pastor says-we are not to follow the blessings, we are to follow Jesus and the blessings will follow us. Moreover, where is Jesus but above, where the apostle wills that we direct our affections? This is the same as Jesus taught in Matthew 6:19-21 "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal; For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Of course, we are to enjoy God's blessings in this life. Some, through a sincere desire to separate from the world have gone to extremes and laid down rules for what to eat and what to wear and even how to speak but we cannot consent to binding men's consciences where the scripture leaves them free and hesitate not to condemn such measures. The church has no right to add their own traditions to the word of God any more than the Pharisees did. God's blessings then are to be enjoyed and to be a cause of gratitude, but not to be pursued strictly for their own sake. Then there is the other extreme, which makes the chief end of being a Christian to obtain earthly benefits. This too is an out of balance view of things; for why should a people who are called to give up their lives at a moment's notice be so attached to this life that when they are called home to heaven God must drag them from the world they love so much? No, this is surely not the mere enjoyment of the blessings of this life but an intemperate and unseemly attachment to the things of this world.
THIS LIFE AS A PILGRIMAGE
In order to prevent this undue attachment to the world, scripture abounds in examples of the pilgrim nature of this life. From the patriarchs to the apostles, the people of God have always lived with an eye to future blessedness much more than to a clinging love for this life. Abraham is often pointed to as an example for us to follow and he undoubtedly is, but while Abraham was blessed, let us not forget that he did not live a life unacquainted with grief and suffering. At an age when most people are settled in life, Abraham was called out from the security and happiness of his family and told to go into a land where he would be a foreigner. He prospered but never owned more than a place to bury his dead. He had riches but never more than a tent to live in. He was treated badly by his neighbors and never was allowed to keep even the wells his servants dug without a dispute and then having to pay for them. In short, his whole life might well illustrate that saying of Jesus that "...verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and mothers, and children, and lands, WITH PERSECUTIONS, and in the world to come, eternal life."

(Mark 10:30-31)

Isaac and Jacob were no less temporary dwellers of the land God promised them than Abraham had been and certainly no less subject to the persecutions of their neighbors. Though heirs of the promise God made to Abraham, God was content to exercise their faith and patience by leaving them in a gypsy like state, dwelling in tents as though they were but temporary visitors. This was a testimony to the people of the world as well, for when they saw that the patriarchs lived in such a manner despite their wealth, they had to know that these people were not putting all their hopes in this life only but must have a hope for a better inheritance than just in this world. Yes, the patriarchs were wealthy but we never see that they made the world their home for their hopes were- over yonder, in the glory land. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS UPON THE EARTH."(Hebrews 11:13)
In other words they were seeking God, not his temporal blessings, the blessings just happened to come with it. In the same way the life of the Christian should serve the evangelical purpose of bearing witness to sinners that this world is not our home but just a temporary state through which we pass on the way to eternity. This cannot be done if we get carnally minded and live as though we didn't want to leave this world and as though we were ourselves uncertain about whether or not we actually do have a heavenly home. When the world can't see the hope of eternal life in the people of God then the church has lost its witness. The writer of Hebrews commends them for the very reason that they bore witness not just of temporal blessings, but of a far more important blessing—that God gives us a hope beyond the grave. There are many benefits of being a Christian but the chief benefit is and always will be eternal life.

**BLESSING NOT ALWAYS A SIGN OF APPROVAL**

Many ungodly people are blessed with great earthly riches in the sense that everything we have is from God. Yet the prosperity of the ungodly presents no theological problem when we understand that earthly prosperity, financial blessings if you will, are not in themselves a sign of God's approval. Make no mistake here, God's blessing can be given to an ungodly person, such as when an ungodly couple are blessed with a baby. Certainly that baby is a blessing from the Lord and just because the parents are ungrateful and do not see God's providence in this doesn't mean it isn't there. The Bible teaches that "...children are an heritage of the lord and the fruit of the womb is his reward." (Psalms 127:3)

However, in God's merciful providence towards the ungodly we dare not see God's approval. On the other hand, what about the all too often taken for granted blessings of the table? The Bible teaches that God provides even daily bread and Americans, even ungodly ones are blessed daily by God's providence. As the Lord himself said, God is kind to the unthankful and to the evil (Luke 6:35). God's blessing does not always mean God's approval and it is very dangerous to equate it as such. From such a doctrine, we could then slide into the idea of judging a person's spiritual state by how successful in earthly prosperity he is.
We are warned that some fall into this same error of "...supposing that GAIN IS GODLINESS: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can take nothing out."(1Timothy 6:5-7)

Many people accept anything if it comes from one of the big successful television preachers without judging their doctrine by the word of God, but by simply being star-struck by their commercial success. This is just asking to fall into heresy and false doctrine. No, a preacher should be judged by his doctrine and his life and if it doesn't measure up to the word of God then it is not some new deeper revelation but is wrong. If the spiritual state of a Christian is to be judged by mere outward circumstances such as prosperity then what of Peter who lived as an itinerant preacher and was chased out of his own country and persecuted for the gospel's sake. Or Paul, who was arrested and beaten often by the authorities of his day and who made his living as a tentmaker and eventually perished in the persecutions under Nero. They certainly were not financially prosperous or considered successful by any stretch of the imagination. And what of that gallery of heroes who fill God's hall of fame in Hebrews 11? "Women received their dead raised to life again, and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; BEING DESTITUTE (which means poor) afflicted, tormented. Of whom the world was not worthy; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."(Hebrews 11:35-38)

If we were to judge their spiritual state by their level of earthly prosperity they should not rank very high in our estimation, but thank God that our estimation is worthless in comparison with God's estimation. No, worldly wealth is no sure sign of God's approval, but neither is it something to be superstitiously shunned. Paul said "I know both how to be abased, and how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."(Philippians 4:12) So then, let him that is abounding in earthly blessings look not down on him who is not, and let him who is being abased by humble circumstances look not down on him who is not.

Let every man accept with gratitude whatever providence God has sent him at the moment. Let the poor trust God for better days and let the rich trust not in his riches which are liable to make themselves wings at any moment, but let both rich and poor apply themselves more to laying up treasures in heaven than to the temporary wealth of this life.

**LOOKING FOR A CITY**

I have already mentioned the elders who so greatly pleased God by their faith and particularly how that faith was directed heavenward, to the eternal life God promises to those who trust him. Of Abraham it is said that he "...looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."(Hebrews 11:10)
Again in verse 16 "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city." In addition, truly if the blessings that we enjoy in this life were the ultimate end of our faith Paul would not have written "If in THIS LIFE ONLY we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." (1 Corinthians 15:19) Meaning that the temporal blessings we now enjoy would not really make our lives superior to the worldly sinners if it were not for the hope that lies beyond. Who does not see that by such an expression the apostle depreciates the temporal blessings God gives us in this life as not worthy to be compared to the riches of the next one? And for what purpose does he do this but to encourage us not to get so caught up in the good things of this life that we forget to look up and hope for the treasure in heaven? Not that there is anything against the temporal blessings in and of themselves but let us remember that Jesus himself warned us to "..Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth."(Luke 12:15) In other words an abundant life in God's sight is an abundance of much more than just temporal blessings.

To set our affection on the things above, as the apostle Paul tells us to do, is exactly what we do when our fondest hopes are for the blessed appearance of our savior. It is a mark of spiritual maturity when the Christian looks forward to the day of redemption even though he may have all the blessings we can have down here. The very hope and desire for the return of Jesus is a certain sign of spiritual health and maturity just as the absence of this hope and desire should be a cause for concern.

As the apostle John wrote, "Beloved now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:2-3) To this sound doctrine all the writers of scripture agree, as Paul proves by telling Titus, "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world; LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."(Titus 2:12-13) And for an apostolic unanimity let's not leave out Peter's testimony "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of person's ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, LOOKING FOR AND HASTING UNTO the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, LOOK FOR new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Peter 3:11-13)
By these and many more expressions we see how strongly the apostles urged the church on to be heavenly minded. In other places they condemned being earthly minded. Paul warns of those "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame, WHO MIND EARTHLY THINGS." (Philippians3:19) By this he meant those who care not at all for the blessings of heaven and the gift of eternal life, but whose chief use for God is to further their own selfish desires in this life. Sadly, there are some people who see God as just another thing to manipulate and try to use him in this way.

They care not to hear of the cross or the blood or the empty tomb unless it is applied to their own use and advancing the cause of their own ambition. It is of these that the apostle was referring, in Philippians 3:19.

While we would have all men to rejoice and enjoy the multitude of benefits with which God loads us daily, we would have none fix their eyes on these temporary gifts but rather on the divine giver. And we deplore the mentality that caused Christians to so separate themselves from the world that they retreated to desert places and thought it an unlawful extravagance to enjoy such blessings as food or drink and would allow nothing but the barest minimum necessary for the sustenance of life. Such an excessive view must be condemned unhesitatingly. The good things God gives are meant to be enjoyed, and a source of gratitude and ultimately an encouragement to our faith. But it cannot be denied that there is an opposite extreme where the blessings which God gives are so magnified that the affections are directed towards them more than towards Him who gave them. Sometimes this can become so engrossing that the Christian can easily become so attached to this world that he doesn't want to leave it. This too is excess. We must hold with John Calvin when he said that "This however, let us hold as fixed, that no man has made much progress in the school of Christ who does not look forward with joy to the day of death and final resurrection. "Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus."