

# Our Authority to Bless

By Jim and Carolyn Murphy

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Several years ago my wife, Carolyn, attended a workshop given by Ruth Frost, a dear friend of ours. Ruth has developed a workshop on the topic of speaking and writing blessings for others. Carolyn came home very excited about what she had learned. She immediately started to write blessings to various members of our family and friends. She began by asking the Lord to show her to whom she should write the blessing. Then she would wait on the Lord for a time, praying about which Scriptures to use and which biblical principles she wanted to emphasize. Finally, she would sit down and write a very beautiful and meaningful blessing which she then gave the person or family. People love them! Our friend, Ruth, had recognized the powerful biblical principle of blessing others.

The words blessing, bless, and blessed appear over 600 times in Scripture. Let's begin by defining blessing. The *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* discusses and defines "blessing" as follows, "God's intention and desire to bless humanity is a central focus of his covenant relationships. For this reason, the concept of blessing pervades the biblical record. Two distinct ideas are present. First, *a blessing was a public declaration of a favored status with God.* Second, *the blessing endowed power for prosperity and success. In all cases, the blessing served as a guide and motivation to pursue a course of life within the blessing.*"<sup>1</sup>

## Old Testament

### God's Blessings on Man

God spoke blessings over His earthly creation as He was forming it. "God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water of the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.'" (Gen 1:22 NIV) Thereafter, when He created Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. . . ." (Gen 1:28 NIV) As God finished creating the earth we see that ". . . God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." (Gen 2:3 NIV)

God continued to bless His chosen people. When He called Abraham to leave his country and go to a far off land, He accompanied that call with a blessing. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing . . . and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen 12:2,3b NIV) Notice here that God extended this blessing to all Abraham's descendants so that includes us today!

Amazingly enough, we also see in the Old Testament that we, as God's people, can actually bless Him. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." (Ps 103:2 KJV) The Psalms particularly are full of man blessing God. These occurrences of blessings are usually translated as, "praise" or "extol" in modern versions.<sup>2</sup>

Praise [bless] the Lord.  
How good it is to sing praises to our God,  
how pleasant and fitting to praise him! (Ps 147:1 NIV)

Praise [bless] the Lord.  
Praise the Lord from the heavens,  
praise him in the heights above.  
Praise him all his angels,  
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.  
Praise him sun, and moon,  
praise him, all you shining stars.  
Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.  
Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for he commanded and they were created. (Ps 148:1-5 NIV)

### Those With Authority to Bless Others

**Patriarchs** – We see many examples in the Old Testament of the male head of a family blessing his wife and children, grandchildren, and so on. Probably the most well known incident of a patriarch giving a father/son blessing is when Jacob deceived Isaac into giving him the blessing that Isaac meant for his son, Esau. (Gen 27) To demonstrate how important the patriarchs thought blessings were, Jacob, while wrestling with the angel, refused to release him until the angel blessed him! (Gen 32. See also Gen 49 where Jacob blesses his sons.)

**Government Rulers** – David, king of Israel, blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty after the Israelites brought the Ark of the Lord into the tent. (2 Sam 6:17,18) Solomon blessed the people at the temple dedication. (1 Ki 8:14, 55) Certainly one of the most powerful blessings in the Old Testament is when Moses pronounced a blessing over the tribes of Israel. (Deu 33)

**Priests** – The first priest mentioned in the Bible is Melchizedek whom the writer of Hebrews called, "Priest of the Most High God." Melchizedek blessed Abraham when he returned from defeating the neighboring kings. (Gen 14; Heb 7:1. See also Heb 5:6,10; 7:1-3, 17.) In Exodus God instructed Moses to consecrate his brother, Aaron, as the first official priest over Israel. (Exo 28:1-3, Lev 8) Then God gave specific instructions through Moses to Aaron and his sons as to how they were to bless the people. It is in this context that we have one of the most beautiful blessings in the entire Old Testament.

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

“ ‘The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you  
and be gracious to you;  
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you  
peace.’”  
“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I  
will bless them.” (Num 6:22-27 NIV)

Aaron accepted this authority and continued to bless the people in his priestly role. (See for example Lev 9:22.) Thus one of the main duties of the priests of the Old Testament continued to be to pronounce blessings on the people.

So God initially, personally blessed mankind. Then when He established Israel, He anointed His priests with that same power,

<sup>1</sup> *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Walter A. Elwell editor, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 49516, Page 70, emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Page 70.

authority, and responsibility to bless. But, "The one who possesses and dispenses all blessings is God the Lord."<sup>3</sup>

The Old Testament people understood this. They knew their priests were speaking the very words of God. That's why the priests' blessings were so significant.

## Blessings in the New Testament

The *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* states, "The parallels between the Old and New Testament usages of blessings are striking. To be blessed in the Old Testament was to be granted special favor by God with resulting joy and prosperity. In the New Testament, however, the emphasis is more on the spiritual rather than on material blessings.

"In a general sense, the terms for blessing in the New Testament are used to designate that one is favored by God. Included among these are Jesus (Mk 11:9-10); children (Mk 10:13-16); Mary (Lk 1:42, 48); the disciples (Lk 24:50); those who "have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn 20:29); and those who endure trials (Jam 1:12; 5:11). As in the Old Testament, when those words are ascribed to God they are rendered "praise" (Rom 1:25; 9:5; 2 Cor. 11:31).

"The most recognizable references to blessing come from the teachings of Jesus. He declares that in spite of difficulties at the present time, the promises of God's salvation and coming kingdom bring a state of happiness and recognized favor with God (Mat 5:3; Lk 6:20-22)."<sup>4</sup>

The blessings of God are His divine gifts to us which He dispenses in sovereign freedom. "He grants His favor to individuals or to a people causing the work of their hands to succeed." (Deu 28:12)<sup>5</sup>

## The Beatitudes

The first and most obvious New Testament blessings that come to mind are the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5. Jesus, as part of the Sermon on the Mount said,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called sons of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of  
righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of  
heaven. (Mat 5:3-10 NIV)

Going back to what the words, "blessing" or "blessed" means, Jesus is saying that those who fall into the categories He outlined in these verses are given special or favored status with God.

## Paul's Blessings

Paul is an excellent example of a leader in the first century church who understood the value and power of giving a blessing. He began every one of his apostolic letters to the various churches he founded with a blessing. His most common form of blessing is, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." (See for example Rom 1:7. NIV)

## New Testament Priestly Authority to Bless by Our Words

As we have already seen, God gave the priests in the Old Testament authority to bless those over whom they had authority and for whom they had responsibility. New Testament Scripture clearly states that we, as followers of Christ, are the continuation of God's priesthood. The apostle Peter said, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Pe 2:9 NIV, emphasis added.) The apostle John writes, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." (Rev 1:5b,6 NIV, emphasis added.)

## The Power of the Spoken Word<sup>6</sup>

Here I want to briefly examine the general principle of the spiritual power and authority of the spoken word. We see the principle of the authority of the spoken word begin to unfold in the very first chapter of Genesis. **And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.** (Gen 1:3 NIV, emphasis added.) The phrase, "and God said" is found six times in the first chapter of Genesis. God literally spoke the world into existence.

After God, by the authority of His word, spoke the world into being, He then delegated that authority to Adam. In Genesis 1:26 God said, ". . . let them [man] rule . . . over all the earth . . ." By this transference of power, God gave Adam the right to literally rule with authority over the earth.

And what is one of the most powerful tools in that realm of authority? It is the same tool God used to create the world, **the spoken word!** Look at Jesus' words to His disciples.

"I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that **what he says will happen**, it will be done for him." (Mk 11:23 NIV, emphasis added.)

"If you believe **you will receive whatever you ask for** in prayer." (Mat 21:22 NIV, emphasis added.) "Ask and it will be given to you . . ." (Mat 7:7 NIV)

Peter added a new dimension to this when he said, "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God . . ." (1 Pet 4:11 NIV)

<sup>3</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Copyright 1964 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Vol. 2, Page 756.

<sup>4</sup> *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Walter A. Elwell editor, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 49516, Page 70. Emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Copyright 1964 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Vol. 2, Page 756.

<sup>6</sup> Carolyn and I have written a two-part article entitled, **Error! Reference source not found.** This teaching can be found in our book, *An International Minister's Manual*, as well as Hundredfold's web site, [www.hundredfold.org](http://www.hundredfold.org)

As believers in the Church of Jesus Christ in this generation, we have that same authority as well as the responsibility to speak blessings. In essence we stand exactly where Aaron and his sons stood, as spokesmen for God to others. Thus we have the awesome power to speak blessings on another. But tragically, in today's church, we have almost completely lost sight of the whole reality that each of us holds a priestly office and thus are empowered to bless.

### Who or What Can We Bless?

Of course, it is in the spirit realm that we truly exercise our authority to speak blessings. So let's ask the specific question, "Who or what can we bless?" The answer is that we have the right and responsibility to bless all those people over whom we have spiritual authority. The same principle applies to entities such as churches, buildings, events, objects, and situations.

So every pastor can and should speak blessings over his congregation, both as individuals and collectively. He or she can also speak the Lord's blessings over his church property, etc. Elders and deacons have this same power as leaders of their local church. Sunday School teachers and helpers have the standing to bless those in their classes. Heads of families have the right and responsibility to speak blessings over every member of their family and extended family. Husbands have the spiritual authority to speak protection and blessings over their wives. Both parents have that authority over their children and grandchildren to all generations. In fact, as a parent we exercise our authority from two different offices, as the matriarch/patriarch of our family and as priests in the kingdom of God. I believe Christian employers have that same right and privilege to speak blessings over their employees. Christian teachers in the community can pray blessings over their students. And the list goes on.

We can also speak blessings and protection over physical locations such as our homes, our church property, our places of work, etc. And we can certainly ask the Lord's blessings over events such as family weddings, births, church gatherings, and so on.

### Can We Earn God's Blessings?

I believe there are degrees of God's blessings. First, as a general principle, God blesses the lives of His people. I'm not saying that every Christian's life is easy. We all know of fellow Christians who suffer horrible circumstances. Yet over the years I have observed that Christians generally fare better than non-Christians under similar circumstances.

Second, it is apparent from Scripture that the more pleasing we are to the Lord the more He bestows His blessings on us. In other words, God appears to reward those who allow themselves to go through the long process of becoming mature in Christ.

Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* points out the most abundant blessings are for those who keep God's commandments and live righteous lives. It goes on to say that with the development of a righteousness of works there even arises a claim to blessing.<sup>7</sup>

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?  
Who may stand in his holy place?  
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not lift up his soul to an idol  
or swear by what is false.

He will receive blessing from the Lord  
and vindication from God his savior. (Ps 24:3-5 NIV)

### What About Blessing Our Enemies?

Jesus tells us, "Bless those who curse you . . ." (Luk 6:28 NIV) A full analysis of this Scripture belongs in a teaching on forgiveness. However, I don't want to ignore it all together. So let me just say that if someone has hurt you, you are to speak with heartfelt sincerity the Lord's blessing over that person. I try to do this faithfully, not because I feel like it, but because God's word tells me I should. I personally do not try to tell the Lord how to bless that person. I leave that to the Lord. I just know that it is my responsibility to be obedient to Scripture.

### How to Formulate a Blessing

I think there are degrees of intensity in the whole area of speaking a blessing over others. At the lighter end of the scale we may say blessings like, "Well, God bless you for saying that nice thing to that little girl." Or "I'll pray the Lord blesses your trip tomorrow." Or when we put a small child down for a nap, we may say, "Have a nice nap, God bless you." I believe that when we pray a blessing over the food we are about to eat this is that kind of immediate blessing. These are certainly valid blessings but they are given more spontaneously and are usually short in duration.

We can also speak an immediate blessings over a person or situation even though it is ongoing. For example, when I pray for someone who is seriously ill, I almost always find myself asking the Lord to bless that person with a good night's sleep. Of course, we go on and pray God's blessing of healing and other deeper blessings, such as a long, healthy life.

Then at the other end of the scale, we can speak a profound blessing over someone or something that could last for decades. For example, we can speak a blessing over a couple at their marriage ceremony intending that the blessing continue to work throughout their entire lives as husband and wife.

It is these kinds of blessings I want to focus on. When the Holy Spirit directs us to speak or write this kind of blessing we need to pray about it and wait on the Lord. We want His mind and His heart for that person or situation. It is here that the Holy Spirit often will quicken specific Scriptures to us to incorporate into the blessing. For example, Carolyn, in her blessings, often uses Psalm 19:14 by saying, "May the words of [your] mouth and the meditations of [your] heart be ever pleasing in [His] sight . . ."

### An Example of a Blessing

When our grandson, Nathan, was born, Carolyn wrote him a blessing for his first Christmas. She waited on the Lord for several days, praying and reading different Scriptures that were quickened to her mind. In the opening paragraph of the blessing, she declared herself a priest of the Lord thus able to impart her blessing to Nathan. Here is her written blessing.

#### A Blessing for Nathan David

Dearest Little One,

As we welcome you into our family with such joy and thankfulness on your first Christmas, I am so aware that our Lord has declared in His word that the generations which go before you are priests and ministers in His Kingdom. So now, as a priest of the Lord, I bless you.

May your young years be full of the joy, laughter, and love of your Mommy and Daddy and of all of us who love you so. May

<sup>7</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Copyright 1964 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Vol. 2, Page 757.

you grow in the wonder of your Lord and Savior, Jesus, who came as a baby boy into this world, even as you came so.

May your heart, soul and spirit so yield to God's redemptive love that you take Jesus into your very innermost being while you are as yet a little child. And may His word ever be a light and lamp to your path through life.

May the years of your youth reflect God's righteousness so that your feet never leave the path of His ways, neither to the right nor to the left.

May those in His church look upon your youth and know, as Samuel did when he looked upon David, that you are one of God's anointed ones.

May the words of your mouth and the meditations of your heart be ever pleasing in His sight.

May you grow into a man of great faith, character, integrity, love, and mercy so that the light of Jesus will always shine through you into His church and to a lost world.

I bless you, little Nathan, always and forever, with the never failing love of Christ and of us, your family.

Grandma C  
Christmas, 2000

Carolyn put this blessing in a frame and gave it to Nathan's parents on Christmas day. She made a copy of it and put it in her Bible. As I write this Nathan is almost four years old and the copy of the blessing is still in Carolyn's Bible. She often prays this blessing for him in her prayer time. Just think of the power of this grandmother's prayer of blessing being lifted before the Lord over and over again for years to come.

Another good use of this type of blessing is at a Christian wedding. A Christian patriarch (or matriarch) of one or both of the families could speak this kind of life's blessing over the couple during the ceremony. Various members of the family could be given written copies and continue to pray this blessing over the couple for decades.

Other examples are writing or speaking these kinds of blessings when a new church is planted, when a new pastor assumes leadership over a congregation, or at the ordination of a minister.

### **Conclusion**

I hope this teaching encourages you to begin blessing those over whom God has given you charge. I can think of no greater gift we can give than to pray God's blessings on another. May the Lord bless you with His abundant riches!

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Rev. Jim Murphy and his wife, Carolyn, of Blue Jay, California, United States, head Hundredfold Ministries, International. They write Christian teaching literature and travel to the Developing Nations of the world teaching Christian leaders. Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l is a cross-denominational Christian ministry dedicated to strengthening the church in the Developing Nations of the world.

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