

# Should Christians Expect Only ‘Spiritual’ Blessings?

MARCH 21, 2021 RUSTY OSBORNE

“Does God still bless people by giving them *things*?” Perhaps you’ve heard a similar question in a Bible study or small-group setting. Such questions are often snuffed out with a “No. God blesses his people *spiritually*, like [Ephesians 1:3](#) says. God ‘has blessed us in Christ with every *spiritual* blessing in the heavenly places.’”

Is this true? Does the Bible present God’s blessing as physical gifts in the Old Testament and spiritual realities in the New? Like so many theological truths, our either/or categories fail to accurately capture the message of blessing presented in the whole Bible. Here are three reasons Christians shouldn’t be so quick to view God’s blessing as spiritual to the exclusion of the material.

## Physical, Spiritual, Relational

God’s desire to bless his people is seen in the opening chapter of the Bible:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ([Gen. 1:28](#))

In this first instance of divine blessing, God blessed his creatures to grow numerically and to exercise authority as his vice-regents on the earth. Blessing is bound up in God’s people living obediently and thus experiencing the fullness of life that he designed for his creatures.

Blessing rings throughout the book of Genesis, as we hear echoes of [Genesis 1:28](#) in the words given to Noah after the flood ([Gen. 9:1](#)). Even after the cataclysmic global judgement, God’s plan to bless his creatures remains intact. He wants his people to live, not die.

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Nowhere is God’s relentless desire to bless his people more visible than the promise given to Abram in [Genesis 12:1–3](#). The fivefold use of “blessing” in these verses reiterates God’s desire. Once again, the divine Author weaves together the themes of blessing, offspring, and dominion in the land. His plan has always involved the material world he called into existence, and his program of blessing mediated by Abram would ultimately bring about its restoration.

God created his people as spiritual and physical beings designed for relationship—with both himself and others. We shouldn't be surprised when his blessing follows the pattern of his good design. Before the fall, to live in God's blessing was to know the fullness of life in his presence physically, spiritually, and relationally. To remove any one of these categories from our view of God's blessing will ultimately carry us away from the picture presented in his Word.

## Blessing in the Already/Not Yet

So if God's blessing was always physical, spiritual, and relational, then why does [Ephesians 1:3](#) seem to stress only spiritual blessing? Is Paul correct in his understanding of Old Testament blessings? Absolutely! But rather than taking "spiritual" to mean *not material*, it's better to understand it as *mediated by the Spirit*.

Paul understood that our participation in the kingdom of God on earth is mediated through the Spirit of God. The Spirit is how we experience life ([Rom. 8:6](#)), kill sin ([Rom. 8:13](#)), and grasp our adoption into God's family ([Rom. 8:15](#)). In all of this, the Spirit comes to us as the "first fruits" of the kingdom's blessings, the "guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" ([Eph. 1:13](#); [Rom. 8:23](#)).

Paul recognized that after Jesus finally died, rose, and poured out the Spirit, God's people now live as citizens of a kingdom that has come but has not yet been fully revealed. This is frequently referred to as the "already/not-yet" aspect of God's kingdom.

Does this mean Christians no longer experience God's blessing in the form of material gifts? No. He can give good gifts to his children when he so chooses, and many Christians can testify to how God has graciously provided for them financially in a time of need or miraculously in a time of physical danger. These good gifts come from our heavenly Father ([James 1:17](#)), and should prompt thanksgiving and praise.

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The point, though, is that these evidences of grace are not the fullness of what God intends for his people. In the kingdom's already/not-yet era, there are seasons of both "abundance and need" ([Phil. 4:12](#))—but in the Spirit we have all the blessings that enable us to live in contentment ([Phil. 4:13](#)). The Spirit empowers us to live faithfully and contently in a time when Christ doesn't reign on the earth and the church often faces persecution.

But this is not the end.

## Blessing in the Future

How we think about God's blessing is directly affected by the way we read the end of the biblical story. Too often, we operate with an abbreviated view of salvation history that ends when we die as individuals. While we might not say it, many of us perceive daily life through the lens of "When I die it's all over." It sounds ridiculous when laid out so plainly, but we rarely think about what God is going to do with the world once we're no longer on it.

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God's plan to bless the world through his Son is not exhausted until he brings about a new creation for his people. The final scenes of Scripture point us toward God's good ending ([Rev. 21–22](#)). There we see how his people truly come to experience the fullness of life—eternal life—with resurrection bodies in his glorious presence. The biblical story doesn't end with us as spirits floating on clouds, but as embodied individuals exercising dominion in God's new heavens and earth. It's far more than just "spiritual blessings," narrowly defined.

Blessing is not something reserved for the spiritual realm—it encompasses "all things" God intends for his children ([Rom. 8:32](#)). The God who has blessed us in Christ won't stop until all the earth is his and his people enjoy his presence forever.

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