

## What does it mean to “bless those who curse you”?

Jesus said, “Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27). Contrary to popular belief, this does not mean that we should say, “God bless you” whenever people are mean to you.

Jesus told us to pray for those who mistreat and persecute us. But what is puzzling is that **He never told us exactly what to pray**. I have heard people say that we are supposed to pray for God’s blessings to come on our enemies. Really? Even if they are in rebellion against God? What about the verse that says rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft? (1 Samuel 15:23) Why would God bless a rebellious person involved in witchcraft? And what about this verse that says “God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). If God is opposed to arrogant people, then asking Him to bless them would be against His will.

God does not contradict Himself, so He will not go against something that He has already stated. If I am in rebellion against God, I cannot expect Him to bless me because it contradicts what the Scripture teaches. So why would I pray for God to send His blessings on someone who is in rebellion against Him?

To “bless” someone means to speak well of them. To “curse” means to speak evil of someone. To “bless those who curse you” means to speak the truth in love about them, even when they are cursing you. They are cursing you, not by cussing you out, but by lying about you, slandering you, and spreading gossip.

For years it bothered me that I could not figure out exactly WHAT God wanted me to pray for those who mistreated me. As I was studying the book of Jonah, it suddenly became clear.

God gave the Prophet Jonah a message of judgment to preach to the people of Nineveh, “Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). If anyone deserved God’s judgment, it was the Ninevites. They were an extremely cruel people. When they conquered in battle, they skinned people alive. They cut off their enemies’ heads and set the women and children on fire. Sometimes they would maim their enemies by cutting off their hands, ears, noses, tongues, or gouging out their eyes.

Jonah went up and down the streets of Nineveh, preaching his message of judgment. The king believed his message and said, “Who knows? God may relent and not judge us” (Jonah 3:9). They didn’t know for sure that God would halt the judgment on them, but they repented anyway! The entire city repented.

**Repentance is a change in a person’s heart, which changes their behavior.**

Amazingly, his sermon got through to them. “Then the people of Nineveh believed in God, and called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.” (Jonah 3:5). Everybody believed and repented. These extremely wicked people actually listened to Jonah, repented, and turned to God.

This was nothing short of a miracle. It was an evangelist’s dream come true. It would be like all the Al-Qaeda leaders repenting at the preaching of Billy Graham. Jesus referred to their repentance in Matthew 12:41. When they turned away from their evil ways, God relented from destroying them because they repented. God told the prophet Jeremiah, “At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.” (Jeremiah 18:7-8)

You would think that the repentance of Nineveh would make Jonah happy, but not so. Instead, Jonah was furious. In his mind, their years of committing war crimes and atrocities shouldn’t be dismissed so quickly. Does a quick prayer of repentance make up for all the people they had maimed and killed? Jonah wanted the Ninevites to receive God’s judgment, not mercy. After the city turned their hearts around, the Lord asked Jonah, “And should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city?” (Jonah 4:11) God wanted Jonah to feel compassion for them too.

So what can we learn from this about praying for our enemies? Simply this. God wants us to pray for our enemies to repent—and only then He can bless them. The Lord would rather bless them than judge them, but they must first have a change of heart. The words of Jesus are not a suggestion but a command. You cannot “opt out” of this.

God commands you to pray for your enemies as part of His plan to bring about their change. Your prayers not only keep your attitude right, but God will actually activate His Spirit to work on the hearts of your enemies. The Lord wants us to pray for our enemies to come to repentance. After they do, then He can bless them, but not before.

You can pray this: "Lord, I pray that you will convict (name) of his/her rebellious attitude and he/her will get right with you. After they get their hearts right with you, I ask you to bless them."

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