

# Prosperity & Poverty

There are many passages in the Bible that speak of God's promises of blessings, prosperity, and success for his people, but there are also many passages that speak of gross hardships, trials, testings, pressures, distresses, persecutions, etc., that are the lot of God's people. Many people have stumbled on this seeming contradiction. Let's look at a few things that the Bible says, and see if we can get a better understanding as to what the heavenly Father is trying to tell us.

Any father would want blessings, prosperity, and success for his children, but a good father will also want his children to be disciplined. What would prosperity do for an undisciplined child? Wouldn't that child, like the prodigal son, waste his wealth, blessing, or prosperity? So it is, that the heavenly Father permits the trials, hardships, testings, and whatever he determines is necessary to bring his children to a place of discipline and obedience. Also, please notice that the discipline must come first. As the prophet Jeremiah wrote: "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth." Lamentations 3:27 [NKJV] Here are two more passages that speak of God's correction:

## Job 5:17

...happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty.

## Proverbs 3:11-12

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest his correction; for whom the Lord loves, He corrects, just as a father the son *in whom* he delights.

Now, the above is very simple, easy to understand, but many questions remain:

Why is it that some of God's people have gone through such extreme suffering? Are they so rebellious as to need so much discipline?

Shouldn't trials and testings end once we learn to obey?

Why are there so many who seem to be such pure saints who are suffering so many things?

Why do some live clean and regularly pay tithes but never prosper?

What methods does God use to discipline us?

It seems that some people are never disciplined. Why?

When tragedy strikes, is it God's hand of discipline, or is it an attack of the devil?

And, on and on the questions go.

Please notice Proverbs 30:8 ".....give me neither poverty nor riches..." This writer knew that riches draw most people's hearts away from spiritual things to earthly things. Is this not true: most of us are sure that we can control riches; nevertheless, when riches come, in almost every case, those riches control us. Again I say, when riches come, almost every one of us are drawn away from the spiritual riches, and are drawn to the earthly riches, luxuries, and comforts. As David wrote: "...if riches increase, set not your heart upon them." [Psalm 62:10] Yet, when riches increase, almost all of us [that is, we who call ourselves believers, Christians, etc.] allow our hearts to be set upon them. When riches increase, almost every one of us asks: "Where would be a safe place to store my riches? How can I protect my riches? Where would be the best place to invest them? There are still many things in this world that I do not have but I want; how can I further increase my riches so that I can have those things?" Some such individuals do give to poor, needy people, but for the most part, most people, when riches increase, tend to give less and less to the poor, and almost every one of them turn to hoarding.

Will riches control you, or will you control the riches? Please note that even Solomon was drawn away by his riches. This is the man to whom God appeared twice, yet even Solomon himself was drawn away by his riches. Are we stronger than Solomon? He did not obey God or do with his riches what God wanted him to do. He too oppressed the people to obtain more riches. Truly it is a very rare individual whom God can trust with

the riches of this world. Very many of the most anointed, the most godly, the most saintly, the purist souls, have, in times of prosperity, been drawn away from the lifestyle and devotion to their God, and sought after the things of this world.

Now, there are very many books in Christian book stores [and being sold by tel-evangelists] promoting the ‘prosperity’ doctrine. Those books point out very many scriptures that tell of God’s desire for his children to prosper. Almost every one of those books, writings, teachings, etc., ignore verses in the Bible such as Jesus’ word: “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself [discipline himself], take up his cross, and follow me.” [Mark 8:34] Those who are following the prosperity doctrine simply can’t deal with this verse and many others like it. Hardly anyone is writing about God’s purposes in allowing his children to go through many trials, temptations, hardships, and go through times of poverty and need. For this reason, I will bring out many of those passages in this article.

Here is one saying from the Bible: 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:17 reads: “...our momentary light distress pre-prepares for us an eternal weight of glory, which transcends every measure...” [translated from Greek]. Will you allow the distressful situations in your life to prepare you for something far greater in the eternal realm? Or will you let those distressful situations get you down, steal your victory, rob you of your joy, destroy your faith? Yes, the heavenly Father allows many distressful situations to come into our lives to test us and to prove us.

An example is God’s word to Abraham to offer his own son as a burnt sacrifice. Didn’t God test Abraham? Don’t most of us think that we will escape God’s testing? He uses those situations to bring us to a place where we learn to walk victoriously despite any difficult situations that we may be in. He promised us that he would not allow us to be tempted more than we are able to stand [endure]. [1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:13] When you run into distressful situations, do you remind yourself of this promise that “you are

not being tempted more than you can stand”? Or do you allow those distressful situations to “get you down”?

Please note again what Jesus taught us: “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself [discipline himself], take up his cross, and follow me.” [Mark 8:34] Very few “prosperity” teachers ever mention this verse. The choice is yours: If you wish to be a servant of Jesus the Messiah, you cannot do it while you are indulging yourself in anything and everything you want. Each day, ask him what your cross is for that day. Following him will eventually lead you to his cross, as Paul the Apostle said, “I have been crucified together with Christ...” [Galatians 2:20] This is another verse that “prosperity” preachers never bring out.

Answer this question: Which would you rather have: the riches of this world, or would you rather have the spiritual riches that will bring you into an intimate relationship with Jesus? Many people will ask, “Why can’t I have both?” The answer to that question is: Riches have drawn very many believers away from the purity and sincerity that is in Jesus Christ. If you want to follow Jesus, you should ask him just what he wants you to do with your riches, resources, possessions. Most likely, he will direct you to share with those who are poor, needy, and hurting. You should dedicate your riches to him, and he will direct your situation so that you will use those riches in a way that will bless those whom he wishes to bless; not to pamper your own self with every luxury item.

One spiritual leader put it this way: “One thing I am sure God will challenge is the idea of ‘seed money.’ God makes it very clear in His Word that His people are to be the seed that is planted, not the ‘almighty dollar.’ He distinctly shows us that we are to be the seed that is planted, and we are to be fruitful in the earth.” –Paul Cain <http://www.consumingfire.com/heaven.htm>

Another spiritual leader put it this way: “...we should not adopt the Old Testament way of paying the tithe, but we should follow what is taught in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9:7, that each person is

to give according to God's order; he may give a half, a third, a tenth, or a twentieth.....Pray before giving, whether to the poor or to some other worthy cause...." — Watchman Nee<sup>1</sup>

2 Corinthians 9:7 reads:

*Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver.*

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Having read the Bible, especially the book of Acts in the New Testament, I have become convinced that there is little resemblance between the church described in the book of Acts and the modern American or Western churches. Besides the book of Acts, I have read histories, church histories, Foxes Book of Martyrs, and an ancient document called Didache. All of these further confirm the gross failing or shortcoming of the modern Western churches.

I could write many things to show the gross failing of the modern church to come up to the standard of the primitive church, but I am confining this writing to only one failing of the modern church: failure in handling their money matters [or business affairs] according to the standards in the New Testament portion of the Holy Bible.

First, let's look at tithing. What does the New Testament teach about tithing [giving 10% of ones' earnings to the church each payday]. Most of us know that according to the law God gave to Moses, those under the law were expected to give 10%. Does the New Testament teach tithing? There is only one verse in the New Testament that teaches tithing. Jesus, speaking to some religious leaders, said, "...these [judgment, mercy, and faith and Godly love] you ought to have done, and not leave the

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<sup>1</sup>Watchman Nee's Testimony, compiler: K.H. Weigh, Church book room, 1974, Hong Kong Church Books Room, Hong Kong, 1974, page 26.

other [tithing even the smallest items] undone." Matthew 23:23 & Luke 11:42<sup>2</sup>

But here Jesus was talking to some people who were under the law of Moses. Is there any other place in the New Testament that teaches tithing? This is something that I have studied intensely, and I have become convinced of this: Though Moses commanded that the people give a tenth, Jesus taught the people to give their all, even their hearts and lives. And there is evidence that many people have done just that.

So, where did the New Testament believers give their offerings? After carefully reading the New Testament and the early church histories, I have come to understand that the early church gave almost everything to helping poor, needy people. I have not found any evidence that they paid tithes into their local churches or to their pastors. [Yes, I know that many churches, pastors, and denominations of Christianity will be angry with me for teaching such a doctrine, but I have an abundance of evidence from the Holy Scriptures and from the histories of the early church.]

Does the Bible say that they paid their ministers? Notice this verse in Acts 4:35 "And laid them [the prices of the things that they sold] down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was

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<sup>2</sup> These two verses read as follows:

[Matthew 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Luke 11:42 But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

made unto every man according as he had need.” Yes, the first part of this verse does say that they gave to their ministers [apostles], but the last part of the verse tells us that this money was used to help those who were in need. There is no hint that the apostles took a percentage, or a cut or an commission, or “an expense account” or a salary out of this money.

Now, the question is: How did the ministers or servants of God in the book-of-Acts church handle their business affairs, and how were their financial needs met? The Bible does not tells us how those needs were met, but there is evidence that those men learned to live by faith, and living that lifestyle, their needs were met on a day-by-day basis. The same is true concerning our Lord Jesus Christ and his 12 disciples. There is little indication in the four gospels as to the details of their financial affairs. However, it is very evident that none of the apostles waited until they had a guaranteed monthly salary before they went to preach the gospel.

The following story from the early church gives us an insight into how the servants of God lived:

Once there were two brothers who each were medical doctors. They each devoted their medical skills to God and vowed between themselves that they would never accept any payment for their services. And, this they did for many years; treating and/or healing the sick and refusing to take any payment—even when they were pressured to accept a gift.

However, one day, one of the brothers treated a certain woman who wanted to give something to this brother. She was poor and had very little money, but she begged him to accept her “widow’s mite.” Of course he refused. She continued to beg him, and he continued to refuse to accept anything. Finally, seeing that he would not take any money, she decided to offer him food; however, she was so poor that the only thing she had was one egg. Again he refused to accept the egg. Again she pleaded with him to accept this egg. The end of this story is that she bothered

him so much that he finally accepted the egg.

When he found his brother, he told him what he had done, and his brother immediately turned his back to him and never spoke to him again.

Now, the point of this story is to show how most of God’s servants in the early years [and centuries] of the Christian church lived—and to show their devotion to serving needy people freely. [I am not writing this story to say if what the first brother did (accepting the egg) was proper, or if what the second brother did (turning his back on his brother) was proper. I am only writing this to show the level of devotion that the ministers or servants in the early church had and how they lived.] How many do we know today that walk in that level of devotion to following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ?

How were the needs of these two brothers and most of God’s servants met? We are not told, but from plenty of evidence in the Bible and in the histories, they learned to trust God and in his own ways, God provided for them.

What are our Christian ministers doing today? Many have started having conferences and charging “registration fees” or “admission fees.” I went to a few such meetings. First I paid \$7 to get into one meeting, and later \$35 at another meeting. But a few months later, another minister came to my hometown, set up a convention, and requested a \$60 registration fee. At that time, the heavenly Father put it into my heart that I was not to go to any more meetings at which ministers charged a registration fee. Can we imagine Jesus charging an admission fee or a registration fee for the multitude that gathered on a grassy slope to hear him? Rather he fed the sheep; whereas, many of our Christian ministers today are fleecing the sheep.

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Following is a quotation from the first newsletter put out by the leaders of the Azusa Street revival:

We believe in the faith line for Christian workers, and no collections are taken. During the [past] four months, meetings

have been running constantly, and yet with working day and night [without purse or script], the workers have all been kept well and provided with food and raiment. Workers who have received calls to foreign lands are going out, the Lord providing the means with no needs being presented [to the congregation]. The ones that give, give as the Lord speaks to them and do not want their names mentioned.

— end of quote from Azusa Street newsletter —

Let's look at a standard that was used by the apostles to judge false prophets and false apostles: The early apostles wrote:

An apostle or prophet who asks for more than bread for the road—especially one who asks for money or one who asks to be put up for more than two days—is false.

By these standards (that is, asking for money), virtually every one of our ministers, priests, bishops, pastors, and evangelists are false apostles or false prophets.<sup>3</sup>

Our Lord Jesus taught: “Freely you have received; freely give.” [Matthew 10:8] I published a 40-page book about a man who served God freely and am hereby offering it to you **freely**. This book is about a man from India by the name of Sundar Singh who died about 1931. Please write me and ask me for this **free** book.

Brother James

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<sup>3</sup> The name of this apostolic document is *Didache*, which is a Greek word that means *The Teaching* or *The Doctrine*. It was taken from *Faith and Wealth* by Justo Gonzalez, page 93.

This document is available on the internet at:

<http://wesley.nnc.edu/noncanon/fathers/ante-nic/didache.htm>

The text as it appears on the above web site reads:

“...when he departeth, let the apostle receive nothing save bread, until he findeth shelter; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet.” 11:8+9

Following are some more examples of faithful men who trusted God rather than asking men for financial support:

A. About 200 years ago, there was a Christian believer in Europe whom the Lord led to start an orphanage. He had no money, but he got on his knees and prayed for it. He did start an orphanage and ran that orphanage for 60 years. Hundreds of thousands of children were cared for during those 60 years, and he never once asked anyone for a penny. Rather, he daily got on his knees and asked his heavenly Father for their daily bread and other necessities. In 60 years, those orphans did not miss a meal. He said that there was one time, the meal was 30 minutes late coming in [once in 60 years]. Now, if anyone had a right to ask for money, certainly this man, George Muller, did. He would have been asking for the orphans, not for himself, yet he did not. Frequently, he made trips to churches and took a choir from the orphanage to the churches. Everyone expected him to ask for money, but he never did.

B. In our city [Knoxville, Tennessee], there is a pastor who started offering free cassette tapes of his messages on a radio broadcast. He never once asked for money on his radio broadcast. The ministry grew and grew so much that today, he is sending out 100,000 tapes every year—all over the world—including into hundreds of prisons. If a person has a true anointing, the people will gladly send in their financial help without having to be asked.

C. During the 1906 revival at Azusa Street, the leaders of that revival started a newsletter. Because the anointing was so great, the people gave freely, and they produced 5000 copies of the first newsletter. The demand was so great that for the second newsletter, they produced 10,000 copies. Again the demand was so great that 20,000 copies of the third newsletter were sent. There was never any mention of money in the newsletter or in the meeting place. I have an 8-page pamphlet about that revival which I offer to the reader FREE. There were 13 newsletters in

all produced by the Azusa Street Mission. Someone recently made them available on the internet [FREE]. I have already downloaded them. They came to about 300 pages. I hereby offer this book on a floppy disk FREE to anyone who will ask. This revival at Azusa Street was led by a black man who was blind in one eye. They met in a building that used to be a stable. They were not a bunch of rich people there. As most probably know, in 1906 black people did not have much money. Yet, they never once asked for money.

D. The church where my daughter is a member do not take up offerings; they only have an offering box in the back of the church for those who wish to donate. I have never heard money mentioned in the meetings, yet the church is growing rapidly.

E. And above is the example of the two brothers who were medical doctors. Should they have requested payment for their services?

F. Above I also mentioned that the early church gave virtually all of their money to helping poor, needy, hurting people. Should they have settled down to having Western-style church buildings, taking collections every week, and hiring a paid pastor?

G. Of course the premier example of giving is our Lord's example in feeding the crowds [multitudes]. He did not fleece the people, he fed them. We are not called to fleece the sheep, we are called to feed them. Our Lord himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." [Acts 20:35]

H. I know of and have heard of a number of other ministries that refused to ask for money, and they prospered according to God's prosperity. Those who are asking for money are not walking in the fullness of the blessing that our heavenly Father has apportioned to us—and the same applies to all of the ministries that are begging for money.

Once again: the apostolic document call the Didache [διδάχη] was reputedly produced by the early apostles. Notice again what the early disciples wrote:

An apostle or prophet who asks for more than bread for the road—especially one who asks for money or one who asks to be put up for more than two days—is false.

Reminder: Paul said that "the love of money is the root of all evil." [1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:10, King James Version] [Another translation reads: "A root of all evil is love of money." My translation: "Love of money is a root that produces nothing but evil."] What a sneaky thing love of money is. The devil found millions of people who have been saved from their sins, but whom he [the devil] was able to draw away from the nature of the Lord with love of money. Very many preachers and ministers and priests have fallen into that trap, and, if you were a pastor, it would be very possible for you to fall into that same trap.

Please read this saying by the Apostle Paul carefully:

Those who want to get rich, fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and harmful desires, which cause them to sink into ruin and destruction.

—1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:9

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There is much more that could/should be written on this subject. I'll write more when I have the time and inspiration.

This booklet is FREE. Please write and ask for more copies.

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