

Prosperity



Many of the same kinds of doctrinal problems that existed in first-century Christianity exist in our present day! A very serious one centers around the relationship of godliness to material prosperity for the Christian and his faith.

Popular teachers are saying that since we are Christians we should not be denied material prosperity, since it is part of our redemptive rights. Such teachers advocate the pursuit of the material and even gauge our faith level by our material possessions. (The world gauges success by our material possessions as well!) In other words, these *word* teachers say that one's *Volkswagen faith* is not as developed or pleasing to God as another's *Cadillac faith*. (I personally heard this taught over the radio!)

Nearly 1930 years ago, Paul wrote pastor-teacher Timothy with regard to this very subject—the Christian and material possessions:

... men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap

and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. (1 Tim 6:5-11)

This is a clear refutation to the popular, ear-tickling *Prosperity Message*, and therefore, a very important passage for our day, as it was in Timothy's. Please note the following three observations from that passage:

- We [Christians] are to be *content* with our material possessions. This is the opposite of being eager for money, which is equated with *the love of money*. The word *eager* (verse 10) means: *reach out after, covet after, desire*. This speaks of greed, another name for idolatry (Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5). Remember, ALL idolaters will end up in the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Rev. 21:8)! Therefore, a very real danger—namely the fiery lake of burning sulfur—exists through any message, including this one, that would generate the love of money! Furthermore, some [Christians]

do wander from the Christian faith because of such a teaching and have been plunged into ruin and destruction, verses 9 and 10! The same Greek word as found here in verse 9 is also used in Matt. 7:13 and rendered *destruction* which clearly refers to Hell: "... For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it."

- As a safeguard against this, Paul advises the people of God to flee the desire to get rich and instead pursue much more important things like righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Consequently, the real issue here revolves around Christian goals, ambitions and priorities. They are to be spiritual and eternal, not material and temporal; yet we are to provide for our relatives and family (1 Tim. 5:8)!
- Paul identifies those who teach a message that generates a love for money as people who "have been robbed of the truth," verse 5. This is a blanket statement regardless of any signs and wonders such may be able to perform or alleged visits from Jesus Christ Himself that they claim!

Nowhere in the Holy Scriptures is the temporal and material elevated in importance! Instead, souls are to be our goal! Hence, evangelism is exemplified, especially in Acts. As soldiers in God's army, we should be willing to suffer lack, be persecuted and even die for this cause, as Stephen did (Acts 7:59, 60). Paul said, "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory," 2 Tim. 2:10. "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22b). "For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:33b). This was the goal and purpose of the

man God used to write half of the New Testament books. Shouldn't this also be our goal and purpose in this life? Certainly, there is a major difference between the Prosperity teachers of our day and Paul who taught, "If we have food and clothing we [Christians] will be content with that." I've never heard the Prosperity Gospel teachers preach a sermon from that verse! The gospel of greed breeds sin and a terrible distortion from the holy image of a Christian.

Remember, real heroes of the faith are described here:

were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute [extremely poor], persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith ... (Heb. 11:37-39).

Please note: The Greek meaning of this word translated *destitute* is *lack, suffer need, (be in) want* [Strong's Exhaustive Concordance—Greek Dictionary, p.75, no. 5302]. (See also Heb. 13:5; Col. 3:1,2 and Prov. 30:7-9). NOTE: Job was the godliest man on the planet in his day! He was not a faith failure, as he has been presented.

Certainly, the *Prosperity Gospel* or gospel of greed has distorted who the real heroes of the Christian faith are, not to mention, even more seriously, promoting the spiritually deadly sin of GREED. Reader, please know: If you are greedy, you need to repent and get saved (1 Cor. 6:9,10; Eph. 5:5,6; Col. 3:5 cf. Rev. 21:8). Flee from this form of idolatry! And beware of false teachers.

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