

Column

The so-called ‘prosperity gospel’ goes in and out of the news. An article which appeared last year in *Christianity Today*, drawing data from a recent survey, says that two-thirds of American Christians have imbibed at the fountain of this belief system.

But, is it true? If you follow God’s teachings, if you lead a good life, if you faithfully send in your money to Brother and Sister Osteen, can you expect to have a Cadillac in your garage, a swimming pool in your back yard, a picture-perfect family and good health?

Where might you look for an answer to this conundrum? Surely for the Christian it is to the Bible. What does the Bible say on this subject?

Well, if you look in Deuteronomy these two -- faithfulness and prosperity -- seem closely linked. One example is found in chapter 7: “If ye hearken to these judgments . . . and he [God] will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine [cattle], and the flocks of thy sheep . . . and will take away from thee all sickness.”

The same principle appears to be taught in some of the Psalms. In the very first, we read: “He [the righteous man] shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

Well there you have it. “The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it” . . . that is unless you stumble onto the curious little book of Job. Here we are given quite a different perspective. Job, a man upright in all his ways, a man who follows God’s precepts, in a flash loses everything: his wealth, his family, his health. What do we do with Job?

Job stands as a counterweight to Deuteronomy and the Psalms and in fact points forward to another innocent suffer – the Lord Jesus Himself. He was the faithful man *par excellence*, one who committed all His ways to His Father in heaven, one who was faithful to the end . . . yet, He never achieved great material wealth. In fact, the New Testament tells us that the Son of Man had no place to lay his head (Matthew 8:20). More than that, His faithfulness to the Father’s plan led to the most extreme suffering and death.

So, are the purveyors of the prosperity gospel right? Well, yes in this respect: Following God’s way, keeping His commandments, trusting in His

providence, indeed bring great blessing (1 Timothy 6:6) and at times material prosperity. But, we must be very cautious in making material prosperity the main thing. We must remember Job and Jesus.

The bottom line is: If God has given you great material blessings receive them joyfully and resolve to use them in God's service; but, if you are struggling and suffering, don't think you have fallen out of the reach of the love and care of God. He cares for you. Vindication is promised. Great is your treasure in heaven.

Above all – whatever your circumstance – God's call is to remain faithful, *whatever*.

O ALMIGHTY God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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