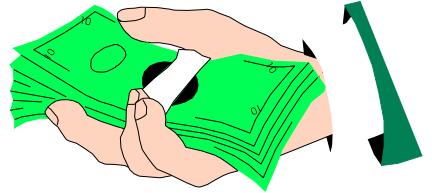


# PROSPERITY .

## Is it God's Idea?



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# **THE PROSPERITY MESSAGE**

**In these days it becomes increasingly urgent that Christians should know that God wants us to be rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9) This is not just money of course and this is the purpose of this small book.**

It seems to have been conveyed to honest Christian people that there is something wrong with prospering, and that if you work for God you should not expect to receive a proper wage commensurate with your abilities. This idea was probably exacerbated by the vows of poverty that monks and nuns took in the early church; that they were not paid at all for their labours (so that the church grew rich on their enforced generosity). These customs became an entrenched thinking and were fostered by the corruption of many early church leaders to their advantage. There have been some, especially in recent times, who have questioned such very wrong thinking but often they have been ridiculed by the self-same people who are still taking advantage, even in "reformed" or "protestant" churches. In these circumstances it is a good idea to listen to what people who are not "brainwashed" have to say. In these days it is shouted loud and clear by the general (and probably unbelieving) community that the church is only on about money. Actually this is not strictly true but the thinking is already established and only by broadcasting God's desires equally loud and clear can we change anything. We need not be ashamed of God's plans and strategies but determine to practise them until people who are deceived finally see them working and desire them too.

# Prosperity — Is it God's Idea?

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## **1. SEEDTIME AND HARVEST**

(Genesis 8:22)

Some churches we have visited have no embarrassment about sending an offering plate around at a church meeting and consequently there is also no embarrassment about giving, but one of the stupidest things that we witness often is "the offering box" at the back of the church building, where people, who are disposed to give and are not regular online givers, are supposed to make their offering. It is tokenistic and no faith is encouraged or acknowledged. But from the "new beginning" God made a mighty promise and set a precedent that has never been revoked. Everything that happens of God

requires a seed. Actually everything that happens comes from a seed. Jesus said, "Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 7:17-19) These customs need to be cut down because trusting people are not being taught to give by sowing and reaping.

Any farmer knows that he has to acquire seed to put in his prepared paddock in order to have his harvest. What some do not believe is that it is God who supplies his harvest. He would certainly hope for a harvest but hope is not a trusting prayer. We meet many people who have "hope" and they are often disappointed because they have not taken into account that we have an enemy who wants to win the hearts and souls of men who are already in his kingdom by default. All he has to do is make them revile God and reinforce that God does not seem to love them. This is why we love stopping on the road to talk to these farmers and encourage them to trust God because we believe the prosperity message so wholeheartedly.

The most dreadful aspect of ignorance of God's plans for our prosperity is that seeds are being sown that are not full of God's love and faith but are inspired by the devil himself. Some seeds might seem like earthly wisdom but James makes it plain where earthly wisdom comes from. (James 3:15) This is still happening because many church leaders have been qualified, not by their holiness and intimate knowledge of God Himself, but by doing excellently in their examinations and by eloquence. They have innovative ideas to

promote their church but are rather like the Pharisees of old with their rules and regulations which do not demonstrate faith and trust in an inordinately generous God.

## **2. GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM** (Genesis 12:2&3)

God made an incredible promise to Abraham. "I will bless you...I will bless those who bless you...all people on earth will be blessed through you." But the promise comes by faith. (Romans 4:16) God...calls things that are not as though they were. (Romans 4:17) God's response to our faith is that He delivers the blessings that He has promised. "In you they trusted and were not disappointed". (Psalm 22:5) "The one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame". (1 Peter 2:6) The whole story of Abraham tells how he learnt to trust God and appropriate these promises. Abraham acquired sheep and cattle, donkeys, servants and camels. (Genesis 12:16) He had a personal relationship with God to the point where God discussed His problem with Abraham. (Genesis 18:20-33) He was materially blessed by those of other nations with whom he came in contact and the Bible testifies that the LORD had blessed him in every way. (Genesis 24:1) This obvious blessing was a powerful testimony to Abraham's servant when he was sent to find a wife for Isaac, and he had plenty to leave Isaac on his death. The Bible says he lived a full life. The Bible says Abraham is the father of all those who relate to God through faith. (Romans 4:16) Therefore every blessing God promised to Abraham is ours also through our faith. Abraham was called by God and he accepted God's offer. Though he

made mistakes he was accounted righteous, not by his works or even by his obedience to circumcision but by believing God.

We who are in covenant with God by believing that Jesus died for our sins (the better covenant because the price for sin is paid permanently *Hebrews 8:12*), have been chosen to be holy and blameless in God's sight, have been adopted as His sons and daughters and He has "lavished on us the riches of His grace – all wisdom and understanding". (*Ephesians 1:4&8*) Because God is a God of increase, (that is what sowing and reaping is all about,) the blessings to Abraham are only the beginning of what such a rich and generous God was wanting to do for His family. God started with one man and his family but He revealed to Abraham that the "faith" family was larger than the number of stars in the sky. (*Genesis 15:5*) Abraham simply believed God. He did not ask how this could be because it was way beyond his understanding. This kind of faith in God is so trusting and God loves it and rewards it.

### **3. ...AND ISAAC AND JACOB**      (*Genesis 26:2-4 and 22; 30:43*)

God had begun to teach and bless His family. Isaac's birth was a miracle, promised by God but received by faith because physically it was impossible for such old people. But nothing is impossible for God because He is Creator. If He could create Adam out of the ground He could certainly create in the bodies of His family. The Covenant of blessing was renewed and increased as each of these men put God's promises into practice.

There were the challenges of the wells for Isaac (Genesis 26:18-33) and of the increase of flocks for Jacob. (Genesis 30:31-43) As they put their trust in God, God proved faithful to His Covenant. It is written of Jacob that the man grew exceedingly prosperous. (Genesis 30:43) The strategies that God put into the minds of the two men in order for them to receive their increase were quite different, but very much according to their respective personalities. It is easy to judge them according to our values as naïve or conniving, but because everyone is on a life journey God does not judge as we might. It is God who gives the ability to produce wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18) and the reason He does is so that He can confirm His Covenant. These strategies which these two patriarchs adopted were a witness of God's goodness and power. The testimony of the wells is that Abimelech's men saw clearly that the Lord was with Isaac. (Genesis 26:28) The result of Jacob's strategy was first that Laban was shown that God did not like him cheating Jacob. Because Laban would not acknowledge this, God determined to bless Jacob purely because He is a Covenant-keeping God. Later He dealt with Jacob so that Jacob would know Him and acknowledge Him as his God. (Genesis 32:22-32)

No matter what are the faults in our character, God is always ready to teach His children His own ways. These life lessons from God always begin with blessing, a flow-on of God's wonderful love and generosity. Money and possessions are the currency of this world and the blessings of God are easy to understand. We do the same with our children by rewarding them with tangible gifts because they are not able to understand spiritual blessings at first. Jacob



understood his spiritual blessing after he had wrestled with "the Man". Jacob's testimony was that he had seen God face to face, and yet his life was spared. (Genesis 32:30)

#### **4. JOSEPH**

(Genesis 41:41-49)

God gave Joseph a wonderful promise. So far all His revelation to His chosen family was in tangible blessings and, although Jacob had some spiritual revelation, he did not teach it to his children. The older ones only saw the tangible "favouritism" of the father towards one son. Isn't it good that the Bible records disastrous mistakes so we can learn from them! The dreams God gave to Joseph were spiritual blessings, but Joseph did not know and so he boasted to his brothers and reaped some terrible consequences. (Genesis 37:1-36) God shows no favouritism. (Romans 2:11) He looks for His man (or woman) whom He has gifted before they were born for His purposes and His glory (and theirs if they want to devote their lives for God). (eg, Jeremiah 1:5) Sometimes painful lessons cause people to reject God but God's purpose is to refine as pure gold. (Malachi 3:2&3) It is so good to understand this principle. (Hebrews 12:7-13) God's blessings are always so we can bless others and thus demonstrate the mercy and generosity of God.

After many trials God's promise was indeed fulfilled to Joseph and he was not only greatly blessed by God with power and wealth but he became a mighty blessing to his own family and his adopted country. But God never stops pouring out blessings through His people.

Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Jacob wanted to consider as his. (Genesis 48:5) When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush He called Himself the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. (Exodus 3:6) God only has children, not grandchildren. When a parent decides to call one from a lower generation his child, it gives that child right of inheritance that is by grace alone – not deserved or earned. Jacob's act towards Joseph's two children was a prophetic act. Jacob also elevated the second over the first. (Genesis 48:19) Ephraim means "fruitfulness" whereas Manasseh means "forget the past". So important to God is fruitfulness and increase that Ephraim was placed before Manasseh. The gospel has always been about future and growth. God does not like lack of growth and inaction through hanging on to the past. Jacob's blessing on Joseph reinforces this concept and guarantees health and strength to those who embrace this principle of God.

The "God story" is one of continuous revelation, step by step, and to those who are filled with the Holy Spirit and want to know, God generously shares His secrets. (James 1:5)

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## **5. THE ISRAELITES**

(Exodus 12:35&36)

"The Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly, and became exceedingly numerous." (Exodus 1:7) But they also became a great threat to the Egyptians. Unfortunately they had forgotten God's Covenant so they became subservient to the Egyptians. Egypt became synonymous with slavery because God's own precious

people allowed this to happen. But there were a man and his wife who remembered that God was good, and a Protector and trusted their child to His favour. God always looks for a man!

So Moses became a leader of the Israelites, very reluctantly but he grew in faith and stature. He was recorded in heaven's records as "regarding disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." (Hebrews 11:26) "He persevered because he saw Him who is invisible." Moses chose God's favour above worldly wealth although it was readily available to him.

Those Israelites were not grateful to Moses at all except for one notable exception. "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15) However throughout all the nightmare of serving God by leading these ungrateful people God established or re-established many of the principles He had set from the beginning. The Israelites moved from slavery and poverty to rich and wealthy landowners. Moses explained to them very clearly how to receive and retain God's blessings. (Deuteronomy 28:1,2 &14)

What wonderful blessings they were offered. (Deuteronomy 28:3-13)

- You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. (No matter where you live, even in poor land or good land, good neighbourhood or bad, whether you have a desk job or are a farmer, God will prosper you.)
- The fruit of your womb will be blessed. (You will have as many children as you desire, they will all be healthy, beautiful, intelligent and well-behaved.)

- The crops of your land and the young of your livestock will be blessed. (All crops will thrive and produce their harvest; the animals will deliver their young, prolific and thriving.)
- Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. (Plenty of food, both purchased and home-made.)
- You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. (At home you will be safe and also when you go travelling.)
- The Lord will grant that your enemies will be defeated. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. (It would not make any difference whether the enemy was sickness and trouble or actual people. An enemy is an enemy!)
- The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. (Even what we have stored is protected and preserved and everything we do is successful.)
- The Lord will bless you in the land He is giving you. (This indicates that we have favour with our neighbours.)
- The Lord will establish you as His holy people...then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the Name of the LORD, and they will be in awe of you. (This kind of prosperity and favour certainly confirms that God is good all the time and brings Him honour and glory. It attracts any who are seeking blessing. They will be convinced that the only true God is the One who has revealed Himself through His relationship with His people.)

- The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity. (Success breeds success and wealth makes more wealth. On this road you just cannot stop the flow because this is how God works and this is what He wants.)
- The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of His bounty, to send rain on the land in season to bless all the work of your hands. (Two principles that Jesus taught – that if we are faithful with little we can be trusted with much, {Luke 16:10} and to everyone who has, more will be given. {Luke19:26}.)
- You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. (Wealth has its responsibilities, giving power but also a chance to help others. When we give generously in response to what God has spoken into our hearts, the blessing flows on so that others can experience God's love too.)
- The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. You will always be at the top, never at the bottom. (These blessings were promised to a people who had been at the bottom, seriously, brick making, bullied and demeaned. When one has been at the bottom and hated it there is great incentive to see that it does not happen again – you would think.)

What we have put in brackets is what we would consider the ideal blessings. God says He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us (Ephesians 3:20) so our suggestions could only be a minimum of God's generosity and loving care. It is hard to understand why the Israelites did not just simply obey as asked.

## 6. THE WRONG USE OF WEALTH

(Exodus 32:3 -24)

A serious mistake to make about having wealth is that it is for you to do what you like with it. We have just written about the responsibilities associated with having been trusted with the power that wealth brings.

When the Israelites left Egypt God gave them favour and told them to ask the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. (Exodus 12:35&36). The Bible says that they plundered the Egyptians. This is a very strong word in the story. Here are a people who have just gone through the terrible experiences of the plagues and have seen that after the plagues of blood, frogs, and gnats, God's people had not been affected. (Exodus 8:22) Perhaps those Egyptians who had friends in Goshen could just nip over to visit, but otherwise they had endured flies, sick livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness and the death of every firstborn. Terror and awe would have gripped their hearts. It is an amazing fact that people from every age think that you can buy yourself out of trouble. These poor Egyptians must have poured their jewellery, valuables and clothes out, hoping their troubles would go away. It must have been very easy for the Lord to make the Egyptians favourably disposed towards His people, and hastily and desperately dispose of their wealth. All this gold was entrusted to the Israelites by God.

**And what did they do with God's money?** They made a golden calf, which could have been an image of the Egyptian Apis-bull of Memphis, or the Mnevis bull of Heliopolis. (New Bible Dictionary page 180) These idols could have influenced locals near Goshen. Idolatry is

very pernicious and in Egypt the bull or calf was a symbol of fertility and physical strength. What better use than to use the Egyptian gold to gain strength and fertility? When the devil gets his foot in the door he likes to take it as far as he can. Not only an idol but an orgy of "celebration" and revelry! Revelry before a god of fertility! The mind boggles as to how they "celebrated". We are horrified but Aaron looked on helplessly. When Moses came down from the mountain he was terribly angry. This was the people that promised that if he represented them before God they would do what he told them.

Our trouble in the 21st century is that we have found other ways to use God's money, equally self-indulgently. One is that we spend massive amounts of money on arms that we can use to kill people. People cry out about corruption but do not mind cheating in various ways. This behaviour is not as dramatic but does God like the attitude any better? Jesus reminds us to remove the plank from our own eye before we point to the speck in someone else's eye. (Matthew 7:5)

The result of this wrong use of God's money was equally dramatic. Moses called for those who were on God's side. All the Levites rallied to him. Repentance is a very wise thing and their penance was terrible. They were told to take a sword and go back and forward killing brother, friend and neighbour. "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (Matthew 10:37) Because Jesus has died for all sins we are not asked to do such a drastic cleansing of evil, but sometimes when we see how

wickedness and notoriety is "honoured" in our society so that it seems to proliferate, we can understand God's commands.

## **7. GOD'S GENEROSITY TO SOLOMON** (1 Kings 3:13)

Our behaviour does not change God's heart and attitudes. He always looks for His man. It is so easy to forget God's promises especially at a time when most of God's commands were not readily accessible to the ordinary person. The Torah had been faithfully recorded by the scribes but, like the Israelites at Sinai, (Exodus 20:19) the people did not want to meet God but were content to have laws written down to follow and relied on the orders given to them by their leaders. The keeping of the law then depended on the faithfulness of God's appointed leaders to teach and keep this law of God. David, although he made many mistakes, was a man after God's own heart and he sought God. He was not so good at teaching his children but Solomon, at the beginning of his reign, sought God's wisdom. This pleased God so well that God gave him riches and honour beyond any other. It was seen by all who visited Solomon that this was God's favour and a confirmation of God's covenant, promised so long ago through the words of Moses. (Deuteronomy 8:18) These blessings were inherited from his father, David, who had claimed all the blessings, promised in the writings of Moses. God promised to "show His love to a thousand [generations] of those who love Me and keep My commandments". (Exodus 20:6)



It is a mistake to think that we deserve God's generosity. For a good relationship with God we need a contrite and lowly spirit. (Isaiah 57:15) When Solomon deferred to God's superior wisdom and admitted he needed this to govern God's people well, this made a way for God to give His best gifts.

The balance of spiritual blessings to physical was changing. David was certainly a rich man but he had many trials before he became king. He learnt in those times to praise God in all circumstances, especially unjustified persecutions. David prayed some beautiful things. He was so grateful to God for his protection and encouragement. "To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure...you save the humble...you are my lamp, O Lord." (2 Samuel 22:26-29) These words and this attitude are very good sowing for the blessings of God to the next generation and beyond. This was Solomon's spiritual heritage. Blessings are not just money and possessions.

This is the heritage every person who loves God wants to leave for their children. It is good to be able to bless them physically but the spiritual blessings bring in the physical ones. Jesus told His disciples not to worry about what we need from day to day. "Your Father in Heaven knows you need these. Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:32) This was Solomon's experience and has set a precedent for all time. If we are not experiencing blessing and prosperity we

should check whether we are seeking God's Kingdom and His righteousness.

## **8. EVEN IN EXILE GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE TO PROSPER**

(Jeremiah 29:4-7)

Exile was punishment for the Israelites and rest for the land. God's warnings through the prophets were not idle warnings because He ALWAYS knows best and He looks for obedience. We have just written about the blessings of obedience in chapter 5. The rest of this chapter (Deuteronomy 28:15-68) are the warnings for disobedience, and the results of disobedience are not nice.

Why would God punish His people? We know that we do the same with our children. We warn them about consequences and Proverbs gives insight about the state of a child's heart. (Proverbs 22:15) What God wants is that we train them (eg, Proverbs 23:13&14) so that "they are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children". (Proverbs 17:6) There are also many other wise words written to give advice both to parent and child. "If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you...since you ignored my advice and would not accept my rebuke...they will call to me but I will not answer." (Proverbs 1:23-28) "My son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many. I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. When you walk...you will not stumble." (Proverbs 4:10-12) These are just a few wisdom sayings which Solomon wrote because he had asked for and been granted the wisdom of God.

We can read the history of the Israelites and about the kings that followed Solomon. There were so few that sought God. It is written that most, both of Israel and of Judah, did evil in God's sight. God sent many prophets to warn them so that they might lead God's people in righteous ways but the power and the wealth corrupted most of them. This must be why Agur son of Jakeh, who had "no knowledge of the Holy One", wrote, "Give me neither poverty nor riches...otherwise I may have too much and disown you". (Proverbs 30:3&8-9)

Exile was a bad experience for God's people. The Psalmist writes, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:1&4) This might be how they felt, but negativity does not help. The words following, in Psalm 138, show that praise brings the presence and the joy of the Lord. "I will praise You, O Lord, with all my heart; before the 'gods' (in this foreign land) I will sing Your praise. I will bow down towards Your holy temple and will praise Your name for Your love and faithfulness, for You have exalted above all things Your Name and Your Word. When I called, You answered me."

This was when they were ready to listen to the words of the prophet when he came with words from God. Even as exiles they were to demonstrate God's love and faithfulness by prospering, not only for their own families but for those among whom they lived. This is God's 'ALWAYS' plan. Wherever we are we are to be a blessing. Habakkuk wrote, "Though the fig-tree does not bud...there are no grapes ...olive crop fails...no sheep and cattle...yet I will rejoice in the Lord...He is my strength...He enables me to go on the heights". (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

We can prosper because prosperity does not depend on what we have but on God's covenant with us.

## 9. PROSPERITY IS THE REWARD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

(Proverbs 13:21)

God continues to give the same revelation from generation to generation because of the tendency of His people to think that they can live their lives apart from Him. As we can see from the comments of Agur, when we think with worldly wisdom, which James says is unspiritual and of the devil, (James 3:15) we can easily lose track of God's ideas and adopt our own. We need to go back to God's word and God's covenant to remind ourselves of God's original ideas. (Deuteronomy 8:18) This covenant is the outworking of God's grace and generous heart, where He always wants the best for His children.

The Old Testament required obedience and simple trust, which conferred righteousness as a gift from God. Paul explains this. (Romans 4:3&5) But the New Covenant is better because no one could obey the Law. (Hebrews 8:7-13) "When the Holy Spirit comes He will guide you into all truth". (John 16:13) Our righteousness is not earned by keeping the law, but by the gift of God through receiving the Holy Spirit, because the price for all sin has been paid by Jesus, being obedient to the Father on our behalf. Righteousness was and is always a gift by the grace of God. If we choose to accept the gift we receive the reward, **prosperity**. If God is speaking the truth in His word, then prosperity is also in the gift of God, but as a gift we have a

right to refuse it. It seems a crazy thing to refuse a good gift, because "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change". (James 1:17) But much of the 21st century church seems to have adopted Agur's philosophy. This must perplex such a generous God as ours, but He will never force us to receive His gifts. It is up to us to take Him at His word. One of the prophets says, "Seek good, not evil, that you may live". (Amos 5:14) Another writes, "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge". (Hosea 4:6) This is not factual knowledge as much as it is knowing God Himself, and right standing with God brings the fellowship with Him that is necessary to know His heart. Righteousness is by faith. "God reconciled us to Himself through Christ...not counting men's sins against them". (2 Corinthians 5:18&19)

Receive your reward today!

## **10. THE BLESSING OF THE LORD BRINGS WEALTH, AND HE ADDS NO TROUBLE TO IT** (Proverbs 10:22)

Not only are we supposed to prosper, to demonstrate God's covenant, but He has every intention that this wealth is a blessing to us.

We hear sometimes that people have won a lottery or had a large windfall but that it has not been a blessing. Perhaps they were then plagued by greedy relatives and 'friends' or 'good' causes that sent begging letters and phone calls. There have been cases of kidnapping to force the wealthy person to give up the money. Perhaps

they have just misspent it and wasted it, which brought great regret. Whether major or minor troubles, none of these incidents is easy or pleasant to deal with. These instances are increasing in our world, where now terrorism is the method adopted to extract money from those who have it.

All through this book we are emphasising how we must believe God's word is truth and is absolutely honest and reliable. We need to come to the point of saying to ourselves that if God's word says it, I believe it. I might not understand it yet but I am determined to be a man/ woman/ boy/ girl of faith. It is true that having enough money and some to spare enables us to do good. 'More than enough' can be defined as wealth. We (the writers) have been influenced by a wonderful Christian leader who told how he had taken faith steps. He believed what God said. "He supplies seed to the sower and bread for food". (2 Corinthians 9:10) If we have 'enough', we have food, but if we have more than enough we have 'seed'. This seed when planted will bring forth our harvest. The first 'crop' yielded a small harvest, some for food and some to 'sow'. What he discovered is that our God is a God of increase and next time there was more to sow... and more ...and more. Because he had adopted the correct principle his harvest was not only getting larger but God, through his harvest, was blessing many people. This is what Jesus is trying to convey to His disciples. "I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last." (John 15:16)

Why would anyone think that God might "add" trouble to wealth? There is so much wisdom in the Bible. God knows the heart of man

so well and He also knows His enemy and ours. The signature of the devil's work is "killing", "stealing", and "destroying". (John 10:10) If the devil can plant an idea in the heart of man against the law of "sowing and reaping", so that our existence is reduced to bread alone, God's generosity will be dried up under our stewardship. The wisdom of Solomon reinforces that God does **not** add trouble if we become wealthy and use this money and our possessions in the way that demonstrates God's heart.

This promise of God does not stop at supply of seed and bread. God promises to increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest **of your righteousness**. (2 Corinthians 9:10&11) You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. People respond favourably to generosity. The giver feels good and the recipient feels good. God is a giver and we are therefore demonstrating God's character when we give. This is why God wants us to prosper and this is why He wants to reassure us that no trouble will ever ensue from His way of prospering.

## **11. WITH ME ARE RICHES AND HONOUR, ENDURING WEALTH AND PROSPERITY** (Proverbs 8:18)

This is another of the amazing promises that God has made to His righteous ones. This saying is in the context of wisdom. Does not wisdom call out? (Proverbs 8:1)

What are some of the things wisdom does proclaim?

- Get wisdom, get understanding. (Proverbs 4:5) (God is our source, not mental learning, not certificates and diplomas, degrees and doctorates. Learning from God is by revelation from His Spirit to our spirit. This mental learning is good for recognition on the earth but brings no qualification for heaven.)
- Wisdom is supreme. (Proverbs 4:7) Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honour you. (Valuing God's wisdom above all else, sowing esteem reaps God's esteem and embracing wisdom reaps honour and God's trust.)
- I guide you in the way...along straight paths. (Proverbs 4:10) (The highway of Holiness is the safest and best way through life because it puts us out of reach of the devil. He prowls around, seeking to distract us and cause us to miss our step. He wants us to fail, to be discouraged, but God's wisdom, His promises, will keep us safe.)
- You who are simple gain prudence. (Proverbs 8:5) (We start out in Christian life by being born [again]. We are just babies in the faith, but God wants us to grow to maturity. [Ephesians 4:13&14] Prudence is defined as "care to avoid undesired consequences". Why learn from the "school of hard knocks" when wisdom will give us advance notice, in our spirits, of the consequences of our folly?)
- Wisdom is more precious than rubies. (Proverbs 8:11) My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver. (Proverbs 8:19) (Possessions and riches without the wisdom to



use them as God intended, are a liability. Solomon asked for wisdom so it was safe to give him all those riches and possessions. When we ask aright God takes us at our word and trusts us. Love always trusts. (1 Corinthians 13:7) This is the amazing thing about God's love. God makes promises to us according to HIS ideals, not according to our failures. So He makes the promise – "With Me are riches and honour, enduring wealth and prosperity." (Proverbs 8:18) This is God's standard, available for the asking.)

- I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, (Proverbs 8:20) bestowing wealth on those who love me. (God, however, is the source of wisdom so he does exercise it Himself. This last proclamation qualifies His generosity. Those who love Him are His target of blessings; those who will receive and respect His love poured out to His righteous ones.)

## **12. A GENEROUS MAN WILL PROSPER** (Proverbs 11:25)

Jesus told two different stories about stewardship. "It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing (his assigned task) when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions." (Matthew 24:46) The master of three servants went on a journey and entrusted his property to them. Two of them doubled their money but the other, when called to account, had not only not used the money at all, but actually accused the master of being hard

and expecting more than he was entitled to, since he did not do the work, but expected the servants to make his money for him. This third servant was considered worthless. (Matthew 25:14-30) The first two appreciated the trust that the master showed them. It was an honour to have this trust and the opportunity to "put the money to work", and they did their best. This also required faith that God would guide them in their spending of the money and trust that if anything did go wrong that the master would still honour their efforts, because he was a generous master. In the story Jesus did not mention that those who put their hope in God will never be put to shame. (Psalm 25:3)

The second story is a strange story about a shrewd manager. (Luke 16:1-9) He was about to lose his job because of dishonesty. His master was rich and perhaps his manager thought it would not matter about a bit of waste and careless management. Generosity is not careless use of money; on the contrary, it is deliberate blessing of people. This man decided to make some friends by further dishonesty; giving big discounts in the master's name, to gain favour with the customers. The story is strange because the master commends the dishonest manager. This dishonest man knew the principle of generosity, even though it was not his money he was giving away. God has decreed – **a generous man will prosper**. This manager was shrewd because he believed the principle even though he carried it out in an unprincipled way. At the end of the story Jesus does add a greater principle to be followed. "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much...if you have not been

trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?"

One man gives freely, yet gains even more. (Proverbs 11:24) In either story this was true, but at the end of the second the Pharisees, who loved money, sneered at Jesus. Often people who have power feel they have a right to gain money, not by sowing and reaping in faith that God's word is true, but by demand. One might seem to "prosper" by exploiting people, but "there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (Proverbs 14:12 &16:25) Real prosperity can never be gained by other than faith and generosity.

### **13. JEHOSHAPHAT'S KINGDOM WAS ESTABLISHED BY THE LORD SO THAT HE HAD GREAT WEALTH AND HONOUR**

(2 Chronicles 17:5&6)

We have mentioned that there were not many kings who did what was right in the sight of God, but Jehoshaphat was one who was commended. In his early years he walked in the ways David had followed. (2 Chronicles 17:2) The Lord established the kingdom under his control because he sought God.

What does it really mean to seek God?

The Bible says that you will call upon Me,

you will come and pray to Me and I will listen to you,  
you will seek Me, and you will find Me when you  
seek Me with all your heart.

And I will be found by you. (Jeremiah 29:12&13)

This exhortation is in the context of God's plans to prosper ...to give you hope and a future.

We often think how strange it would be to say we have a relationship with someone, yet never speak to them. We hear churched people say that they never pray for themselves as if this were a virtue. We have been to prayer meetings where people have "shopping list" type prayers for all the sick people and the functions that are on at the church, but never reach out in love to God and consider His desires. We use the expression "to call in on a friend", and we mean to share mutual interests because we care about each other. Calling on God is just the same. We are as interested in God's heart and He is interested in ours. A relationship like this, according to the word of God, was what brought wealth and honour to Jehoshaphat.

First, the fear of the Lord was on the nations surrounding Judah so that they did not want to make war. This gave opportunity to build up infrastructure and to train his men. This also meant that other nations brought gifts, money and animals, so that Jehoshaphat became more powerful.

Secondly, although he made a bad alliance because he was flattered because of his power, he listened to good advice, came to the Lord and prayed and then followed the advice, even though, as a military strategy, it did not make natural sense to sing and praise God instead of the usual war practices. (2 Chronicles 20:20-26) This is why it is good to hear from God about everything we do. He really does want

to bless us and make us successful. This is a way of attracting people to Jesus.

#### **14. HEZEKIAH SOUGHT HIS GOD AND WORKED WHOLE-HEARTEDLY AND SO HE PROSPERED (2 Chronicles 31:21)**

Another king who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, after Solomon, was Hezekiah. His story is a lovely one because he not only sought the Lord himself, but he challenged the priestly tribe of Levi to purify and consecrate themselves so that they could minister to the people. He understood that because the temple was neglected, this was indicative that God was neglected and rejected too. He set about having the temple restored so that the people in his charge would remember the Lord. God always pours out blessings on those who not only want to bless and obey Him, but want to draw others into the blessing. After the temple was repaired and re-consecrated, he called all the people to come and celebrate the Passover Feast, by sending couriers all over the land. Some who heard the invitation ridiculed him but many responded to the invitation. Many had not prepared themselves in the ritual way but Hezekiah prayed for them so that everyone who came shared in the great joy and celebration. His prayer was that the Lord would pardon everyone who set his heart on seeking God – the Lord. Even aliens who had come to join the assembly were accepted and participated. This returning to the Lord en masse had an unexpected result. All the people started bringing gifts for the Lord and for the temple, enough

to eat and plenty to spare, because the Lord had blessed His people and this resulted in "a great amount" left over. The joy of the Lord overflows in generosity and people who are filled with it give cheerfully and sense the love of God flow into their hearts. (2 Corinthians 9:7) This promotes a desire to give more.

Hezekiah's obedience to God brought prosperity not only to him but to his whole kingdom. It is interesting though, that after revival the devil finds someone to do his evil plans and so an enemy came against Hezekiah and caused a lot of grief. The spark of inspiration was still in Hezekiah and he knew what to do. He prayed to the Lord. What did God do? He sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men of the enemy. (2 Chronicles 32)

Hezekiah had another enemy, sickness. He prayed to the Lord (2 Kings 20:2&3) who gave him a miraculous sign that He would heal him. (2 Kings 20:9-11) The Bible says that his heart was proud and he boasted about his wealth to some Babylonians. (2 Kings 20:13-15) God allowed this visit to test Hezekiah's heart. (2 Chronicles 32:31) Then he repented of his pride in the things that he had (as if they were not gifts from God but he had gained them by his own cleverness) and the Lord healed him of his sickness and added fifteen years to his life. This pride in what we have can still cause sicknesses that can only be cured by God and we see it happening in our world at present.

Even though God's people make mistakes the Lord is always gracious and does not forget our good works, and in every one of these Hezekiah succeeded because his attitude showed a desire to honour God. Although Hezekiah's mistakes are recorded, God did

not take his prosperity from him, although the prophet warned Hezekiah that all his wealth would not be there for his descendants. The Bible records show that Hezekiah's son was an evil king and undid all the good work of Hezekiah.

It is wonderful for us who have been born since Jesus came and paid the price for sin. The new covenant makes each person responsible and answerable to God for his/her actions. (Hebrews 8:10-12) God has prepared works for us, (Ephesians 2:10) and if we are obedient to the call of God we have the same reward as these Old Testament men. God is the same, He does not change. (James 1:17) "Do not merely listen to the word...do what it says – he will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:22-25) Faith is made complete by our actions. (James 2:22)

## **15. WILL A MAN ROB GOD?**

(Malachi 3:8)

The last book of the Old Testament was written by a messenger whose name might have actually been Malachi, and it is an urgent message to a people whose worship of God was seriously compromised. Ezra had returned to Jerusalem to repair the temple under the patronage of Cyrus, and Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall around the city. This restored the identity of the Jewish people after 70 years in Babylon. But 70 years in a foreign land with foreign gods had given them some habits and customs (which can easily become traditions if we are not careful – things we do because they are done, although we do not know why). They had been sent into captivity because they had failed to honour

and obey God, especially with regard to idols, and there had not been many examples of Godliness for them to follow in spite of the preaching of Jeremiah, and the example that Daniel set.

Ezra and Nehemiah and some others had worked tirelessly to inspire these Israelites to follow God and to love Him, but only God can change the heart. They stirred the people up with reading the Book of the Law, with praising God and with inspired prayers. They did all the outward things that Moses had ordered and it seemed to work at first. The gatherings read like a modern Pentecostal meeting.

If the heart is not changed, people will revert to their former state, if they are not constantly being revved up. So it was not long before the people began to slacken off.

The messenger came to warn them of what God was seeing. He begins with God's anguish, "**I have loved you**". But it seems that no one remembered. All they could see was that God was not blessing them in spite of His promises. Many people are like this. "Where was God when...?", as if they have a right to tell God what He should do. The messenger lists the questions God knows they are asking.

- How have You loved us? (Malachi 1:2) (So many people think God should prove His love by doing miracles on demand. The Pharisees were like this with Jesus.[eg, Matthew 16:1] Every connection with God is by faith; I believe it so I receive it.)
- How have we shown contempt for Your Name? (Malachi 1:6) (We honour anyone, but especially God, with our best. It does not honour the person if you just dump any old thing that you want to get rid of, because it has no other use. One of the really



good reasons for wealth is that you can give the very best. Giving people your rubbish says to that person that you consider them rubbish, and this demonstrates your contempt for them.)

- How have we defiled You? (Malachi 1:7) (Not only were the people showing contempt, but the Law of Moses ordered that no damaged animals were to be brought into the sanctuary. [Leviticus 22:22-25] When people straight out defy your instructions and try to give gifts that are an insult, any recipient feels sullied, and God is saying that He does too.)
- Why does He not receive our offerings? (Malachi 2:14) (God gives a rather scary answer to this question. There are two parts to it. Judah has broken faith by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. This is primarily spiritual adultery. As we read the history in the Old Testament we see that the Israelites did this frequently. Idolatry was rampant and Rachel even lost her life because of it. [Genesis 31:32&34] Moses had read the Law of God faithfully – you shall have no other gods before Me, and you shall not make for yourself an idol...[I will] punish those who hate Me. [Exodus 20:3&5]. The long-practised tradition of spiritual adultery had manifested into breaking covenant with their wives, and with domestic violence. Vows are sacred and spiritually binding. [Ecclesiastes 5:4-6] Entering into a covenant is a vow. God is so disgusted that He cannot accept offerings with pleasure. Breaking a vow is called breaking faith.)

- How have we wearied Him? (Malachi 2:17) (Words are powerful. We are created as speaking spirits. [Genesis 1:26] God created the whole world by His words and because He has made us in His image, our words are equally powerful. Positive words will bring forth positive things and negative and faithless words will bring forth negative and faithless things. How tiresome it must be for God to always be putting out the "fires" we start when we speak without faith. The Bible promises that He is sustaining all things by his powerful word. [Hebrews 1:3] To keep our world in even reasonable condition, as Jesus says, " My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working." [John 5:17] Under the circumstances, 'wearied' seems a gross understatement.)
- Where is the God of justice? (Malachi 2:17) (Our idea of justice is always slanted by our viewpoint, however skewed. In every 'tolerant' society right behaviour is what the lowest common denominator wants and fights for. We call them the noisy minority. There is no reference to a high standard because God's standard is too difficult to keep. Synonyms for the word 'tolerance' include permissiveness, lenience, and indulgence and when God sets a standard He expects us to aim for it, not to undermine and defy it. To call 'good' what God says is evil is defiance. If our children behave like that we punish them, quite rightly. This **IS** justice, if we care that they learn to do what is right. God's righteousness is planted in our psyche.)

- How are we to return to God? (Malachi 3:7) (The wages of sin is death. [Romans 6:23] This is not often physical death but spiritual death, which is probably worse. Our iniquities have separated us from God. [Isaiah 59:2] Paul cries out, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" [Romans 7:24] For us who have accepted the substitutionary death of Jesus, we are rescued and given a righteousness we do not deserve. But this incident is prior to Jesus coming in the flesh. God offers a suggestion. Obey Me in the matter of tithing. This is an enigma because we cannot buy our way into God's blessings. That is why it is so important that we give **IN FAITH**. Simple obedience is what God is always looking for and if it doesn't make sense to us, all the better because we **MUST** use faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. [Hebrews 11:6] )
- How do we rob You? (Malachi 3:8) (If money is the currency on earth, God considers it is also a currency in the Kingdom. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." [Matthew 6:21] If we do not want to invest our money with God, neither is our heart there. The way we spend our money shows our priorities. If God promises to provide all we need, then if we feel we do not have it, and we are in His family, we need to go to God's word and find out why. These verses explain that we have not put God first with our money and we have placed our first love somewhere else. If God's promise is that we put our giving to God as a priority, God, on His side, will pour out blessings that we will not have room for. Tithing

was a command for the Israelites. It was God's financial plan for the best operation of His Kingdom, just as we pay taxes in this modern day. If we do not pay our taxes we are liable to legal action. Tithing to God is no longer a legal requirement under grace, but the principle remains. We, the writers, have always tithed, and God has been absolutely faithful to His word in this matter.)

- What have we said against You? (Malachi 3:13) (Sometimes the thought comes to us that there is no point in obeying God when others seem to have better lives. It is prudent to remember where this thought comes from. This thought came to Asaph, one of the psalmists. [Psalm 73] He writes that his feet had almost slipped when he envied the arrogant and the prosperity of the wicked. He saw them as carefree and increasing in wealth, strutting around proudly, sneering and scoffing at 'lesser mortals', and impressing everyone. Then he realises these are dangerous thoughts. "I was senseless and ignorant." Wake up! "Earth has nothing I desire besides You...God is my portion for ever". "Those who are far from you will perish." The devil can attack our minds with ignoble thoughts but we can reject them if we choose. God's people had wallowed in them until all their resentment turned against God.)

God sent this messenger to these Israelites to warn them. He really does want to open the windows of Heaven, He really does want a holy people, He really wants a happy and prosperous

people and He is determined that it should be 'on earth as it is in heaven'.)

## **16. JESUS COMMENDS A WOMAN WHO GIVES**

(Luke 21:2 & Matthew 26:10-13)

How should we define wealthy? Is it more than enough? Is it so much that we do not have to worry about how much we spend? There are interesting synonyms for this word – having an abundance, moneyed, prosperous, well-to-do, comfortable, loaded, and on Easy Street are some of them. These synonyms each convey certain pictures in the imagination, most are centred around the owner of the wealth as if they own it and maybe have acquired it by their own brilliance.

Biblical wealth is not defined like this. First, it is God who gives the ability to produce wealth. (Deuteronomy 8:18) This means there is no such thing as a self-made man, whether one wants to think so or not. Wealth is often the same word as splendour and glory and this only comes from God who has honoured us with His beauty. This splendour and glory is what Adam and Eve wore before they sinned, which is why they were naked and not ashamed. They needed animal skins because they and anyone else could see things that need to be treated with modesty. (1 Corinthians 12:23) Biblical wealth is not about money, even though prosperity can be. The Bible talks about a robe of righteousness (for the display of His splendour), (Isaiah 61:3&10) garments of praise, (Isaiah 61:3) garments of salvation, (Isaiah 61:10)

and being clothed with power from on high. (Luke 24:49) All this depends on our relationship with the Source of all wealth – God Himself.

This woman that Jesus commended did not have worldly wealth but she had something that money can never buy. She had God's heart, a generous and faith-filled spirit. Even though this money was going towards the expenses of a temple that would be destroyed in not too many years, it would seem that her desire was to demonstrate her love for her God and this money will never be wasted. Perhaps she believed Malachi's writing. She had nothing, but she believed that God would open the windows of Heaven and pour down those blessings He promised. She might have heard Jesus preach that with God everything is possible for those who believe. (Mark 9:22) The story does not give details but it does show how important is giving by faith, not counting the cost. Jesus perceived that she had put in more than all the others because He sees faith in operation, and certainly throwing in a handful of coins does not need much faith, if indeed any at all. Giving to God in faith has its own reward, (Hebrews 11:6) because faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1)

The Bible has good advice for our offerings. "Whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7) Jesus is effectively saying that the attitude does matter more than the amount.

## **17. WHY DID CHRIST BECOME POOR?** (2 Corinthians 8:9)

The Bible says that Jesus was rich. The wise men had given Him their treasures when He was a young child, and when He needed to pay tax He sent Peter to the lake to get the money from a fish. (Matthew 17:27) Although His parents were poor, (Luke 2:24 / Leviticus 12:8) they were newly married and Joseph had perhaps not built up his business at that time. There is no reason to assume they stayed poor, especially as Jesus' robe was of such excellent quality that the soldiers cast lots for it rather than tear it. According to our last chapter explaining God's standard of wealth, Jesus must have been the richest man alive at the time. This verse has unfortunately been a justification for not paying Christian workers a fair wage. It has been said that if you are working for God you should have to accept underpayment. Now if you want to work for next to nothing that is your prerogative, but it has nothing to do with God's heart, His standard or His word.

Jesus became poor for our sakes, so that through His poverty we might become rich. This statement is in the context of great generosity. The Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord and then to the Apostles, at the bidding of God's Spirit. These were two important commitments. We have written a book on the power of dedication. Everything we have is available to the one to whom we have dedicated ourselves. This is behind marriage vows and should be behind our commitment to Jesus as our Lord. This commitment does not deny that we can still steward our possessions because we live under the grace of God. This puts a love emphasis on our giving. How much do we love? Jesus gave us everything including His life

and He still pours out His glory to those who will receive it. He also pours His love into our hearts by His Holy Spirit. (Romans 5:5) If we are hungry for this outpouring He will give it to the measure we ask, (Luke 6:38) but He does ask that we use it.

The Macedonians gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability, pleading for the privilege of sharing for the sake of the saints in need.

Many years ago at the church we were attending at the time they asked for an offering over and above our regular giving. We asked the minister how we should work out the amount to give but he could not tell us. We did not know so we prayed and God mentioned to our hearts the exact amount we had in our bank account, no more and no less. Because of the message of Malachi we decided to divide this amount into 12 and give this every month faithfully. We believe we must keep our vows, and we must have had no major expenses that year, so we just continued on until we had finished out the year. God proved He is faithful. After giving all the money we found that we not only had the original amount in our account but an extra 40%. God is the generous One!!

The riches that Jesus is offering is a relationship with God something like this. Money is the currency but spiritual blessing is the reward.



## 18. WHAT OUR RICHES ARE FOR

(1Timothy 6:10&17)

The worst thing that we can do if God has entrusted wealth to us is to make it an idol.

When Timothy was put in charge of a church he must have been intimidated by some of the people. Timothy was a young man and those who were older and more experienced in the ways of the world could have wanted to "advise" him. Paul had commissioned him and he would be answerable to Paul, who was a man of great faith and anointing. Paul, himself, had lots of trouble with those who despised his apostleship and his calling (eg, 1 Corinthians 9) so he was experienced in this kind of persecution. One does not give sympathy in the face of persecution but strengthen the friend in the Lord's ways. This is the essence of Paul's letters to Timothy.

We have already written what our riches are for, but this problem that Timothy faced is also prevalent today. Many people reason that it is their donations that are paying for the minister. This is often fostered by the minister flogging causes and asking all the time for more money. We have heard it said in churches that it is the duty of the members to pay for this and that. Because there are many in churches who do not have a personal relationship with God through Jesus, who are there because they have always gone, and "it is imperative that people who say they are Christians should come to the house of God", these people are tossed by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming." (Ephesians 4:14)

Some big givers at the church need a lot of encouragement and attention so they will keep giving. Big givers are big givers because

God has blessed them with lots of money. This, however, does not give them control. The Pharisees were offended when Jesus corrected them about their use of their money. (eg, Luke 16:14) In the world, it is true unfortunately that money is power, but in the church this ought not to be so. When Paul wrote to Timothy that if we have food and clothing we will be content with that, he is not saying that this is where we should be all our lives, ie, poor. He is addressing a problem that Timothy had run into. People had got caught up in needing money, and doing all they could to gain more, even though they had no revelation or faith as to how to use this money. We meet people in the street who ask us to pray that they will win Lotto, because they need or want more money. (We don't pray for this!) Idolatry is idolatry in whatever form it takes and will lead us **away** from God, who is the Source of all wealth. Losing our relationship with God is as bad (or even worse) as it was for the Israelites. There is a warning in the Bible for those who have wandered or fall away from their faith. These people are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace. (Hebrews 6:6)

Timothy is encouraged to command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth...but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. (1Timothy 6:17) Their riches are best used by doing good deeds, by being generous and willing to share. This way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. Fellowship with God (and not an idol named money) is LIFE in all its fullness. If we

are blessed to be stewards of more money than we need, this is an opportunity to be a blessing. The power is not worldly, but in the authority of a holy life. This witness has the power that is satisfying.

### **19. BELOVED, I PRAY THAT YOU MAY PROSPER IN EVERY WAY...EVEN AS YOUR SOUL PROSPERS** (3 John 2) (Amplified Bible)

The Apostle, John, was always speaking about God's love. He considered and called himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. He sought to be filled with God's love and he preached constantly "love one another". God IS love and the closer we move towards God, the more we are aware of His love. If we want to be His ambassadors, so that God can make His appeal through us, we need to be filled with His love every day. Things happen that cause us to lose sight and sense of His love, so we need to come to Him to be filled afresh. God really wants us to do this. His glory and His presence are the very greatest wealth we can aspire to, obtained by really laying down one's life and taking up His Cross.

We have used the Amplified Bible to head this chapter. The NIV uses the words "getting along well", but we do not think of "getting along well" as prosperity. This expression is very tame, a bit like when people say "not bad" when asked how they are. We have written about prosperity right through this book. A Hebrew word is "shalom" (שלום), meaning not just hello or even peace, but restoration, reconciliation, wholeness, wellness, and every blessing that you are willing to receive from our generous God. Why be super

cool when God is overly generous? John's greeting to Gaius is to his dear friend. He is full of love for this man. This man brought him back from Patmos and ministered to his needs. When people have blessed you like this your heart is overflowing with love and thankfulness. Who would say "hope you are getting on well"?

John lived to a great age and went through some terrible things, especially severe persecution. Yet, although he writes the 3 John 2 words to Gaius, "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work". (2 Timothy 3:16) This means these words are for us too. God intends that we may prosper in every way, first in our soul or in our spirit, but every way means every way that God has spoken in His word. The New Covenant speaks of a righteousness that comes to us by faith, not because we deserve it but because the Law was impossible to keep. Jesus said He came to fulfil the Law. The Law is not abolished, because He says that until heaven and earth disappear, not one word of it will disappear either. The Law is to convict us of sin, but there are also wonderful promises within the law. Jesus fulfilled the Law on our behalf so all the blessings are ours through Him. We are supposed to prosper, even financially, and John prays that Gaius will and all believers who will receive after him.

The safest way to prosper financially is to make sure the soul, the mind, will and emotions are prospering, and then it is perfectly safe for mighty blessings to follow.

## 20. DECEPTION OF WEALTH

(Revelation 3:17)

We are not wanting to finish on a note of warning, however the Bible does, because we have an enemy who does not like to lose. He will try his tricks to the very end when he will end up in the lake of fire.

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith." (1 Peter 5:8) John's final book is a book to encourage and bless. (Revelation 1:3) He (speaking for God) does not want us to be ignorant. The devil tricked Eve on a word and the devil has found by experience that this trick works very well. He tried it on Jesus but Jesus knew God's word and especially God's heart, and refused to be tricked.

It is interesting that in the Middle Ages money became a major stumbling block to the church. There was selling of Indulgences, the acquiring of great wealth because the monks and nuns had to take a vow of poverty, corruption and schemes, and these were a disaster as witness to the love of God. With a few exceptions (and these honourable people were peremptorily annihilated) the leadership in the church was a liability for the Kingdom. The Reformers picked on various doctrines and dogmas that needed changing but outward changes do not change the hearts of those who are deceived by the devil. The main difficulty is like it was for the Israelites who had accustomed themselves to certain traditions. These have become entrenched in minds and spirits of that society. They have become strongholds which only repentance and the power of Jesus can break.

The Laodicean church was in a very bad state, spiritually. There is no commendation at all from the angel, even as to their deeds. If they were neither hot nor cold, all the works must have been done either ritually or mechanically, without faith. Thus they were not pleasing to God at all, even though they might have been deceived into thinking they were doing them for God. The angel says they are wretched, pitiful, poor and blind. They thought they were rich in all aspects and doing very well, thank you very much.

What is God's answer to such a sad state of affairs?

They need to know the truth from God's point of view. Their eternity hinged on this.

- Buy from Me gold refined in the fire – so that you can become rich. The fire of the Holy Spirit burns off the dross. There is great pain in being stripped of all the traditions and customs that make our comfort zone, but if they are making us wretched and pitiful in God's sight, why hang onto them?
- Buy from me white clothes to wear – so that you can cover your shameful nakedness. To go about with the name Christian, looking like anyone who is in the world is a disgrace to the precious Name. We really need to be clothed with God's glory and God's power so that our witness honours and blesses God.
- Buy from Me salve for your eyes – so that you can see. Jesus called those Pharisees blind because they were ignorant of their own condition and of who Jesus really was. God's salve on one's eyes enables us to see where our salvation lies –

only in Jesus. He is the way, He is the Truth and He is the Life. (John 14:6)

Our wealth is in Him, whether it is money and possessions or not. We think we have demonstrated that it is good to be blessed with plenty, to be comfortable or even rich in possessions. But having possessions without God is a state to be pitied above all things.

We could reiterate Habakkuk's confession. (Habakkuk 3:17-19) Though the fig-tree does not blossom and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food... **YET** I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to go on the heights.

But we are speaking spirits and we can create with our words just as God did in the beginning. Do you want just enough like poor Agur or do you want to be blessed so that you can be generous on every occasion? Jesus tells us, "I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father." (John 14:13)

We take You at Your word, Jesus.

**YES! USE US! JESUS!**