



PROSPERITY VS SPIRITUALITY



Is it the will of God for every Christian to enjoy material prosperity? There are those in the Christian ranks who advocate that material prosperity can be equated with spirituality. Their scriptural basis for this belief is “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 2).

The Apostle John addressed the statement to one named Gaius. It was John’s wish for his beloved friend. He in no way says that it is God’s will for him to be materially prosperous, nor does he indicate that believers after him are promised material prosperity. I will hasten to say that Christians very well may be prosperous within the will of God. He has promised to supply all of our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (see Philippians 4:19).



John is not saying that he values secular prosperity and physical health above everything else. The Scripture must be rightly divided, and John could not have made a wish such as that and have been scripturally correct; therefore, we know that was not his intent. He was wishing Gaius a prosperous life, which does not necessarily include material prosperity. He was desiring the ideal prosperity for him which is spiritual prosperity.

While material prosperity is desirable, it is not always possible for the Christian. Some of the saints at Jerusalem were poor and the Apostle urged other believers to share with them. The Macedonians were prosperous Christians and had an abundance of joy, yet they were in deep poverty (see 2 Corinthians 8:2). James classified some who were chosen of God as “poor of this world rich in faith” (James 2:5). In fact, one of the greatest mysteries to the righteous has always been, “Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer?” Jeremiah wanted to talk to God about it (see Jeremiah 12:1). David was also concerned about the prosperity of the wicked. He said, “These are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches” (Psalm 73:12). 

So, while temporal wealth is a wonderful power in the hands of wise men, it can hardly be classified as a mark of spiritual success. There is no Bible promise that a Christian will be rich; rather to the contrary he may be poor.

Nevertheless, there is a very subtle spirit at work in the church which attaches a monetary sign to all success. Church growth is judged in financial terms. The success of special meetings is often gauged by the financial response.

The Apostle Paul warns that there are those who are “supposing that gain is godliness,” or as one version states, “supposing that godliness is a way of gain” (1 Timothy 6:5). Some are teaching the theory that “you name it and you have it,” but they propound this philosophy without regard to scriptural limitations and requirements in asking and receiving.

Godliness is gain of itself because it has the promise of life that now is and of that which is to come. Godliness joined with contentment is great gain because it possesses treasures of a higher and more enduring character. 

Brethren, let us take care that a desire for gain not distort the true gospel message.

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