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his life for them ([Jn. 13:1-3](#)). The reality of suffering in the world calls every Christian to the task of seeking to alleviate suffering and to remove the causes of suffering, both individually and socially. If our personal suffering is because of something that we have or have not done, or is it self-inflicted, we have to repent. If our societal suffering is a result of our negative action or neglect of God's principles of stewardship and justice, we must repent. As Christians we are called to work for justice, both individual and societal, for the preservation of the planet ecologically, for a better life for all of God's creatures—in short, for kingdom values ([Heb. 13:16](#)). We need to repent of our neglect of such matters as social justice, basic human needs, ecology, and the alleviation of social ills. We need to harness the resources of modern medicine, agricultural science, technology, economic development, business management, political science, and other scientific and social scientific disciplines in the service of our fight against human suffering till God himself removes all suffering. The church will be able to serve faithfully unto death only if she knows she is going to pass from this world to the Father and that her 'present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed ...' ([Rom. 8:18](#)).

G. Conclusion

Human suffering belongs to the present reality of life between the fall and the consummation of all things at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although the kingdom of evil has been fundamentally undermined by the first coming of Christ, we live 'between the ages', in a period in which both sin and salvation with their attendant consequences are present. Jesus announced good news to the suffering: the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, the hungry, the weeping, and the persecuted ([Lk. 4:18](#); [6:20-22](#); [Matt 5:3-11](#)); and by his own suffering inaugurated the kingdom of God, a new world order. And in his short ministry on earth, he demonstrated the power of the kingdom by alleviating the suffering of many people. For nearly two thousand years his followers have sought to follow in his footsteps, preaching the good news to the poor and suffering and binding up the wounds of suffering humanity ([Lk. 10:30-35](#); [Matt. 25:31-45](#)). The church's ministry of mercy is an essential ingredient in her calling. To share the good news in word and deed is the reason that she has been left in the world. Suffering is a great mystery; however, part of the mystery has been revealed in the **p. 13** suffering of Jesus on the cross as a demonstration of God's great love for humankind. Christians have been called to suffer with Christ for the sake of the world; they are also called to demonstrate the love of God by reaching out to those who suffer. For in their suffering and in their service they validate the genuineness of their faith. **p. 14**

A Bed of Roses or a Bed of Thorns

Sang-Bok David Kim

For the last few decades the Christian community has been embroiled in controversies over the issue of the so-called prosperity theology, which is considered a new teaching by many. The church has been sharply divided between the ardent followers of prosperity theology and those who severely frown upon it and call it 'heretical'. We are gathered here to have another round of a formal discussion on it. As we begin this consultation, my

prayer is that we shall carefully search the Scriptures and come to a better understanding on the subject so that the church of Jesus Christ may follow the truth and receive benefits intended for our edification.

WHAT IS PROSPERITY THEOLOGY?

Prosperity theology is a teaching primarily embraced by Charismatic circles, which have been growing in the United States under the influence of Kenneth E. Hagin since the 1950s. Its tenet is that 'God desires that all faithful Christians should automatically prosper as of divine right.'¹ It is often called the gospel of wealth and health and happiness. It teaches that the atonement of Christ guarantees for all Christians divine healing for good health, the riches of this world if we follow certain principles, and a life of happiness without unnecessary sufferings.

On the other hand, prosperity theology is regarded by others as unbiblical and even 'heretical because its claim to be Christian cannot be substantiated, and the movement is to be rebuked wherever it is encountered'.² The movement became prominent in the latter half of the twentieth century. As the titles of the articles written on it suggest, it is seen as something new to the church: 'Prosperity: a New and Foreign element in African Christianity',³ p. 15 'Prosperity Gospel: A New Folk Theology',⁴ 'The Prosperity Message in the Eschatology of Some New Charismatic Churches',⁵ New Thought or a Modern Religious Approach: The Philosophy of Health, Happiness, and Prosperity'.⁶

Ray McCauley, a prosperity preacher from South Africa, says, 'It is God's will to prosper every one of his children.' He criticizes his opponents, 'A lot of people seem to think that poverty is a blessing and that somehow it's more spiritual and more humble to be comfortable with next to nothing.'⁷ McCauley had been trained at Hagin Bible Training Center. When he returned to South Africa upon graduation from the school, he started holding services in his parents' home with fifteen people in June, 1980, and six years later his 'Rhema' church had 9000 members and a six million dollar building which seats 5000 people. It is already too small, and has pioneered 120 other churches. His Bible school turns out 300 graduates each year. Each month 500 decisions for Christ are being recorded. When he came back to South Africa, he was told by some traditional Pentecostal ministers that 'it was impossible to pioneer a church without taking a part-time secular job and that a congregation of a few hundred was all that could be expected in our country'. McCauley further stated, 'I didn't believe them. I believe that God was on my side and could do better.'⁸ And Rhema Ministries South Africa started by him became something to behold. Prosperity theology worked for him. McCauley teamed up with

¹ Robert Jackson, 'Prosperity Theology and Faith Movement', *Themelios*, Vol.15, No.1, October 1989, p. 16.

² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³ Paul Gifford, *Religion*, No. 20, 1990, pp. 373-388.

⁴ Joe E. Barnhart, *Religious Television*, ed by R. Abelman and S. Hoover, pp. 159-164.

⁵ Allan Anderson, *Missionalia*, Vol. 15, Aug. 1987, pp. 72-83.

⁶ M. A. Larson, *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring, 1986, p. 80.

⁷ Ray McCauley, 'Believe for a Blessing,' *Redemption*, May, 1986, p. 30.

⁸ *ibid.*

Reinhard Bonnke, who had recently visited Korea twice. They are experiencing tremendous success at spreading the prosperity teaching in the African continent.

David Yonggi Cho, who is looked upon as a symbol of prosperity theology, summarizes his beliefs in one of his books.⁹ His basic teachings are well represented in his 'King's Kid' idea, which is being worn on the shirts on the streets of Seoul. Cho appears to be convincing by the simple fact that he is the pastor of the most prosperous church in the world. He and his church appear to be enjoying what he preaches, 'wealth, health and happiness'.

Prosperity theology, which was started in the United States, is now everywhere in the world. The new movement is mainly associated with the Hagins, the Copelands, Frederick Price, and Charlie Capps in the United States, Ray and Lynda McCauley and Reinhard Bonnke in Africa, Bryn Jones in Britain, Stanley Sjoberg and Hans Braterud in Scandinavia, the Britons in Kenya and India, Orvil Swindol in Argentina, David Yonggi Cho in Korea and many others. [p. 16](#)

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CONNECTION

The leaders of prosperity teaching openly acknowledge Kenneth E. Hagin of the United States as the father of the movement, the human source of their inspiration and their spiritual mentor. Hagin himself claimed that during the 1950s the new teaching was given to him by Jesus through a series of divine visitations.

However, a recent piece of research by Daniel McConnell demonstrated that Hagin had derived most of his teachings from the writings of Essek W. Kenyon. Many passages from the works of Hagin and Kenyon, who died in 1948, have been compared side by side. Hagin was accused of having allegedly plagiarized word for word from Kenyon's works and all of Hagin's work postdates Kenyon's. McConnell says, '... he (Hagin) plagiarized Kenyon both repeatedly and extensively ... the very doctrines that have made Kenneth Hagin are all plagiarized from E. W. Kenyon.'¹⁰ Kenyon was, however, not a Pentecostal, even though he may have influenced many of the post-war Pentecostals. The dominating influence in his theology was the metaphysical cults of Christian Science, which abounded at the turn of the century. He went to a college in Boston, Massachusetts, during the last decade of the nineteenth century, where Mary Baker Eddy, the mother of Christian Science, established her church. He explicitly refuted their doctrines but at the same time spoke very positively of her and said that there was a lot that could be learned from her and asserted the foundational doctrines of these cults.¹¹ He was living at a time when, while Christian Science was rapidly growing, the mainline churches were failing, because, he thought, they produced no signs and wonders. So Kenyon made an attempt to redress an anti-supernatural tendency which was driving bored Christians into joining such people as Mrs. Eddy. He sought to provide Christians with all the same benefits of Christian Science, while remaining within the Christian fold. The result was prosperity theology, which is, with very few embellishments, the theology of the present-day faith movement.¹²

⁹ Yonggi Cho, *Five-Fold Gospel and Three-Fold Blessings*, Seoul Books, 1983, pp. 237–252.

¹⁰ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: The Cultic Nature of the Modern Faith*, A mss presented to Hendrickson for publication in 1988.

¹¹ McConnell, p. 56.

¹² Jackson, p. 16.

AMERICAN PRAGMATISM CONNECTION

It is not surprising that the new teaching began in the United States, where Charles S. Pierce, William James and John Dewey formulated the distinctly American philosophy of pragmatism or utilitarianism and where success business is a big business.¹³ James believed that truth must be practical and efficient and that philosophers should get down to the task of solving the problems of life. Too long have they been playing around with metaphysical speculations, An idea is to be judged by its 'cash value', wrote James, and philosophical concepts should be **P. 17** evaluated in terms of their practice consequences. It has often been noted that pragmatism could have been born on American soil, since it reflects the spirit of the nineteenth century, the frontier spirit of individualism, self-reliance, and practicality. James' down-to-earth attitude sometimes shocked staid academicians. 'This universe will never be completely good as long as one being is unhappy,' he said, and added, 'or as long as one poor cockroach suffers the pangs of requited love.'¹⁴ His concerns were happiness and love, and the abolition of poverty and suffering. Pragmatism asserts that truth must be productive, helpful, and utilitarian. Truth must always produce beneficial results. If it does not, it is no truth. One of the most important discoveries by James is the power of belief in achieving pragmatic results.

The tenets of James' philosophy were adopted, Christianized and popularized by Norman Vincent Peale who often quoted James and applied his philosophy in his Christian circles, American businesses as well as sports. Peale, the author of *The Power of Positive Thinking*, has been popular for decades among the salesmen and business executives for his inspirational talks about success. The possibility thinking of Robert Schuller, who is a disciple of Peale, further extended its influence. Carnegie, Hill and Stone adopted prosperity philosophy and widely disseminated it.¹⁵

FAITH AND PMA

They taught that 'PMA' (Positive Mental Attitude) attracts wealth, success, happiness and health, whereas 'NMA' (Negative Mental Attitude) removes them. As someone suggested, prosperity teaching 'fits the spirit of the age' rather than the spirit of the bible.¹⁶ Peale quoting William James said, 'Your belief will help create the fact.'¹⁷ The power of faith was scientifically observed and demonstrated by James, and in turn popularized by Peale and Schuller. Hagin and his followers are not directly connected to Peale and Schuller. However, the two strands of the prosperity movement complement one other in order to advance it. On the one hand Kenyon, Hagin, Copeland, Cho and McCauley form the faith movement: on the other hand Pierce, James, Carnegie, Hill, Stone, and Peale and Schuller travel the similar path of prosperity teaching. The first group represents more of conservative charismatic churches, while the second represents more or less secular and liberal circles.

POSITIVE CONFESSION

¹³ Og Mandino, *University of Success*, Bantam Books, 1982.

¹⁴ James L. Christian, *The Ways of Philosophy*, Rhiehart Press, P. 36.

¹⁵ Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, Prentice Hall, p. 112.

¹⁶ Voskuil, 1983, p. 10.

¹⁷ Peale, p. 14.

Prosperity theology has a few important tenets. Adherents are believers in the power of faith, whether it is called faith in a religious term or PMA in a psychological term. They have faith in faith. The anatomy of both is similar. The results could be the same. If you believe in something strongly enough, you will get it. As you believe for a healing or a business deal, what you believe can **P. 18** be secured. Peale says: 'I discovered that if you expect the best you will get the best'¹⁸ or 'Big thoughts get big results'.¹⁹ So he advises, 'Repeat the affirmation daily,' 'Speak to your muscles every day and to your nerves.'²⁰ Is this a biblical faith or self-hypnosis or mind-conditioning? Success is claimed on the basis of texts such as [Mark 11:24](#) and [Philippians 4:19](#).²¹ What PMA was to Carnegie and Peale, faith was to Hagin and Cho. When one reads the literature produced by the faith movement, one is constantly reminded of the secular motivational paperbacks readily available for the businessmen on the popular book racks in the stores at any major airport of the Western hemisphere. The prosperity movement is essentially a faith movement. Faith works whether one uses a religious term or a psychological term. It works in religion; it works in business and sports. They teach that the key to success lies within you. As Oral Roberts says, 'Your faith is the key to your own healing.' Your faith activates prosperity.

'NAME IT AND CLAIM IT'

This is sometimes called 'the slot machine religion' or 'cafeteria Christianity'. You can have anything you want. You just name it and claim it; then it's yours. 'Believe it and receive it.' If you want a piece of real estate, just name it, walk around it and claim it by faith; it will be yours to build your church on. If something is claimed, you must act on it as if you have already received it. If your faith is not real, or you have any doubt, consequently you will not receive it.²² If there is any failure, it is your fault. It's your problem.

Jenny went to a healing service. She was told to claim healing of her eye-sight. She was wearing her thick eye-glasses. The healer laid his hand on her. As she believed for healing, she felt her eye-sight restored. She got up and claimed healing and believed that she was healed. Momentarily she could see clearly. So she acted on faith; she shouted 'Hallelujah' and broke her glasses while the crowd was watching her. All shouted 'Hallelujah' together and rejoiced with her. The evangelist told her that she must believe and not doubt that she was healed, and she did. During the following year she has been called upon fifty times, almost once a week, to give the testimony of her healing. She believed and acted upon her faith. At the end of the year she came to me and confessed that she in fact couldn't see well, but still she believed she was healed but was now troubled. I told her that it's alright to use her eye-glasses and she began to use them again. She felt relieved. She was one of my students. If one does not receive it by faith, one is blamed for one's little faith or doubt.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 7.

²¹ [Mark 11:24](#) 'Therefore, I say unto you, Whatever things you desire, when you pray believe that you receive them, and you shall have them.' [Phil. 4:19](#), 'God shall supply all your needs according to the riches in glory by Christ Jesus.'

²² G. Copeland, *God's Will Is Prosperity*, Harrison House, 1978, p. 80.

Does that mean that faith does not [p. 19](#) work healing? Yes, it does, but not always. Faith in Christ saves all sinners. But faith healing does not always procure healing, Only 5%–10% of those who sought healing are helped from feeling better to complete healings.²³

SEEK FAITH: MATERIAL SUCCESS IS A RIGHT

F.K.C. Price says: 'We need to realize that prosperity is the will of God. It is God's perfect will that everyone prosper in every area of life. Primarily, we are dealing with material and financial prosperity, because it has to do with tithes and offerings.'²⁴ God wants all Christians to be rich, and the reason for this is not only so that it can be given away. Price believes that God also wants Christians to enjoy being wealthy: 'Yet by walking in God's financial plan, you can have the \$15,000 automobile, wear the \$300 suit, and buy the \$100 designer shoes. God does not care. He wants His kids to look good' ([2 Cor. 9:6–11](#)), Michael Bassett also says, 'If you want a nice watch, why don't you give one away and be expectant for your nice one to come in? If you want a nice car, why don't you sow for one, then you can be expectant for a new car? ... you cannot give away much when your own needs are not met. You cannot do it when you are struggling yourself to pay your electric bill.' Poverty is seen as a 'denial of all that Christ has won through his death', and 'the ignorance of this fact which prevents financial endowment is tragic'.²⁵ Gloria Copeland is more explicit: 'Give one house and receive one hundred homes or one house with one hundred times as much. Give one airplane and receive one hundred times the value of the airplane. Give one car and the return will furnish you a lifetime of cars. In short [Mark 10:30](#) is a very good deal.'²⁶

The thrust of Peale's books also concerns success and how to achieve it. He believes that material success is a result of a positive attitude to life. Faith and prosperity are inseparable. He explicitly says, 'There was a time when I acquiesced to the silly idea that there is no relationship between faith and prosperity ...'²⁷ Hill and Stone report the effects of having a group of salesmen chant in unison 'I feel wealthy, I feel happy, I feel terrific', and advise writing down 'with emotion', twice daily, a statement of desire for money. Peale speaks of 'the amazing untapped power you have within you', One common thread that appears always is that the power for success is within you. If one does not restrict the power of thought with negative emotion and thought, anything can be achieved. All the prosperity teachers believe that *prosperity is always* the will of God and can be secured if you just believe it for yourself. [p. 20](#)

THE LAWS OF BLESSINGS

David Yonggi Cho's teachings are identical in substance to those of Hagin and Schuller, but more balanced than most. His basic teachings are summarized in one of his books. The five-fold Gospel is the Gospel of Regeneration, the Gospel of the Filling of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel of Divine Healing, the Gospel of Success, the Gospel of the Second Coming; and

²³ Sang-Bok Kim, 'The Place of Miracles Today', *ACTS Theological Journal*, Vol. 5, 1994, p. 83.

²⁴ F. K. C. Price, *High-Finance-God's Financial Plan*, Harrison House, 1984, p. 12.

²⁵ Jackson, p. 18.

²⁶ G. Copeland, p. 54.

²⁷ Peale, p. 229.

the three-fold blessings are the Spiritual Blessing, the Daily Blessing, the Blessing of Health ([3 Jn. 2](#)). He writes, 'When you practice the Gospel of blessings, you become successful in all things. The blessings here do not mean material blessings alone, but also include life's overall success and happiness. Being prosperous in all things means that we live a successful and happy life in the Lord. Already we are the people who are prepared for successes in all things.' Cho teaches that one must follow the laws of blessings if he wishes to be prosperous.

The first is the Law of Tithe Contract ([Mal. 3:10-12](#)). Tithe faithfully all the incomes big or small which come in your daily life. We are never to test God, but he himself told us to test him regarding tithes to see whether God does not pour upon us so many blessings that we are not able to hold them.

The second is the Law of Sowing and Reaping ([Gal. 6:7-8](#)). As you sow, you shall reap is a universal law of nature. If you don't sow, you don't reap. If you sow a little, you reap a little, and if you sow much, you reap much. This natural law applies to the spiritual realm as well. God manifests his work on the basis of your sowing by faith. Therefore, we should sow before God as much time, material, service, and dedication as we can.

The third is the Law of Echo. When we go up to the mountain, if we don't say anything, the other side of the mountain doesn't say anything either. But if you shout in a loud voice, the mountain yonder shouts back to you in a similar voice. Likewise, if we do the works by which we can glorify God as the Holy Spirit leads, what we did will come back to us with many blessings ([Lk. 6:38](#)). If you desire to live in the Lord's blessings, you should share first with God and with your neighbours ([Lk. 18:22](#)). Then what you have shared will come back to you as echoes in thirty-fold, sixty-fold, hundred-fold.

Lastly you should expect the blessings of God. Even though you have sown the faith seeds by way of much material and time, if you don't believe and expect that you will receive the blessings of God, they will not come upon you. The elder son in the story of the prodigal son in [Luke 15](#) was not expecting to receive even a little goat from his own father; he could not experience his father's rich blessings. Likewise, however great and almighty God is, if we do not expect anything from God, his blessings will not come upon us. The Bible says, 'Open your mouth wide, I will fill it' ([Ps. 81:10](#)). The Lord wants to fill our mouth of faith. The reason why faith does not work in our Christian life and we are p. 21 always lacking, is because we do not expect anything of abundance from God, and we have not sown anything in concrete faith. If you follow the laws of blessings, you are assured of prosperity. How do you expect it? according to Cho you are to condition your mind, making a mental picture of what you desire, and then you will get it.

Some of the techniques for prosperity appear to be more psychological than spiritual. It gives an impression that man can, by the use of formula, force the hand of God to grant what he desires. Numerous problems and excesses are observed in the underlying theology: positive confession, Bible usage, almost letteristic hermeneutics, the idea of seed faith, material success and physical health as a divine right, simplistic methods and other techniques of achieving prosperity. There are so many problems with prosperity theology as it is promoted in the current form, such as the belief that material prosperity is the divine right of a Christian. In spite of the manifold problems, people are attracted to the churches that espouse prosperity theology. Some of these churches are apparently prospering, while many churches not espousing prosperity theology are anaemic. Why? Somehow prosperity teachers raise hopes and expectations for the people and seem to meet their needs.

SPIRITUALITY INCOMPATIBLE WITH PROSPERITY?

Then we may ask this question: Is spirituality necessarily incompatible with prosperity? Are spirituality and prosperity possible simultaneously? Is God against health, wealth and the prosperity of his children? Is the will of God always to have his children undergo sufferings in life? On the other hand are the children of God never to experience the sufferings of this life because they are members of God's family? Will they get anything simply on demand because they name it and claim it or agree with one another? Did Peter, James and John, who gave up their fishing boats and nets receive one hundred boats and nets according to the law of sowing and reaping in [Mark 10:30](#)? Was Paul able to remove his thorn in the flesh? Was Timothy delivered from his stomach trouble without a little bit of wine? Why was Paul himself ill ([Gal. 4:13f.](#))? Consider this in light of what Hagin says: 'When the Bible talks about suffering, that doesn't mean 'sickness'. We have no business suffering sickness and disease, because Jesus redeemed us from that.' Why was Trophimus left sick in Miletus ([2 Tim. 4:20](#))? Can all the benefits of the atonement of Christ be secured at the present time by PMA? Although we know forgiveness is instantly granted, is healing always granted instantly? Prosperity preachers must answer many questions. How simplistic prosperity preachers have been one can easily see.

Then on the other hand, is Christian faith relevant only for spiritual and ethical life but not for physical, social, financial, emotional, intellectual or environmental life? Or should material blessings be excluded from [p.22](#) God's domain? If Christian faith affects all areas of life, does that include financial as well, or should we apply Christian principles to all other areas except prosperity? Does the Bible teach that God promises to prosper his children? Does the Bible have nothing to say about the prosperous life of God's children? Is there any systematic teaching in the Bible for Christians to follow that will help them to prosper? Should Christians experience no suffering but instead wealth, health, and happiness, simply because [Isaiah 53](#) says that he took our pains and griefs? Do prosperity teachers sometimes create possible heresy because of the overemphasis of one truth while ignoring the other truth which is equally clear?

The Book of Deuteronomy is full of divine promises of all kinds concerning blessings for God's people on earth, contingent upon faithful obedience to the Lord. To be God's people is the result of his unconditional choice and his sovereign grace; but whether to enjoy prosperity in this life or not is conditional upon their obedience. The Bible clearly teaches that there is always suffering in life which has beneficial significance for the believers. One of the major problems of prosperity teachers is their one-sidedness, losing sight of the other side of the coin, while those who see the Christian life only as a path of suffering, make the same mistake.

ROSES WITH THORNS

The author of Hebrews is explicit: Christian faith holds both blessings and sufferings. Even sufferings are blessings. 'And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight; women received back their dead in resurrection: and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these,

having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect' ([Heb. 11:32-40](#)).

Some prospered, while others suffered, both equally by faith. Those who achieved great feats did so by faith and those who suffered greatly in destitution did so likewise by faith. Both were approved by God for their faith, not just those who could have been called prosperous. Both groups had the expectation of 'a better resurrection' and 'something better' to come. This life is only a [p. 23](#) shadow of something better prepared for us hereafter. Whether in prosperity or poverty we are to trust the Lord. It is erroneous in light of the Scriptures to claim that the atonement of Christ guarantees all Christians health, wealth and prosperity here on earth. A closer walk with the Lord will guarantee the peace of God that passes all understanding in sickness or in health, in prosperity or in poverty. Our happiness is to do whatever the will of God may be for our lives just as it was in the life of Jesus. He was determined to do the will of the Father who sent him, He went through the suffering of the cross, and so there was the triumph of his resurrection waiting for him. His life was neither only suffering or only prosperity but both. If we emphasize only the first half of prosperity in the Hebrews passage and ignore the other half of suffering, we are doing a great injustice to the biblical teaching. But at the same time if we focus on the second half and ignore the first half, we also do violence to the biblical text. The Christian life contains both prosperity and suffering.

MATURITY AND PROSPERITY

What are the characteristics of the mature Christian? Firstly he is a child of God who has been redeemed. He is one who has developed a consistent prayer life. He is wiser than a serpent and yet is also innocent and without guile. He is prepared to go the extra mile and to serve others. In God's service he uses his given talents to the fullest and does all things heartily as to the Lord. He has a peaceful heart, a strong sense of security; he is full of confidence in God, without fear or anxiety, someone of strength and courage. He is filled with faith, hope and love; he is not extreme in his views but has a proper perspective on life. In his relationships with others he is submissive to authority, honours his parents and loves his enemies. He is daily in tune with Almighty God. He is humble, not angry. He demonstrates the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit and his life reveals the fruits of the Spirit. Under normal circumstances, why could such a person not live a successful life here on earth?

BIBLICAL PROSPERITY THEOLOGY?

Christian theology developed over the period of church history. In the fourth century Christology was formulated; in the sixteenth century soteriology was prominent; in the eighteenth and nineteenth century evangelism and missiology were emphasized; in the twentieth century eschatology, bibliology and pneumatology have been expounded. Now is there a need to develop a carefully articulated biblical theology of finance for the practical earthly benefits of Christians? I would say a resounding 'yes'. This aspect of Christian theology has not been sufficiently explored. Christians believe that this world is to be destroyed, so there is no need to take it seriously. At most it should be tolerated. We often quote [1 John 2:15-16](#), 'Love not the world and the things thereof ... the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life.' Spiritual man is not to talk about money. If he [P. 24](#) does, he is supposed to talk in a hushed voice. Is God's view of financial prosperity taught in the Bible? If it is, whose job is it to formulate a sound doctrine of Christian

prosperity? This is definitely the responsibility of the trained theologians and should not be left in the undisciplined hands of prosperity preachers who are not scholars, and consequently create too many problems for the church because of their inaccurate, erroneous interpretation of the Scriptures.

However, have the theologians been so heavenly-minded (concerned only with the spiritual dimension of Christian truth) that they have not been any earthly good? Most of the prosperity preachers are not disciplined theologians. They are practitioners. So there have been excesses in the use of the Bible, often simplistic and one-sided, resulting in extremism. Isn't it about time that the trained theologians became involved in a systematic study of the earthly blessings promised in the Scriptures, in order to discover the biblical principles which can be put into practice by Christians so that they can be successful in this life as well as in the life to come? Is God against prosperity, health and happiness?

PROSPERITY AND SUFFERING

Whether Christians prosper or suffer, they are still to live by faith and to glorify the Lord in all things. Paul says: 'I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me' ([Phil. 4:13](#)), which is a favourite text with all prosperity teachers. According to the context he can do all things. However, we find that he can be 'abased' (suffering), as well as 'abound' (prosperity), 'full' (prosperity) as well as 'hungry' (suffering), both 'abound' (prosperity) and 'suffer need' (suffering). 'My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus' ([Phil. 4:19](#)). 'All your need' includes material things (vv. [17-18](#)) as well as spiritual strength to endure the lack of material things (v. [14](#)).

Paul also says in [Romans 8:18-23](#), 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us ... for the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope ... we know the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of our bodies.' Paul understands that there are the sufferings of this present time and that the incomparable glory is yet to be revealed. The whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. There is no exception to suffering. All suffer together, even we who have the first fruits of the Spirit. All are waiting for the redemption of our bodies. Paul also said, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death' ([Phil. 1:20](#)). Our earnest expectation and hope is to magnify Christ in our body by life or by death, by prosperity or by suffering. The ultimate aim of a [p. 25](#) Christian life is not merely to enjoy our own wealth, health and happiness. Whether we are in wealth or poverty, in health or sickness, in happiness or sufferings, the purpose of Christian life is to exalt Christ in our bodies, waiting for the total deliverance from this life, until we shall be changed to be like Christ when we see him at his coming. Then and then only shall we enjoy perfect prosperity in heaven, a glorified body of perfect health and happiness with the Lord for eternity. Until then we press on for the mark set before us in health or in sickness, in prosperity or in poverty, in happiness or in suffering.

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