

Lesson 1
GIVING PROMISES AND STATEMENTS

Leviticus 27:30: *A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.*

1 Chronicles 29:9: *The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD.*

Proverbs 3:9-10: *Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.*

Proverb 11:24-25: *One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.*

Proverbs 21:5: *The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as hate leads to poverty.*

Malachi 3:10: *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”*

Matthew 6:3-4: *But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Matthew 6:33: *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Luke 6:38: *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

Acts 20:35: *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

Romans 12:20: *“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In so doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”*

1 Corinthians 16:1-2: *Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made*

2 Corinthians 8:12: *For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.*

2 Corinthians. 9:6-8: *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

2 Corinthians 9:10-11: *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

Philippians 4:19: *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

THE HEALTH AND WEALTH GOSPEL

The Health and Wealth Gospel is sometimes known as the Prosperity Gospel. They believe that sickness and poverty are never God's will. It is God's will to make all people healthy and rich. Sickness and poverty are always the result of sin, and Jesus has overcome all sin. By faith, a Christian can overcome sickness and poverty. They look at the sickness and poverty in the world and conclude: "God either has the power to help people but doesn't care, or He cares about people but doesn't have the power to do anything about it." They teach it is always God's will to bring Christians out of poverty and sickness, but the reason He does not is that the Christian does not have a strong enough faith to believe God for a deliverance. They teach that God not only hates poverty but that He wants to make all people rich. They base much of their thinking on the verses mentioned above.

A WRONG VIEW OF GOD

Those who believe in the prosperity gospel have based their doctrine on a false understanding of the person of God. They say God is love, and a God of love would not allow poverty to come to anyone. They are committed to the teaching that God wants to make all men happy because He is love. The Prosperity Gospel says God exists to serve man and to do the selfish desires of man.

If God desires, wants, promises prosperity to all, then all suffering a Christian is undergoing is either the result of some sin a Christian has done or is doing, or it is the result of Satanic influences. What this thinking does is detach God from all misery, suffering, pain and tragedy in the world. Consequently, all the bad things seem to be out of God's control and when it comes to pain, suffering, tragedy and poverty, we are part of a world with God wringing His hands in heaven not knowing how to deal with suffering that is out of His control.

The Bible teaches a God who has everything somehow under His sovereign control. God has the power and God cares, and suffering, sickness and poverty are in the plan of God. Poverty will somehow work for the believers good and somehow bring glory to God. The Bible clearly teaches this even though we do not understand it all.

Exodus 4:10-11. *Moses said to the LORD, 'O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to our servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.'* *The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"* In these verses, God takes the ultimate responsibility for the deaf, dumb and blind (sickness). Yes, a loving God does this for His own glory. It is his sovereign will.

Ecclesiastes 7:4. *When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other.* God takes the responsibility for the good times and bad times man experiences. Yes, a merciful God does this for His own glory. It is His sovereign will.

Isaiah 45:5-7. *I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. . . I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness. I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.* These were words given by God to that wicked Gentile King Cyrus. They were given to him so he would know who God really is. These verses say God creates darkness and disaster, taking full responsibility for them. Yes, a gracious God does this for His own glory. It is His sovereign will.

1 Samuel 2:6-8. *The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.* This was the prayer of a woman named Hannah who knew her God. She realized the awesome power and might of the God of heaven and earth. She understood that God brings death and

life, poverty and wealth and humbles and exalts men. Yes, a caring God does this for His own glory. It is His sovereign will.

Does this concept of God controlling pain, suffering, tragedy, and poverty shock you? Does it seem mean and offensive to you? This is the God of Scripture. There is no other God. God is sovereign, and He always does everything right, even though we might not understand it that way at the time or like it. It is this God we must fall before in worship, calling Him Sovereign God and Loving Lord.

Rest assured, the God of the Bible, the only God, has both the power to remove our suffering and poverty, and the love to comfort us in them. However, He does not always remove our suffering because He has higher plans for us. Many times He uses our suffering for His own glory and to develop our faith. God takes responsibility for suffering. He either directly brings it or He allows it; that is, he uses the natural suffering which comes to all men to build Christian character and Christ-likeness in us. However, God always has control over suffering, poverty and sickness. He can remove it and many times does, but He does not have to remove it and many times does not for His own glory and for our own good (Rom. 8:28).

A WRONG VIEW OF PRAYER

The Prosperity Gospel proponents believe that God has given prayer promises that says He will answer all of the Christian's prayers in a positive way if the Christian just has enough faith. They appeal to certain verses and ignore others.

There I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours (Mark 11:24).

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you (John 15:8).

The prosperity people reason that it is never God's will for God's people to be poor because poverty is the result of sin and Satan's strategies. Christ died for all sin and His death rendered Satan neutral for the Christian who believes. Therefore, if the Christian trusts God and prays, God promises deliverance from poverty. If the Christian does not get delivered from poverty he has exercised wrong faith or inadequate faith or incomplete faith. If the Christian prays long enough and hard enough, God is obligated to answer those prayers. If the prayers are not answered, it is never God's fault but there is some fault in the faith of the Christian.

There are some basic fallacies in the position of the prosperity people about prayer.

First, God puts four conditions in the Bible to getting positive answers to prayer. They are:

1. **The Christian Must Pray According to God's Will. *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him (1 John 5:14-15).*** A sovereign God has a perfect plan that will come to pass, and this plan brings the most glory to Him. God is sovereign at all times, and our prayers, in order to be effective, must be in accordance with His sovereign will for us. If what we ask of the Father is not what He intended us to have from the foundation of the world, He will not give it to us. This is why we must pray "in the Spirit" so our prayers will be energized and empowered by God and according to His will. ***But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20).***
2. **The Christian Must be Abiding in Christ and His Word. *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you (John 15:7).*** Remaining

or abiding in Christ is directly related to the Christian believing and obeying the Word. One cannot pray according to God's will until he knows what God's will is. God's moral and directive will is found in the Bible.

3. The Christian Must be Obedient to the Word. *And receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him (1 John 3:22).* Answers to prayer will come in direct proportion to the Christian's willingness to do God's will as it is revealed in the Bible.
4. The Christian Must Act in Faith. *If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind (James 1:5-6).*

Second, God always answers our prayers. Every time we ask God we will get an answer. It may not be the answer we want however. Every prayer has three basic answers: yes, no or wait awhile.

God has given the Christian some very important and significant prayer promises.

1. *Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete (John 16:24).*
2. *If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer (Matt. 21:22).*
3. *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened (Matt. 7:7-8).*

God expects us to claim these promises, asking specifically for His will, but also praying in expectation and anticipation of an answer. The Christian is free to pray for anything, and then he must leave it to God's will whatever that may be. *You do not have, because you do not ask (James 4:2).*

How does all this relate to poverty? God has promised to meet our basic needs – food, clothing and housing. He has never promised to meet our wants, but He often does. Sometimes He does exceedingly and abundantly above all we can ask or think. *Now to him who is able to do immeasurable more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us (Eph. 3:20).* The Psalmist observed that God's people did not beg bread. *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread (Psa. 37:25).* If a Christian is poor, he should try by every means to get out of that difficult situation, but it always must be done by legal means. However, if that is not possible, then the Christian must learn to be content in the situation. *I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength (Phil. 4:11-13).*

The human means a Christian should use to get out of poverty is hard work and prayer. God commands that people work and not be lazy.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy, they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right (2 Thess. 3:6-13).

The Christian must check his motives for wanting to get out of poverty. If it is to get rich only in order to have more things and security, this is a wrong motive. ***When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures (James 4:3).***
