

# THEOLOGY OF PROSPERITY

A New Testament Perspective

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## Abstract

*The article begins with an examination of the first-century understanding of prosperity, first in the Jewish culture and then in the Greco-Roman context. Next, it examines Jesus and Paul with respect to their personal example and their advice to others concerning wealth. Finally, it proposes a few questions to help us determine our perspective today, as evangelicals, with respect to the subject of prosperity. Thus, instead of being a continuous “film” of what the NT says about prosperity, the article presents a few discrete “photos,” snapshots that are somewhat disparate but nevertheless revelatory.<sup>1</sup>*

## INTRODUCTION

I will leave the study of the so-called “Health-and-Wealth Gospel” as a theological trend to other disciplines. My intention here is rather to present some NT principles which can help us evaluate that theological trend. As a general evaluation, one evangelical theologian has suggested that the approach taken by those supporting the Health-and-Wealth Gospel (or, the Prosperity Gospel) “is not so much an aberrant theological system as a complete neglect of theology altogether.”

In addition, it is important to note that those who follow the Prosperity Gospel are often rather weak or unconcerned regarding the rules of hermeneutics and their use of the insights of Greek and Hebrew syntax. These insufficiencies lead to inadequate interpretations of passages and even to taking passages out of their linguistic and historical contexts. We offer here two examples of key verses drawn from the NT, verses that are keys for the Health-and-Wealth Gospel proponents but are wrongly interpreted and thus

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<sup>1</sup> See Ken Sarles, “A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel,” in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (Oct-Dec 1986), p. 350. In this article, biblical quotations have been taken from the New American Standard Bible (1977), whereas the verses from the Apocrypha come from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (1952).

lead to errors in their theology.

The first of these verses is John 10.10b: "... I came that they might have life, and might have *it* abundantly." Here Jesus mentions the goal of having an abundance of life. In order to understand this concept correctly, one must first make a distinction between animal life (βίος), that is, the fact to be a living and breathing creature, and the life (ζωή) as all that one experiences as a human being. It is this latter term, ζωή, which is found in this verse. And this word in John's Gospel has already been linked to the Word, that is, to Jesus (cf. John 1.4) and indicates, effectively, the concept of life eternal (cf. John 20.31). Thus this verse (John 10.10b) does not speak of abundance of material wealth but rather of the marvelous quality of eternal life that Jesus gives to believers.

The second verse is also from the apostle John and is found in his third canonical letter, 3 John 2: "Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers." First of all, the interpreter must recognize that this wish for prosperity falls directly in the part of a Hellenistic letter where one always anticipates a wish or a prayer. This element of Hellenistic letter-writing was true for any and all letters in the first century AD. Secondly, the Greek verb (here translated into English as "prosper") actually means, rather literally: "to be on the good road" (εὐοδοῦσθαι). The term does not relate primarily to the idea of material prosperity. This latter interpretation, which is generally the one proposed by the Health-and-Wealth Gospel, goes beyond the meaning of the verb and thus beyond the implication of this verse.

### THE JEWISH CONTEXT

We begin with the Jewish context, in order to discern their concept of "prosperity." According to the Old Testament (OT), prosperity was understood especially in terms of the familial and agricultural blessings of God. For example, Psalm 128:1-6 says,

"How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways. When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, You will be happy and it will be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine, Within your house, Your children like olive plants Around your table. Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD. The LORD bless you from Zion, And may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Indeed, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!"

In the NT, it is possible to see the same concept of prosperity in the

exchange that took place between Jesus and the apostle Peter in Mark 10:28-30.

“Peter began to say to Him, ‘Behold, we have left everything and followed You.’ Jesus said, ‘Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life’”

Jesus said these words after having noted that wealth here below could not help one to achieve eternal life: “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:23)

Since the level of prosperity varied from person to person, God ordained that the entire Jewish community take responsibility for the poor. For example, those who harvested grains always left the edges of their fields and the corners unharvested, so that the poor could glean there. Leviticus 19.9-10 says:

“Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God.”

In this way, God himself sustained the poor through the implementation of these commandments and rebuked Israel when she did not abide by them, as Isaiah 58:6-7 indicates,

“Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free, And break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ... And if you give yourself to the hungry, And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness, And your gloom *will become* like midday.”

Poverty, therefore, was not considered a major cause for shame in Jewish society but rather as something that could happen to anyone at a given time. Malina states that “poor” indicates someone who can no longer maintain the social status he/she inherited, due to unfortunate circumstances. Those around him/her did not see that situation of poverty as being the person’s permanent

state.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to such a situation, the Jews attributed shame to those who enriched themselves in an illegitimate manner. One notorious example would be the tax-collectors, who worked for the (pagan) government of Rome. The rabbis said that such men could never attain the Kingdom of heaven. The reason for such a statement was that they considered the tax-collectors incapable of recalling every single person they had wronged. Thus they could neither make a complete repentance nor the necessary restitution.<sup>3</sup>

During the Intertestamental Period, there were two developments that concerned the Jewish idea of prosperity. First of all, some Jews began living together in sectarian communities, where all goods were held in common.<sup>4</sup> The Qumran community was an example of such a group, as was the community of “Therapeuts” in Egypt. In these Jewish sects, it was believed that prosperity ought to be shared in an egalitarian manner among all the members. In addition, all the members were expected to work, especially in the community’s agricultural pursuits, in order to meet the needs of the entire community. Material prosperity as such was not sought after in these Jewish sects. Instead, their interest lay in developing piety.

During this same epoch, it is possible to note in the Apocrypha and in pseudepigraphical writings an increasing emphasis being laid on the danger associated with material wealth. According to the Jewish writers of the time, the quest for prosperity represented a temptation and could even become an idol in a person’s heart. It was better to seek after wisdom than prosperity. Otherwise, one might find himself/herself a slave of wealth instead of being its owner and master. Some examples of these warnings are the following:

Testament of Judah 19.1: “My children, the love of money leadeth to idolatry; because, when led astray through money, men name as gods those who are not gods, and it causeth him who hath it to fall into madness.”

Wisdom of Solomon 8.5: “If riches are a desirable possession in life, what is richer than wisdom who effects all things?”

Sirach 31.1-2, 5-7: “Wakefulness over wealth wastes away one’s flesh, and anxiety about it removes sleep. Wakeful anxiety prevents slumber, and a

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce J. Malina, “Wealth and Poverty in the NT and Its World,” in *Interpretation* 41/4 (1987), p. 356.

<sup>3</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, in the chapter on despised trades.

<sup>4</sup> The situation of the early church in Jerusalem, as depicted in Acts 2-6, was different, for their sharing was voluntary. Cf. especially Acts 2.44-45; 4.32-37; 5.1-11; 6.1-7.

severe illness carries off sleep. ... He who loves gold will not be justified, and he who pursues money will be led astray by it. Many have come to ruin because of gold, and their destruction has met them face to face. It is a stumbling block to those who are devoted to it, and every fool will be taken captive by it.”<sup>5</sup>

### THE GRECO-ROMAN CONTEXT

In the Greco-Roman context in the ancient Mediterranean world, the basic economic concept has been described by socio-cultural anthropologists as that of a “limited-goods society.” According to this way of thinking, in the entire world there was only a fixed quantity of goods or wealth. This quantity would never increase nor decrease. Thus, if one person became richer, another person (or group) must necessarily become poorer in order to maintain the same amount of wealth in the world. The only way to advance in the society was, in effect, to impoverish someone else. The modern concept of wealth creation was unknown. Instead, it was thought that all possible riches were already present in the world. The only question was: Who would control that wealth?

In contrast to Jewish society, the Greeks and Romans considered that poverty was actually a matter of shame. The person who was not prosperous had no great value in his/her society. In addition, the gods themselves had little interest in the poor; they were, instead, primarily interested in the wealthy members of society who could construct beautiful temples for them and offer impressive sacrifices there. To the already-rich members of society, the Greek and Roman gods gave prosperity in abundance, which of course was understood to impoverish the less fortunate even more.

But what was it that, in the Greco-Roman culture, actually constituted wealth? Once again, we can see a difference between two cultures. The Jews saw the blessings of prosperity as being at the familial and agricultural levels. For the Greco-Roman society, however, money and lands were not considered wealth in and of themselves. Rather, these things represented the necessary means for “purchasing” a place for oneself in the society, in order to receive public renown, glory, and praise. It was in that public acclamation that the non-Jews of the Mediterranean cultures defined the true nature of prosperity.

In reality, the wealthy had no reason to accumulate their money in a bank somewhere. They needed, rather, to spend that money liberally – first of all, in

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<sup>5</sup> This quotation is drawn from Charles, *OT Pseudepigrapha*. These passages were suggested by Craig Blomberg, *Give Me Neither Poverty nor Riches*, which has a good section on the Intertestamental Period.

order to purchase sumptuous luxuries for themselves (so that others would know that they were rich) and, next, to give help to individuals (that is, to their “clients” in the lower social ranks) and also to benefit the city where they lived. In response, in recognition of these acts of kindness offered to them, the clients and the city were expected to make a public declaration (through inscriptions or monuments) of the great and good works of their patron.<sup>6</sup> This public honour was the true prosperity according to their culture. Money was only a simple tool used to obtain that honour. Paul thus reminded Timothy that the Christians must have a good attitude concerning their wealth: “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited...” (1Timothy 6.17). This advice was particularly apt, given the fact that the majority of those to whom Paul and Timothy ministered were from a Greco-Roman cultural background.

### **THE NEW TESTAMENT CONTEXT: JESUS**

We can now look at the Synoptic Gospels, in order to see what Jesus did and what he said about prosperity. Although we need not study all of his teachings,<sup>7</sup> we will take a few “snapshots” to establish Jesus’ attitude towards prosperity.

First of all, let us look at the personal example Jesus presented to his disciples. As a young man, Jesus was known as a carpenter, undoubtedly a trade that Joseph had taught him. During the years when Jesus was practicing this trade, he likely had a sufficient amount of work, for the city of Sepphoris, the Galilean headquarters for Herod Antipas, was only 5 kilometers from Nazareth and was a growing city. Thus the city undoubtedly needed a large number of carpenters for the construction projects. Even if the family of Jesus did not have a surplus, they most likely had the minimum necessary for life in the village. According to Luke 2.24, Mary and Joseph offered, at the time of his presentation at the Temple, the offering reserved for the poor instead of that which was required for a richer family.

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<sup>6</sup> In Romans 16.23, the name Erastus, treasurer of the city of Ephesus, appears. During the archeological investigations at Ephesus, archeologists discovered his name inscribed on one of the bricks used to construct the road. Erastus was honoured for his gift of paving one of the main streets of the city. Cf. John McRay, *Archeology of the New Testament*, for a photo of this brick.

<sup>7</sup> The subject of money was frequently touched upon by Jesus: “The danger and proper use of wealth is far and away the most common ethical subject in the synoptic Gospels.” Thomas E. Schmidt, “Burden, Barrier, Blasphemy: Wealth in Matt 6:33, Luke 14:33, and Luke 16.15,” in *Trinity Journal* 9/2 (Fall 1988), p. 171.

When Jesus stopped his carpentry work in order to enter into his ministry of training the twelve disciples, he undertook this change of direction not because he was seeking a more lucrative job, one with financial and material prosperity in view. It is true that Jesus in his new role was helped out financially by some individuals, as Luke 8.1-3 indicates:

“And it came about soon afterwards, that He *began* going about from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God; and the twelve were with Him, and *also* some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.”

But in Luke 9:58 Jesus himself admitted that he did not even have a place to call his own. “And Jesus said to him, ‘The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’” The apostle Paul described Jesus as someone who underwent voluntary impoverishment, for our good. This expression reflects well the concept of a society of limited goods. 2 Corinthians 8.9: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” He accepted the difficult conditions of his ministry, just as he accepted the good things that people offered him. When the occasion was offered, he ate, with pleasure, at the homes of the wealthy, such as Zaccheus and Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7.36 ff.; 19.1-10), even to the point where some accused Jesus of being a glutton (Luke 7.34).

Such was Jesus' personal example. He demonstrated, at all times and in all situations, his satisfaction with that which God provided, never complaining about what he lacked. His attitude was one of thankfulness. But what advice did Jesus have to pass on to others concerning prosperity? Two passages can trace for us the major axes of his reflection: Matthew 6 and Luke 12. First of all, we will look at what Jesus had to say in Matthew chapter 6.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. . . . No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to

what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? ... For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6.19-21, 24-25, 32-33)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus highlighted what must be every believer's priority in life: his/her personal and intimate relationship with God himself. According to Jesus, that intimacy is the true prosperity. If it were to be the number one priority in the Christian's life, at that moment, he or she would experience peace of heart instead of worrying uselessly. When Jesus spoke in these verses of receiving "all these things," it was not a matter of receiving material riches but rather of having the assurance that God would supply all that was necessary for life, just as he continually does for the flowers and birds. In recognizing that God himself controls the situation, a calm spirit follows automatically. Otherwise, the Christian could be tempted to make the search for wealth his/her priority. But Jesus already emphasized that such a person could not expect a response from God: "No one can serve two masters.... You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6.24). On whom will the Christian depend? The choice is a clear either/or: Either, a dependence on "mammon," that is, on money or material prosperity; or, a dependence on God himself. A choice is necessary, for it is impossible to serve both.

The second passage to be considered comes from Luke chapter 12, where a man wants part of an inheritance to be given to him. To this man, Jesus first gives a warning (v. 15) and then recounts a parable (vv. 16-21):

And He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12.15-21)

Jesus was giving some strong warnings in this passage: "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." And he further accentuated



the contrast between “the man who lays up treasure for himself” and the one who is “rich toward God.” The desire to have an abundance of wealth could lead a person to compromise his or her priorities.<sup>8</sup> The result for the man in Jesus’ parable of Luke 12, a man who was rich but not wise, was that his material prosperity did him no good in the end, since he was foolish and did not identify the most important form of wealth: intimacy with God. The use of his surplus to meet the needs of others would have been a good solution to his “problem.”

### NEW TESTAMENT CONTEXT: PAUL

Finally, we come to the apostle Paul, particularly to his personal example and his written record. Paul had experiences similar to those of Jesus. He worked in his trade of tentmaker in order to earn a living. Acts 18.1-3 mentions Paul’s trade:

“After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers.”

And Paul accepted, from time to time, gifts from others in order to support him in his ministry.

“And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a *gift* more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.” (Philippians 4.15-18)

It is possible that Paul came from a rich family. It would be surprising if his family could have supported Paul’s studies under the rabbi Gamaliel without having sufficient financial resources. This information concerning Gamaliel comes from Acts 22.3, where Paul proclaims: “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as you all are

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<sup>8</sup> The parallel with the warnings given by Jews during the Intertestamental Period, as quoted above, is striking.

today.” But Paul did not seek to further enrich himself. In fact, he said to the Ephesian elders that he did not covet anyone’s silver or gold but, instead, had worked to provide for his own needs and to help others. The farewell discourse to the Ephesian elders includes this affirmation by Paul:

“I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my *own* needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20.33-35).

As to the churches Paul founded, they did not seek to have a congregation that was drawn from just one social grouping. In point of fact, the entire range of social levels was represented in the early church.<sup>9</sup> Paul did not attempt to entice non-Christians to come to Christ by promising them an easy life nor an abundance of material goods. Rather, Paul accepted all the converts as being members of the same family, the family of God, believing that the reality of socio-economic differences would forever characterize the composition of the earthly church. For example, see the remarks made by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7.17-22, expressing the idea that, in light of the limited time before the Parousia, everyone should remain in his or her current social position: “Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called” (1 Corinthians 7.20).

That circumstance did not mean that the rich could separate themselves from the less well-to-do. The apostle’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 11 concerning the celebration of the Lord’s Supper clearly underscored the necessity of unity among the believers.

“But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part, I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you. Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. ... So then, my brethren, when you

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<sup>9</sup> The very highest level in the society as well as the very lowest are perhaps excluded from this affirmation. Cf. Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 72-73.

come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you may not come together for judgment. And the remaining matters I shall arrange when I come” (1 Corinthians 11:17-22, 33-34).

In another letter, Paul declared that everyone should have a grateful heart toward God for his good gifts.

1 Timothy 4.3b-5: “... who ... *advocate* abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.”

And, in addition to providing a house where the believer could meet and providing food for the meals in common, Paul stipulated that the prosperous Christians should use their material and financial prosperity to help those in need. However, they were to do so without seeking public glory; in this way, they would not imitate the Greco-Roman society all around them. Their priority should be God himself, not public honour and praise:

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. (1 Timothy 6.17-19)

## CONCLUSION

On the basis of this study, we may reflect on a few questions to help us determine how we, as evangelicals, line up with these principles.

First, what is our concept of prosperity? Who would be that person whom we would label as “prosperous?” Does prosperity mean having an abundance of goods? Perhaps in an academic setting, that concept would mean: having an abundance of books and a good computer. Or is prosperity to be measured in familial terms? Or does it exist in the amount of respect others give us? In our view as evangelicals, what is prosperity? And where do we ourselves fall on that scale of values? Are we satisfied to have “enough,” or do we always want more? Do we think that that word “enough” means: “A bit more than what we have at present,” indicating that we classify ourselves as being neither “prosperous” nor content with our current situation.

Secondly, where does our personal idea of prosperity or perhaps even our desire to be wealthy lead us in our daily living? Are we led toward arrogance

or a desire for public recognition? Are we moving toward coveting what others have? Does selfishness characterize us? Or are we instead led toward an increasing concern for the well-being of others? Do we express our satisfaction with what God has already supplied, even if it is less than what others have? Are we led to an expression of gratitude toward God, who gives us those things we truly need?

Consider the example of the apostle Paul, the faithful servant of the Lord. He was a theologian. According to his letters, Paul owned some books, and they were precious to him (2 Timothy 4.13). But had he had too many books, his freedom to itinerate wherever God sent him would have been impeded. Thus Paul never built himself a library somewhere and filled it with books. He kept his liberty of spirit and did not tie himself to material goods. One could imagine that a horse would have been useful in Paul's itinerant ministry, but he did not have one. Is that because God did not take good care of Paul, making him walk those distances? Paul himself admitted that his life had not always been luxurious and that he had even experienced nudity and hunger.

A good while before his Roman imprisonment, Paul described his ministry experiences as follows: "*I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure" (2 Corinthians 11:27). But his conclusion, at the end of this litany of sufferings and of the experience of the "thorn" in his flesh was indeed positive: "... And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12.9-10).

But even in all of these circumstances, the apostle remained satisfied:

Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4.11-13)

Prosperity is an attitude: an assurance that God himself will provide for one's needs, a satisfaction with that provision, and a constant pursuit of intimacy with the Creator.

To end this study, I would like to quote the wisdom of the apostle Paul one last time:

But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness. (1 Timothy 6.6-11)