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Christian Prosperity

Christian Prosperity, what is it? What about the prosperity gospel--can it be believed? What about seed, time, and harvest? Or tithing? Will God open the windows of heaven to tithe payers? What about 2nd-tithes, or 3rd-tithes? Are they required?

The answers to these questions will have Christians storing up treasure in heaven--and they will strain every bit of faith the Christian has, for the easy answers aren't answers at all.

When I was baptized into the Body of Christ three decades ago, the prevailing teaching of the Church of God concerning wealth was then Calvinistic, in that the amount of physical prosperity a person possessed served as a reliable measure of the individual's spirituality. Tithing was putting God to the test to demonstrate how He would prosper the individual (Mal 3:10). If prosperity didn't follow tithing, then the person either wasn't properly paying his or her tithes, or the person had a secret sin, which wasn't allowing God to prosper the person. But more disciples didn't prosper than did. Yes, there were newer cars in church parking lots, and nicer homes were purchased, but disciples also acquired more consumer debt and seemed to reflect America's rising debt-based affluence. Overall, disciples were neither ahead, nor behind the nation's economic health. Yet new vehicles and nicer homes became evidence that tithing worked--God was pouring out His blessings on a people and on a nation so that His work of taking the true gospel to the world could be accomplished.

Following baptism, my income went from thirteen plus thousand in 1971, the last full year before I began tithing, to thirty-five hundred dollars in 1973, the first full year I was tithing. I failed to see how I was physically prospering by tithing. Yes, I learned a lot of Scripture, and I was continuing to learn. Yes, I had supernatural events happen to me that actually saved the life of my youngest daughter on two, and possibly three occasions. In 1975, I would experience a supernatural event that saved my life. But I wasn't prospering by any measure of how that word is normally used. I was strapped for money. My business was barely afloat, and I virtually unemployable, judging by the number of jobs for which I wasn't hired. Yet despite being genuinely destitute, I was able to relocate to Alaska, where I purchased an acre of raw land in what would become a prime retail area for \$200. down and \$45. per month--and while Outside (out of the state), I would have my neighbor put in a power pole on my lot (his mistake: he directed the power company to put the pole on the wrong lot), and I would trade seven chainsaws, for which I was a dealer, and a twenty-five horse outboard, for which I was also a dealer, for the Cat work and building materials to construct a 26x36 foot shop. I was faithfully tithing, and I was getting by financially, but no one would have said that I was prospering in the usual sense of the word.

In the many sermons I heard, the idea of tithing to gain material wealth was implied if not directly taught. I felt a certain degree of low level guilt because I wasn't prospering more than I was. But my lack of monetary wealth wasn't for lack of effort: from Breakup to

Freezeup, I was in the shop at six every morning, six days a week, and I didn't leave until ten or eleven at night. Even though I was living a quarter mile from the famed Kenai River, I didn't have time to go salmon fishing. My presence was required in the shop so that others could fish. Likewise, when moose season came, I had no time to go hunting. Moose hunters cut firewood when they weren't successful, and I was inundated with chainsaw repair for all of moose season. Then came the dead season: November through March. For those years I was at Kenai, I busheled during these months, falling timber for whichever contractor that had money to pay wages, and occasionally not receiving those wages because the export log market had collapsed. And the sermons kept coming: test God and see if He won't open the windows of heaven, pouring down an overflowing blessing. Prove God. Send tithes and offerings to headquarters. If I am faithful, then God is faithful to open the windows of heaven--and I didn't have the money to take a chainsaw sales rep job in Boise, Idaho, in December 1978. I was hired for the job, then didn't have the money necessary to leave Kenai and get down the Highway. Everyone I knew was as broke as I was, so there wasn't anyone to whom I could turn. I was without choice: I stayed in Kenai, but I put my shop on the market March 1st, 1979. It sold nine days later; it sold before I could change my mind.

By this time, I had been faithfully tithing for six and a half years, and I had less material wealth, success, and prosperity than I had before I started. I had begun to understand those sermons I heard about testing God were somehow off target. I didn't know then what was wrong with them. I only knew that I had been faithful, and I had been blessed in many ways, the foremost being physical protection through supernatural intervention, but I hadn't prospered materially.

Coming forward two decades, I began hearing televangelists preaching a "prosperity gospel," based upon Jesus' teachings. The idea of sowing money into a ministry and reaping material gain is an unassailable tenet of this gospel. If a person puts in enough money, even if the person has to borrow the money or pay only a tithe of the pledged amount, the person is assured of financial success. The anecdotal evidence is overwhelming: people are getting out of debt by giving to a certain ministry. They are receiving new houses, new cars, new clothes, renewed relationships--whatever their hearts desired, they are receiving by sowing a large enough seed. And if the seed money doesn't produce gain, then that ground is no good, and the person needs to sow seed into a different ministry.

The basis for the prosperity gospel exists in Scripture. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus, after being assured by the young ruler that he had kept the commandments since his youth (Luke 18:21), told the young ruler to sell all he had and give his wealth to the poor, the same advice Jesus had previously given His Disciples (Luke 12:33). The young ruler couldn't do this, for his wealth was proof of his spirituality. His wealth was proof that God had opened the windows of heaven to him. He couldn't see that his wealth stood between him and God, so when Jesus offered him a place in the resurrection of firstfruits, he couldn't claim the position, because he had to divest himself of the proof of his righteousness. He couldn't see that spiritual wealth differed from material wealth, and neither could Jesus' Disciples. For the 1st-Century world of Judea and Hellenistic Asia Minor, wealth involved tangible goods; it consisted of things--and the wealth of this world separated the young ruler from God, just as it does with most everyone (1 John 2:15-17). Jesus then made His famous comment about it being easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for someone rich to

enter the kingdom of God. Peter, not understanding Jesus' comment, said, "Look, we have left our homes and followed you" (Luke 18:28). Jesus answered Peter with a statement that validates the prosperity gospel if the evidence of how Christians have lived for the past two millennia is ignored. He said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life" (v. 29-30). So the unambiguous teaching of Jesus is that between now and a disciple's glorification, the disciple will receive much more than the person has left. But a wife, brothers, parents, children aren't things; they are relationships. A house, however, is a thing. So Jesus told Peter and the others listening that a person would receive much more than a house left behind; plus, the person would receive eternal life in the age to come.

ll of those years before I sold the shop in 1979, all of those years when I had nothing that appeared as material prosperity, and all of the years since when I've had even less seem to argue against Jesus' unambiguous statement of receiving more back than I left, if the more were material possessions. Of course I spent several years living on Kodiak Island, enjoying its hunting and fishing, and I twice sailed a small boat down the Alaska Peninsula and out to the Aleutians, experiencing some of the most impressive scenery in the world close up. I made a poor living selling hunting and fishing articles for a few years, and I entered graduate school without an undergraduate degree and without any course work in the field. My first degree is my M.F.A. in Creative Writing from University of Alaska Fairbanks. So I have no complaints. Rather, I came to take for granted what others spend large amounts of money to enjoy as I lived on the edge of the world, taking a living from its margins. I have looked into tomorrow in a literal and in a figurative sense; I have also been uncertain about how Jesus' statement about receiving more applied to the real-world lives of Christians. I don't know many disciples who have brought forth fruit worthy of repentance who have substantial material prosperity. Those individuals with even limited prosperity are the exception, rather than the norm.

In the early 1990s, the most visible administration of the Church of God realized that as an institution, it hadn't well understood the new covenant. The institution initiated a series of doctrinal changes that placed it left of center within Evangelical Christianity. The resulting fallout caused spinoff organizations to idolize the teachings of the individual who had been the previous Pastor General of the institution--and no understanding of the new covenant magically materialized in either the institution or in its spinoff organizations. Rather, what occurred was the spiritual murder of a hundred thousand saints, my own daughters among the slaughtered. Needless to say, I do not feel great love towards the men who engineered this slaughter. Their spiritual ignorance is appalling, and in any other field, would be criminal.

In A Philadelphia Apologetic I tell the story of me being drafted into the Body of Christ three decades ago. In January of this year (2002), I received a similar call to begin what I am doing now. And with that call came understanding of the new covenant, what it is, how it differs from the Sinai covenant, and how rarely it is understood. What I received when I wasn't looking (in a figurative sense) was the training necessary to actually read Scripture. So my qualifications for what I now do come from being a novelist and literary critic who has had the Holy Spirit for thirty years. They do not come from a seminary where I would have been taught to read texts in this particular way, or in that particular way. I was

spiritually drafted to reread biblical passages, not to reinforce the readings of historical exegesis. And if in rereading Scripture, I overturn concepts formalized by the Council of Nicea 325 A.D., or taught by the college that educated many of the Church of God ministers who are still unsure about what is a part of the Law of Moses, then overturn those concepts I must.

Before someone says that he or she understands the new covenant, the person needs to look into the mirror of the perfect law and see who is looking back. If Christ isn't, then have the laws of God really been written on the person's heart and mind. Under the new covenant, three linguistic absolutes occur when God the Father draws a person from the world (John 6:44, 65), and no one comes to Christ unless drawn by God the Father. These three things occur simultaneously. The laws of God are written on the person's heart and mind. The person now knows God because the person has internalized God's laws; and the person's sins have been forgiven because the person chooses not to sin, which is the transgression of the internalized laws of God (Jer 31:31-34 & Heb 8:10-12 & Heb 10:16-17; plus, Matt 5:17-19)). Actually, the person is reconciled to God the Father by having the person's past sins covered by the shed blood of Christ. The person is now justified by having his or her post-baptism sins being borne by the resurrected Christ. Both goats of Yom Kipporim are the sin offering for Israel, now spiritual Israel. As a shadow of what would/will happen, one goat was sacrificed (Christ at Calvary), and one goat is lead away into a far country (the glorified Christ returning to heaven as the high priest of saints). Christ presently bears the sins of saints, but He will returned those sins that rightly belong to Satan to the devil when Yom Kipporim becomes a reality after Christ returns, which is why animal sacrifices will be resumed in the Millennium. As King of kings, Christ will no longer bear humanity's sins.

Under the new covenant, the laws of God aren't almost written on the heart and mind of a disciple. Nor are they partly there. They are either on a disciple's heart and mind, or the person hasn't had his or her sins forgiven, and the person doesn't know God, regardless of what the person thinks (1 John 2:4). Under the new covenant, righteousness comes from faith, but exactly what does this mean when the laws of God are written on hearts and minds? It's one thing to mouth these words, but quite another to read the writing on one's conscience that came with the forgiveness of sins, then to actually apply that writing and those laws. Even the demons believe in God (Jas 2:19), and shudder, but they are also in rebellion against Him. Disciples, however, once enlightened, will go into the lake of fire if they rebel against God, and against what is written on their consciences. So to erase what God the Father has written through clever arguments leaves the person without additional sacrifice for the person's sin, which by definition (1 John 3:4) is lawlessness.

Distinguishing the Sinai covenant from the new covenant, Paul said that the righteousness that comes from faith says, and he goes on to quote the second covenant mediated by Moses (Rom 10:6 - compare to Deuteronomy 30:12-14). This is Paul's law of faith (Rom 3:27). And this law of faith is the single law of Jeremiah that is written on hearts and minds by the new covenant (Jer 31:31, 33). When summarized by its two principles--love God with all one's heart and mind, and love one's neighbor as oneself (Deu 6:5; Lev 19:18; & Luke 10:28)--it becomes the plural laws of God: the writer of Hebrews changes Jeremiah's single law of God, or Moses' single commandment of God (Deu 30:11) that brings about the circumcision of the heart and mind [naphesh] (Deu 30:6) into the plural laws of God (Heb 8:10 & 10:16). About this second covenant, or single law or commandment of God, Moses said, "Surely,

this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away...it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe" (Deu 30:11, 14). Thus, the provisions or terms of this single law that constitutes the second covenant has drawn disciples observing all of the laws, commandments and decrees written in Deuteronomy; hence, this single law becomes plural when the mediator changes from Moses to Christ, and the covenant changes from physical to spiritual. Love is now emphasized, but the fault of this covenant wasn't with its terms. Rather, the fault lie with Israel (Heb 8:8); so it is Israel that is changed. Physical Israel is replaced by spiritual Israel, which has the laws of God written on hearts and minds.

Paul declares that the second covenant mediated by Moses is the righteousness that comes from faith. This law or commandment says, "For the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob], when you obey the Lord your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your [mind - naphesh]" (v. 9-10). Moses, continuing to quote God, adds, "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess" (v. 15-16).

A little instruction in Semiotics is, perhaps, here necessary: words are linguistic icons or signifiers to which either the reader or the hearer assigns meaning (objects or signifieds). Words do not carry around their meaning in little backpacks that are opened whenever a person encounters an unfamiliar word. Rather, dictionaries exist as the historic record of what meaning has previously been assigned to the icon. The full explanation of this is a long way of saying that words mean whatever a person wants the words to mean. And when this inexactness of meaning is coupled to representational distance (i.e., mimetic, metaphoric, metonymic usage), the phrase "the law" doesn't necessarily mean the law, what the scholars of the previously most visible administration of the Church of God do not understand to this day. A linguistic icon is tethered only slightly tighter to its linguistic object than a pronoun is to its antecedent--and in metonymical usage, the icon behaves like a pronoun, in that its referent must be determined from the context each time it is used. A reader cannot assume that the icon has the same referent each time it is used within a passage, let alone within a text, the fault of all languages (especially Hebrew) since God confused them at the Tower of Babel.

The above relates to spiritual prosperity through understanding that a person cannot assume a passage says this or that without reading the passage in its context. With Christ's death at Calvary and His resurrection three days later, passages that pertained at a physical level have been elevated to a spiritual plane. The eternal covenant, or new covenant, is the second covenant mediated by Moses with better promises. Until a person comprehends how binding are its terms, the person will not realize the seriousness of his or her calling.

Once drawn by God the Father, a disciple is spiritually modified. The disciple is no longer under the law, because the commandment of God--the essence of all that is contained in the Book of Deuteronomy--is written on the person's heart and mind. The laws of God are now

inside the person, who is under grace, which is a gift of God and as such remains outside the disciple. But receiving grace isn't receiving permission to ignore what has been written on hearts and minds. Literally, this commandment or law of God that requires of those who have a circumcised heart and mind to keep all of Deuteronomy isn't too far away to observe, nor too hard to do.

Again, the new covenant is, simply, the second covenant of Moses (Deu chapters 29-31) with spiritual instead of physical promises. When the mediator changed, the promises changed, but the contractual terms of the law remained the same, which is, again, why the fault of the first covenant wasn't with the law but with Israel (Heb 8:8-9). So the promised life of the Moab covenant, which was actual physical life sustained by military victories and by rain in due season, becomes the promised life of the new covenant, which is eternal life. Jesus specifically links keeping the law of God to receiving eternal life (Luke 10:25-28 & 18:18-20; plus add Matt 5:17-19 to 1 John 2:3-6). Likewise, the promise of prosperity under the Moab covenant was the accumulation of "things" and children--money, property, houses, livestock, vineyards, servants, which are the things which televangelists promise today if a person will sow seed (money) in good ground, that good ground always being the televangelist's ministry. As such, these televangelists are keeping alive the promises made under the Moab covenant, either when the law was given or when prophets, speaking for God, tried to coax Israel into returning to the covenant relationship by which physical life was promised. These televangelists are such poor readers that they do not realize they have blended the promises of the old and the new covenant without accepting any of the contractual terms for achieving those promises. They are, frankly, intellectually dishonest with the Word of God, either through their own ignorance, or through spiritual malice by being Satan's ministers of righteousness (2 Corth 11:14-15).

The promises of the new covenant change physical life to eternal life. When the rich young ruler asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18), Christ didn't tell the ruler that he already had eternal life, but rather, said, "You know the commandments" (v. 20) and listed enough of the single royal law (i.e., the Ten Commandments) so the young ruler would know the law to which Christ was referring. Neither Jesus nor the young ruler thought that the promise of life made in the second covenant (Deu 30:15) pertained to eternal life, but the young ruler understood that as the prophesied Messiah, Jesus could and would change the promise. Keeping the Ten Commandments as part of the law of God was the reasonable expectation of a person under the Moab covenant; yet Jesus told the Pharisees that none of them were keeping the law Moses gave them (John 7:19). The young ruler thought he had been keeping the commandments as required (Luke 18:21), but if the Pharisees weren't, then the young ruler wasn't as shown by his attitude about selling all he had. His wealth came before God; thus, he wasn't keeping the first commandment. In addition, he was a little short on love toward the poor, which is directly addressed in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Earlier in Luke's account of what Jesus did, a lawyer stood up to test Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life (10:25), the same question the rich young ruler asked. Jesus' answer was almost the same as in the later incident: "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" (v. 26). The lawyer recited the two summary commandments that incorporate all Ten Commandments, as well all of the Book of Deuteronomy, with the necessary requisite of love both toward God and toward neighbor--these two

commandments are what has been written on the hearts and minds of spiritually modified disciples. It is a mistake to state that these commandments summarize only the Decalogue, when, in actuality, the Ten Commandments are the codification of the larger law of God that has been bound in a book and placed with the holy ones as a witness against them (Deu 31:26). And Jesus tells the lawyer, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live" (Luke 18:28).

What the lawyer asked about was eternal life, not physical life. So the life Jesus references will be eternal life. And how does a person achieve eternal life, since a person doesn't have it except as a gift from God (Rom 6:23)? Jesus said to do what is written in the law. That single law is the Moab covenant, which has hearts and minds being circumcised, a euphemism for the equally figurative expression of writing the law of God on drawn disciples' hearts and minds. What actually occurs is that a person, for whatever reason, has been picked up by God the Father to be spiritually modified so that a relationship between Himself and the person is possible. Sin--any sin, even the smallest sin--separates either angel or human from the Father. Therefore, to have a relationship with the Father, a person must be sin free, which no human has been except for Christ Jesus. But as God the Logos prior to His human birth, Jesus's physical life was worth more than all of the Creation. Thus, His shed blood is of sufficient worth to cover a person's sins, thereby reconciling the person to God the Father. As the drawn disciple's high priest, the glorified Christ Jesus bears the sins of the disciple as long as the disciple stays in the covenant relationship which has the disciple believing God unto obedience by observing all of the laws and decrees written in Deuteronomy.

A drawn disciple can argue that he or she is under grace and not under the law of God, but all the expression means is that grace remains outside the person and can be withdrawn, as seen in the pattern of the temple. Likewise, a person can argue that Jesus taught a dispensation of law, while Paul taught a dispensation of grace--and all the person does is reveal his or her ignorance as the person pits Christ against Jesus as if somehow God changed between Passover and Pentecost when Scripture says He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. A person can argue that the law and its commandments have been abolished (Eph 2:15), and that is true. But the law that was abolished is the one that separates the circumcised from the uncircumcised. That law is the Sinai covenant. However, the person who uses this argument usually isn't a careful enough reader to properly assign referents to the metonymic expression the law, which functions linguistically like a pronoun, in that its context determines its assignment of object to icon (or signified to signifier). A person can argue that all of Deuteronomy is part of the law of Moses, and as such, is no longer binding on a Christian, but what part of the so-called law of Moses did Abraham not keep? Using the referent Paul does in Romans 7:7 for the law, did Abraham covet the possessions of the four kings? Or the land which Lot chose? He didn't, did he? Rather, Abraham obeyed God's voice and kept His ordinances, commandments, statutes and laws (Gen 26:5), and because Abraham obeyed God's voice, he was counted as faithful, which is what James says about the law (Jas 2:18-24). So it isn't God's laws that are no longer binding; rather, it is the covenant made with physical Israel by which that nation would become a holy people (Exod 19:6) that is no longer binding. Today, drawn disciples are a holy people, a royal priesthood, God's own people (1 Peter 2:9), called to proclaim the mighty deeds of Christ Jesus.

There are nearly as many excuses for not keeping the laws of God that have been written on disciples' hearts and minds as there are Nicolaitans. The ancient Israelites who left Egypt, except for Joshua and Caleb, were unable to enter the promised land because of unbelief [apistia] (Heb 3:19), which became disobedience [apeitheia] (Heb 4:6). The two icons work the other way also: disobedience produces unbelief. When a drawn disciple chooses to disobey the laws of God that have been written on the disciple's heart and mind, the disciple no longer believes God, nor does the disciple know the Lord. The disciple is no longer in the covenant relationship in which the person was placed when drawn by God; thus, the person bears his or her own sins. If baptized, no further sacrifice remains for this person. Unless the person repents and returns to that covenant relationship, when resurrected the person will be thrown into the lake of fire. There are no exceptions for good works, or for being a soul warrior, or for anything. The Christian who knows the Lord keeps His commandments, which aren't bound in a book that can be misplaced but are inside the person, written on a circumcised heart and mind. The Christian who refuses to keep God's laws has deceived him or herself, and awaits the lake of fire, despite all of his or her good arguments.

A longer presentation of what is conversion, and what is the new covenant can be found in the booklets by those titles, and in Lesson One of The Advanced Course of correspondence study, as well as in Holiness, Righteousness & the New Covenant (ISBN: 0-595-25891-3 - the book can be ordered from any bookseller as a backorder item).

If Jesus kept the laws of God, and if Jesus lives in a drawn disciple, why would this disciple think that he or she doesn't have to keep the laws of God? Jesus specifically states that disciples are not only to keep the least of the commandments, but are to teach others to also keep the least of the commandments (Matt 5:19). The more reasonable application of what Jesus taught would have all of humanity keeping the laws of God, which includes 2nd and 3rd tithes, clean meats, and appearing before the Lord at three seasons a year (Passover, Pentecost, and the Fall Holy Days). Moses didn't think these things were too hard for physical Israelites who would receive circumcised hearts and minds by believing God unto obedience (Deu 30:11). They certainly cannot be too hard for spiritual Israelites who have been similarly modified by God the Father. For decades, these were the customs of the Church of God even though the church never fully understood why it was doing these things. But because it never fully understood the new covenant, the practices of the formerly most visible administration changed when a pipsqueak scholar sought to liberate himself from his repressed childhood.

For the purposes of this booklet, the new covenant is the writing of the twin laws of loving God with all one's heart and mind, and loving one's neighbor as oneself on a person's heart and mind. These two laws summarize the Book of Deuteronomy, which exists as a witness for or against a Christian. The new covenant is not some touchy-feely feel good invitation to Jesus to come live in the person's heart. Until the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of the Most High God and His Messiah (Rev 11:15 & Dan 7:11-12), only those individuals who have been drawn by the Father and spiritually modified by Him can come to Christ or the Father. Circumcision stands as the symbol of separation. Only under the new covenant, circumcision isn't of foreskins, the point Paul makes, but of hearts and minds. As such, disciples are drawn from the world but must still live in the world. They are not of the world, and they should not love the things of the world. Their desires should not

be for the tender things of the world, but should be for the things of God.

The new covenant elevates the obligations of covenantees to match the better promises of the Covenantor. The expressions of the obligations remain the same as do the expressions of the promises, but what is meant by those expressions has changed. Life and prosperity (Deu 30:15) become eternal life and spiritual prosperity. Death and adversity become the second death (John 5:28-29) and the type of delusion that doesn't allow those who are perishing to repent (2 Thess 2:11-12). And finally, we are ready to take a new covenant look at prosperity.

What Jesus said about leaving houses and receiving more in this age must be understood in the context of the person receiving eternal life in the age to come. Except for Jesus, no human being has yet received eternal life even though many have qualified. The separation of this present age from the world tomorrow is unambiguous. It is in this present age when disciples will acquire more than they left.

Jesus told two parables that relate to spiritual prosperity--the parable of the pounds, and the parable of the talents--with both parables told within ten days or so of His death, so the subject was on His mind at the end of His ministry here on earth. The subject should be on our minds, for the juxtaposition in Deuteronomy is with life comes prosperity, and with death comes adversity. Jesus' parables show this relationship between life and death at work.

In the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27), a certain nobleman who can be read as Christ--Jesus told the parable because His Disciples "supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately" (v.11)--goes to a far country to get royal power for himself. He would return sometime in the future. But before he leaves, he gives a pound each to ten of his slaves, or servants, and he tells his slaves to do business with them until he returns. And here the parable addresses all of those Christians who teach a dispensation of grace, and who teach that legalism is the great apostasy: the citizens of the nobleman's country send a delegation after the nobleman. Along with, apparently, seven of the ten slaves who received a pound each, the citizens say that they will not have the nobleman rule over them. They will not have Christ rule over them.

The nobleman returns. The first slave comes forward and says, "Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds" (Luke 19:16). It needs to be here noted that slave is offering to the nobleman all eleven pounds, the original one pound and then additional pounds that have been earned in this present age. The nobleman apparently doesn't take the ten pounds that the slave earned, taking back rather only the one that had been initially given. When the one pound is later given to this slave, those witnessing the accounting protest, saying "Lord, he has ten pounds!" (v. 25). This first slave would have had eleven pounds if he kept them all, and he would have no pounds if he had returned them all to the nobleman. So he apparently was allowed to keep his increase, or the gain he had made trading. In addition to this gain, he was rewarded by receiving authority over ten cities, thereby establishing a one-to-one correspondence between his earnings and his reward.

The next slave has made five pounds with the one pound that had been left with him. Continuing the one-to-one correspondence between gain and reward, this slave is given rulership over five cities (Luke 19:19).

A third slave came forward, and returned the pound he had been given to the nobleman. He had not done what he had been commanded: "Do business with these until I come back" (Luke 19:13). Rather, he had buried the capital he was to have invested, and the nobleman isn't pleased, but says that the slave should have at least put the pound with the moneylenders so that it would have accrued interest. If this slave didn't want to manipulate his capital, thereby making a greater return in his investment, then the least the slave should have done is put the pound with someone who would work with it.

In this parable, a pound is received in this present age. The work done is done in this present age; the increase is made in this age, but isn't spent or consumed in this age. Rather, the earnings don't belong to the slaves until the nobleman returns. And the reward isn't received until the age to come arrives--the reward is spiritual authority over cities.

Under the new covenant, prosperity is spiritual, which apparently has some physical-like qualities. Within the Church of God, it has been taught that the pound represented the Holy Spirit, but would someone put his or her portion of the Holy Spirit out to the moneylenders to gain interest? A person wouldn't. Physical assets gain interest. Disciples are commanded to do business with the pound they have been given; disciples have been given work to do. Peter says that disciples have been drawn and made holy to "proclaim the mighty acts of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). This is spiritual work, even though proclaiming is a physical activity. So the capital with which disciples have to work is multiplied through doing the work of proclaiming Christ to the world. The pound, then, becomes an identifying icon for the assets of a disciple. What Jesus has left each disciple drawn from the world is the disciple's assets, whether large or small. Yes, to each is given the Holy Spirit, but not in the same measure. And again, a disciple wouldn't entrust his or her portion of the Holy Spirit to bankers. Rather, what can be compared to putting one's capital with moneylenders is tithing and giving offerings to a ministry that is proclaiming the mighty deeds of Christ. Buying and trading with one's pound would then be analogous to personal evangelism, or doing the work of a ministry.

Parables are analogies, and as such, they don't work exactly like allegories, but close enough that what can be said about allegories can be said about parables. What the nobleman left with each of the ten slaves was identical, so while the pound can be read as being analogous to receiving the Holy Spirit, what Paul writes about spiritual gifts (1 Corth 12:4-11) suggests that what is allotted to each individual by the Holy Spirit differs (v. 11). Thus, what is allotted equally might be better read as the opportunity to work at proclaiming the mighty deeds of Christ. The widow putting in her two mites gave more than the many coins of a rich man. Both had the equal opportunity to give. The gifts differed, with the gift of the widow being of greater worth spiritually even though it was worth less physically.

Paul's discussion of sowing sparingly and sowing bountifully (2 Corth 9:6-15) works with the idea of receiving interest on what Christ has left with each person. The spiritual interest received is somewhat dependant upon what has been sown. The more that is sown, the more interest a person receives. The pound in the parable has now become a person's wealth, with everyone's wealth being perceived as a single unit of one pound. The widow's wealth is her one pound, and she gives it all to the temple. Likewise, the rich man's wealth is also his one pound, of which he only gives, maybe, a thousandth of it to the temple. Therefore, the rich man has sown much more sparingly than has the widow even though

he has given more coins of greater worth. And here, we can link this parable to what Jesus told Peter about receiving more in this age than what the Disciples left (Luke 18:29-30).

Unfortunately, the evidence of two millennia of Christianity isn't that drawn disciples receive many more houses in this life than they left. Rather, the evidence is that most disciples struggle financially as they reflect the overall prosperity of the social area in which they live. Their sowing of seed hasn't statistically improved their material prosperity beyond what their prosperity would have increased or decreased within the rise or decline of the social-economic strata in which the disciples reside. Certainly benefits come. For disciples, things have a way of just working out when there doesn't seem to be any way possible for that to happen. But getting back physically much more than what was sown hasn't been the case in the Church of God. King David was appalled that the wicked seemed to prosper more than the godly, and not much has changed since his reign when it comes to the righteous and material prosperity.

The interest on the seed sown doesn't become the servant of God's prior to judgment. Until then that interest might well be accruing, but it doesn't necessarily translate into things. Rather, Jesus commanded disciples to, "Sell your possession, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:33-34). And this is what He told the rich young ruler, and this is what He would tell those televangelists who preach the prosperity gospel. God the Father knows that as humans, disciples have need for things, for income, for food. About these things, disciples should not worry. Instead, they should strive for the kingdom of God, and the physical things that are needed will be given (v. 29-31).

The slave who has his one pound taken from him did nothing with it. The nobleman says that the least that the slave should have done would have been to put it with the moneylenders so that it might earn interest. The application seems to be that the least a disciple should do is tithe, which is merely returning to God what is already His. While it has been argued by some scholars that tithing ended with the abolishment of the old covenant, the second covenant addresses three tithes, or rather, one tithe divided into three funds: one fund for the operation of the temple, or now, the work of evangelism; a fund for feast expenses; and a fund for supporting all who have no inheritance in Israel (Deu 14:22-29). The Church of God has traditionally labeled these the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd tithes.

Under the formerly most visible administration of the Church of God, considerable faith was necessary to trust God to supply needs when a disciple's outgo versus income didn't balance after a 1st tithe was paid. Now add a 2nd ten percent every year, and a 3rd ten percent every third year--more faith was needed than many disciples had. Nevertheless, most members of this administration faithfully paid what was asked of them. A lot of seed was sown, and the ground went to weeds.

The disciple who fails to tithe has been tested, and has been found wanting. That disciple can be assured more testing will come, so God the Father can be absolutely certain about where the disciple's treasure is stored. But tithing was never intended to become the burden that it became when a person gave thirty percent of his or her income to the Church, plus additional offerings.

Tithing is returning a tenth of a disciple's increase back to God, who retains His claim on this first tenth. Under the old covenant, tithing was a national responsibility that preceded receiving the promises of physical prosperity (Mal 3:8-12). The entire nation of Israel was to be a holy people (Exo 19:5-8). The Sinai covenant wasn't made with individuals, but with a nation. Therefore, both the responsibilities and the promises of the covenant were national, with national punishment (enslavement or captivity) coming for disobedience. The watchmen today who prophesy national captivity for the modern descendants of the ancient house of Israel fail to understand that the new covenant is made with individuals, and that the old covenant has been abolished. They, like the televangelists preaching the prosperity gospel, are exceedingly poor readers of Scripture.

Under the new covenant, all promises have become spiritual. God the Father knows what the needs are of disciples He has drawn from the world. He would fail in His responsibility for these disciples if He didn't provide their needs now that they are no longer of the world. Of course, if they return to the world, if they leave the covenant relationship into which they have been drawn, they can expect to have to provide for themselves. And God's promise to provide doesn't relieve the disciple of his or her responsibility to work. Rather, the promise is that regardless of what work is diligently done, enough material prosperity will come the disciple's way that his or her needs are met--and not only needs, but wants that don't harm the disciple's spiritual development. Therefore, tithing is directly addressed by Jesus (Matt 23:23), commanded by the second covenant (as Deu 30:10 addresses Deu 14:22), and indirectly commanded in both the parable of the pounds and in the parable of the talents. Where it is indirectly commanded, it can only pertain to the new covenant. But under the new covenant, a person shouldn't expect to receive material prosperity because of the person's faithfulness in tithing. That prosperity might occur, but the promise is that the person is storing up treasure in heaven, even if that treasure is merely the interest gained on the person's pound through tithing.

The other parable Jesus gave concerning spiritual prosperity is of talents (Matt 25:14-30). A man going on a journey summoned his slaves, and gave to one five talents, to another two talents, and to the third one talent. After a long time, the master returns and demands an accounting from each slave. The one who received five talents had made five more, and his master said, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (v. 21). That last phrase now makes spiritual prosperity a salvational issue, thereby linking life to prosperity in the same way they are physically linked in the Moab covenant (Deu 30:15).

The exact nature of what the many things are over which the slave will be put isn't mentioned, nor needs to be. The purpose of this parable, which is given less than a week after the parable of the pounds, appears to be for the purpose of adding flesh to the first parable; for the same thing is said to the second slave who returns two additional talents made from the two talents he received as was said to the first slave. To whom more is given, more will be expected to receive the same reward. Thus, the disciple who has been given five talents and has a fivefold increase will return to Christ thirty talents, of which he can keep twenty-five when the two parables are put together. This servant, who will become a son when glorified, now receives both the treasure or prosperity he or she has accrued in heaven, as well as the reward of being put over five cities.

But the disciple who received two talents and who has a tenfold increase will return twenty-two talents to Christ at judgment. This glorified saint will keep twenty talents and will actually have less treasure than the servant to whom more was given, but this saint will be rewarded by being put in charge of ten cities. So this saint's reward will be greater than the first's.

Parables or allegories establish one-to-one correspondences that are literary, not literal. The reward of a glorified saint might be rulership over cities, if the saint doesn't become a pillar in the temple of God (Rev 3:12). What the parables actually establish is that a relationship exists between doing work here on earth for God the Father and His Son, and the saint's prosperity in the world to come. The minimum that a saint is to do is pray and pay (i.e., pay tithes and give offerings). If a saint buries what the saint has received, the saint is worthless and will be cast into the lake of fire. Thus, what a saint does with his or her wealth, opportunities, and abilities becomes a salvational issue, which wasn't the case under the old covenant. But under the old covenant, national captivity was the club God used to chastise an adulterous nation. Malachi concludes his instructions to bring the tithes of the nation into the storehouse with, "Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I [God] commanded him at Horeb for all Israel" (4:4). That covenant made at Horeb or Sinai has been abolished (Eph 2:15). Therefore, the promises to open the windows of heaven for a tithing nation have also been abolished. But the principle of tithing hasn't been. Rather, the windows of heaven have become purses that are holding the prosperity of saints until their judgment.

The work of saints is to proclaim the mighty deeds of Christ to the world (1 Peter 2:9). It is through trading and multiplying a saint's natural and spiritual gifts in proclaiming Christ's deeds that a saint accumulates spiritual prosperity, to which will be added rewards when glorified. There is no possible way for one person to determine another person's level of spirituality from the second person's material wealth. No correspondence is promised under the new covenant, where what had been physical has become spiritual. Thus, the prosperity gospel of televangelists that sounds too good to be true is, but Satan as the King of Babylon, or "the world" as Satan's serf can make the promises of seed, time, and harvest come true. However, no spiritual prosperity has accrued when a person sows into the soil of this world.

A tithe of the firstfruits is commanded to be kept for attending the feasts of the Lord (Deu 14:23-26). Traditionally, the Church of God, based upon the teachings of its previously most visible administration, has taught that a full tithe was to be kept for attending services on the annual holy days. That teaching has allowed many people to attend services in exotic locations, and to generally treat attendance at the holy day services as expensive vacations. The fruit of spending ten percent of one's increase in a week or so hasn't been spiritual enrichment as much as it has been physical enjoyment according to the physical blessings promised under the Sinai covenant.

When the command to spend a festival tithe is closely examined, the traditional practice of setting aside ten percent of one's yearly increase cannot be well supported. Rather, the command appears to be that a tithe of a tithe is to be retained to cover festival expenses. This would be one percent of a person's yearly increase, and would certainly be enough to address the expense of a housetop booth constructed of boughs and food for an eight day festival. The practice of traveling to exotic locations for services, staying in the best hotels,

and feasting lavishly seems to be contrary to the spirit of high sabbath observance. Yes, the passage commanding retention of a festival tithe says that money can be for whatever the person desires (Deu 14:26), but the purpose of observing the high sabbaths is "to learn to fear the Lord your God always" (v. 23). The purpose isn't to vacation far from home, which is what has happened with the location of feast sites near Disney World, or in the South of France. The spiritual intent seems to be that services should be held locally, not just at Jerusalem, or at Orlando, Florida. Under the new covenant, with its spiritual promises and obligations, learning to fear the Lord isn't dining in the restaurants of five star hotels, but listening to the Word of the Lord expounded wherever the person is.

Has, then, the teaching about saving a second tithe been changed? The fruit that has matured over the past forty years of spending ten percent of a person's income on the person in a week has caused the passage commanding the saving of a second tithe to be reexamined. When reread critically, only a portion of a person's tithe is to be spent as a form of worshiping God for bringing Israel into the promised land (Deu 26:1-11). Debate will occur over how much of the tithe can be eaten by the person and over how much is given to the Levite. This debate will give rise to counting a person's mint leaves, a figurative expression addressing the retained carnality of a person which, if not checked, will cause the person to sow as little seed as possible with God, thereby garnering little interest on the person's spiritual investment. Thus, within the ambiguity that exists in the passages commanding disciples to save a festival tithe, the determination that a tithe of a tithe should be retained for the exclusive purpose of learning to fear God on His high sabbaths seems reasonable, and not overly burdensome. If a person wishes to go on a vacation to learn to fear God, then that person needs to set non-tithe moneys aside for that purpose; these moneys would be in addition to the commanded festival tithe (1% of a person's income).

There isn't really enough ambiguity in the text to support an argument for a full tithe to be retained as a festival tithe, not when the evidence of that reading/practice is that it has not produced the spiritual fruit promised. Rather, it has promoted a Christmas-type holiday atmosphere, in which actual competition has existed in how to spend moneys. That ought not to have happened.

When Feast of Booths (or Feast of Tabernacles) observance was commanded, there were no five star hotels, nor jet travel to distant lands. Vacation as a concept was underdeveloped: a pilgrimage to the promised land might be as close to our concept of a vacation as the ancient world could experience. The principle, though, of learning to fear the Lord remains unchanged. The annual sabbaths are shadows of the significant events in the plan God has for humanity, so a person journeying to Jerusalem to observe the Passover was certainly escaping his or her day to day routine, but the person wasn't on holiday, using the British expression. Rather, the person was worshiping God in the most sacred setting then extant. And the same thing cannot be said of the person making a pilgrimage to Orlando, Florida, to attend Feast of Tabernacles services. That geographical location is no more sacred to God than is Stonefort, Illinois.

The question must be asked, does a person need to travel away from his or her home church to learn to fear the Lord? The answer is, No! And it is NO every time the question is asked.

While Paul certainly traveled at feast time, and tried to return to Jerusalem, we don't find

Paul commanding entire congregations to travel to Jerusalem. But in the Millennium, the families of the earth shall go up to Jerusalem to keep the feast of booths (Zech 14:16-19). When this passage is coupled to, "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose" (Deu 16:16), what becomes evident is that representatives of all of the families of the earth shall appear before God three times a year, with Jerusalem being the only named place at this time where God has chosen for Millennium observance. So making a pilgrimage to a location where God has placed His name fits Scripture. However, under the spiritual application of passages that are undeniably physical, God the Father has placed His name wherever two or more disciples are gathered in His name. Therefore, under the new covenant, where local congregations assemble on the weekly Sabbath is also where God has placed His name for annual sabbath observance. No one has to travel halfway around the world to arrive at an exotic feast site to learn to fear the Lord.

The Church of God's traditional teaching that saints should save a full ten percent of the saints' yearly income for the purpose of attending the holy days cannot be well supported from Scripture although retention of a festival tithe is commanded. The context indicates that this festival tithe is a tithe of a tithe, or "some of the first of all the fruit of the ground" (Deu 26:2). Therefore, as an administrative decision, disciples should save a minimum of a tithe of a tithe (1%) of the disciple's increase for the purpose of learning to fear the Lord where He places His name. This tithe of the tithe was returned to the tithe payer by the Levitical priesthood after the full tithe was paid. It is, therefore, unacceptable for the individual tithe payer to determine what percentage of the tithe will be 2nd tithe. The tithe payer is to bring the full tithe to the ministry, who then becomes responsible for returning the 2nd tithe to the tithe payer.

The 3rd tithe is the tithe paid on the third and sixth years of a seven-year cycle. It is not an additional tithe, but a different destination for the single tithe. While nine tenths of the tithe for years one, two, four and five were to go for the temple, the tithe on years three and six supported the Levite, and all who resided in Israel without an inheritance. While an argument can be sustained that under the new covenant, the support of the ministry and the work of evangelism are the same, thereby making no distinction between the years of the tithe, as a matter of faith--since tithing is a salvational issue--these moneys should be kept separate. The ministry needs to be supported as God provides the increase to disciples, but the work of evangelism has the higher priority to available tithe moneys.

The linguistic icon "tithe" is used in context with firstfruits, first born, and other offerings. In its old covenant usage, the person producing the tithe also partakes in consuming the tithe, while remembering the resident Levite. Thus, the icon acquires sufficient vagueness that administrative decisions regarding tithing are necessary; yet, all of the tithe is holy to God (Lev 27:30). Therefore, under the new covenant, the tithe remains holy. But only one tithe is paid, not two or three. A feast tithe can be consumed by the saint at where God has placed His name--and that isn't on every hill and in every grove, nor is it at every national vacation destination. It is, rather, where genuine saints assemble together for Sabbath services. And it is there where the ministry should return to the tithe payer his or her feast tithe, or 2nd tithe. This would have been in the form of feeding tithe payers during high sabbath observances. This would still be an appropriate means of returning the feast tithe--to use the feast tithe for any other purpose is problematic, regardless of what the past

practices have been of the formerly most visible administration of the Church of God.

Not understanding the spiritual nature of the new covenant, the formerly most visible administration of the Church taught that the feast tithe should be used by disciples to live as that administration imagined saints would live in the Millennium. The emphasis was on physical prosperity. Protests to the contrary have the locations of feast sites, with very few exceptions, arguing against disciples primarily coming to the Feast of Tabernacles to learn to fear the Lord. Festival brochures were published that emphasized the vacation potential of each location. And the practices of the splinter organizations that have derived from this formerly most visible administration have these fellowships choosing the most exotic vacation spots possible for their Feast of Tabernacles sites. It is hardly a coincidence that most of them choose at least one location near Disney World.

Question: if God places His name at Disney World as He had at Jerusalem for the purpose of disciples learning to fear Him, why does He need so many competing sites within a few miles of each other? Wouldn't one site be enough? And if it were enough, which site, or whose site would it be? Or is it possible that God hasn't placed His name at any of the temporary sites?

Concerning the poverty tithe which has been called the 3rd tithe (Deu 14:28-29), paying this tithe is a form of worshiping God that expresses love to those individuals who are without resources. A minister fully employed in the work of proclaiming Christ doesn't have time to earn an additional income. It is also used to support the dependent, regardless of the reason for their dependency. It is the full tithe, suggesting that on the third and sixth years, the feast is handled differently. When it has been fully paid, the tithe payer can ask God for a special blessing. Under the new covenant, the blessing will be spiritual, but my observation is that a terrific number of couples have a child after a third tithe year.

It is easy to spiritualize away the promises of God that has material benefits coming from paying tithes and giving offerings into a ministry. None of us can see what treasure we have stored in heaven; so a charlatan can beg offerings while assuring a disciple that he or she is storing up treasure in heaven. A televangelist will promise a material blessing for the sowing of a large enough seed, knowing that the law of coincidence will cause some of his or her audience to continue sending in donations. The audience that these televangelists milk doesn't seem to be expanding. Rather, moneys that once would have gone to a local church now are being sown in "better ground," as if giving offerings to God equates to buying lottery tickets.

The parables of the pounds and of the talents suggest that as long as the person has put his or her pound or talent out to the bankers, the person has resolved the salvational issue, but if the person has sown into the soil of this world, the person won't receive much interest. The person faces spiritual poverty when judged. So it behooves a person to determine as best as the person can where God works--and it becomes self-serving to say more about who is doing the work of God at this time.