

# New Covenant Prosperity

Prosperity for New Covenant believers is:

- based totally on God's undeserved grace and is not a fully merited reward.
- is received because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- is never earned or merited by faith.
- sometimes is conditioned on turning from our known sins and/or on obeying certain instructions by God.
- sometimes is sovereignly given without any specific faith request or obedience response in relation to it.

The prosperity promised to New Covenant believers is linked to the Abrahamic Covenant (see Galatians 3:7-9 and 13-14).

## A marvellous promise for New Covenant believers

Paul wrote some more inspiring words in Romans 8:32: ***“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things.”*** Here Paul relates Jesus' death to the fact God will *freely* give us *all* things.

In Greek, the words ***“shall be freely given”*** in Romans 8:32 are a form of the word “charizomai”. In the context of this verse, “charizomai” means “give freely or graciously as a favor”<sup>1</sup> or “to show favor or kindness...to give freely, bestow graciously”<sup>2</sup>. The word “charizomai” is derived from the word “charis” which is the Greek New Testament word for ***“grace”***. So in Romans 8:32, Paul is stressing God gives all things to New Covenant believers *by grace* or as *free gifts*.

## Our needs provided by His abundant New Covenant grace

In Philippians 4:19, Paul said it is God's will for Him to supply *all* our real needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus: ***“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”*** The expression ***“riches in glory by Christ Jesus”*** refers to *God's totally undeserved grace by Jesus Christ*. Paul uses the same word ***“riches”*** in relation to God's grace through Christ in Ephesians 1:7 and 2:7. Ephesians 1:7 refers to ***“the riches of His grace”***. Ephesians 2:7 mentions ***“the exceeding riches in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.”***

The Mosaic Covenant contained many references to God's mercy and grace (see Exodus 20:6, 22:27, 25:17-22, 33:19, 34:6-7, 37:6-9, Numbers 6:25, Deuteronomy 4:31, 5:10, 7:9, 7:12 and 13:17). But the New Covenant is a greater manifestation of God's unmerited grace

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<sup>1</sup> Bauer, page 876.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, page 265.

than the Mosaic Covenant. The New Covenant refers to “*abundance of grace*” (see Romans 5:17), “*grace abounded*” (see Romans 5:20, “*exceeding grace of God in you*” (see 2 Corinthians 9:14) and “*the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant*” (see 1 Timothy 1:14).

John 1:16-17 shows the more gracious nature of the New Covenant compared to the merit-based Mosaic Covenant: “*And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*” Hebrews 8:6-7 shows the New Covenant is a better covenant and based on better promises: “*But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.*” Hebrews 7:22 also calls the New Covenant “*a better covenant*”.

Note that when Philippians 4:19 refers to God supplying our needs, what He defines as our needs may vary from person to person. Only He knows what each individual believer really needs. Whatever God defines as our real needs is how He defines prosperity for us.

James 4:2-4 shows God does not regard some of the selfish desires of His people as being real needs which are a part of His definition of prosperity for them: “*You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*” The above verses must be balanced out by Philippians 4:19 which promises God will definitely supply our real needs by God’s grace.

## A New Covenant superlative grace promise

Another marvellous New Covenant superlative grace promise is found in 1 Timothy 6:17: “*Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.*” In Greek, the word “*gives*” is a form of the word ‘parecho’ carries no concept of merit or deserving.

The word “*gives*” in 1 Timothy 6:17 in Greek is present tense. Usually in Greek, the present tense indicates the continuous or repetitive nature of an action. So in this case, the present tense reveals the continuous or repetitive nature of God giving to New Covenant believers.

In Greek, the word “*richly*” in 1 Timothy 6:17 is “*plousios*” which means in this context “*rich, wealthy*”<sup>3</sup> or “*pertaining to that which exists in a large amount, with the implication of its being valuable*”.<sup>4</sup> In 1 Timothy 6:17, the word “*enjoyment*” is a form of the word “*apolausis*” in Greek. “*Apolausis*” means “*enjoyment based on the satisfaction of one’s desires*”<sup>5</sup> or “*the advantage or pleasure to be obtained from a thing*”.<sup>6</sup>

So the expression “*God who gives us richly all things to enjoy*” refers to Him giving us earthly blessings as unmerited gifts and not merited rewards, in a continuous or repetitive sense, so we can obtain benefit, satisfaction, pleasure and/or enjoyment from these.

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<sup>3</sup> Bauer, page 673.

<sup>4</sup> Louw and Nida, page 601.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 302.

<sup>6</sup> Vine, page 201.

Note that in 1 Timothy 6:18-19, Paul then states that believers who are rich in this present age, should be ready to give, willing to share and do abundant good works: ***“Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”*** Paul is not here teaching we merit eternal life by good works. Instead, Paul is saying that the *unmerited grace* result of faith and the fruit of such faith – good works – is laying hold on eternal life. The faith implied in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 is mentioned in surrounding verses 12 and 21.

## **The unmerited grace results of seeking first God’s Kingdom by faith**

In Matthew 6:33, Christ teaches the Kingdom of *grace* principle of ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”*** Luke 12:31 contains similar words. Verses such as Matthew 6:33 and Luke 12:31 refer to the undeserved *grace results* or *consequences* of believers fulfilling various God-stated conditions. Verses such as these do not relate to merited rewards or payments for good works. The expression ***“these things”*** in Matthew 6:33 and Luke 12:31 refer to food, drink, clothes and other things that God knows we need.

In Matthew 6:25-33 and Luke 12:22-31, Jesus declares God will give food, clothes and drink to New Covenant believers in the *same way He feeds the birds*. God feeds birds as a *free unmerited gift*. He does not feed them as a merited reward. God does not insist that they do good works which make Him indebted to feed them.

Luke 12:32 refers to God giving us His Kingdom as a free *gift* of His good pleasure. God does not give us His Kingdom as a merited reward. Also note ***“His righteousness”*** referred to in Matthew 6:33 is a free gift (see Romans 5:17) and not a merited reward.

## **New Covenant verses promising earthly prosperity**

In 3 John 2, the Apostle John wrote to his fellow believer Gaius, saying: ***“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”*** In Greek, the two usages of the word ***“prosper”*** above are two forms of the word “euodoo” which means “get along well, prosper, succeed” (Bauer, page 323). Also, note the two forms of the word “euodoo” in the above verse are both in the passive voice in Greek. This means John was praying that another – in this case God – will do the action of prospering Gaius in all other ways just as He was already prospering Gaius’ soul. The passive voice means another will do the action to Gaius.

Many Evangelicals argue 3 John 2 is merely a pleasant wish given in a greeting. They argue this verse does not reveal God’s will. In Greek, the word ***“pray”*** in this verse is “euchomai” which in some contexts can mean “wish” (see Bauer, page 329). “Euchomai” seems to be used in this sense by Paul in Romans 9:3. But note in James 5:16, a form of the word “euchomai” is translated ***“pray”*** and is used in the sense of praying according to God’s will.<sup>7</sup> The context of James 5:15-16 reveals God wills to heal. Forms of “euchomai” are translated ***“I pray”*** in 2

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<sup>7</sup> The Nestle-Atland Greek text uses a form of “proseuchomai” instead of “euchomai” in James 5:16, whereas the Textus Receptus Greek text uses “euchomai”.

Corinthians 13:7 and “*we pray*” in 2 Corinthians 13:9. Also note if John was referring only to a wish, he could have used the optative mood of the word “*prosper*” in Greek. But he did not. In Greek, the optative mood has two functions – to express a wish or what might be a possibility but not a certainty.

The greeting which John gave in this verse is similar to the ones Paul gave at the beginning of his Letters. In Romans 1:7, Paul said: “*To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” The above verse was not merely Paul’s pleasant wish for the Roman believers. When Paul said the above, he was speaking God’s will for them. The same applies to his greetings in Romans 16:3-13, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:2 and so on.

When in 3 John 2, John said that Gaius’ soul was prospering, this prosperity was by God’s undeserved grace. It was not a *deserved reward* for obedience and/or faith. John said he wanted Gaius to prosper in all other ways in *the same way* Gaius’ soul was prospering. This means by *undeserved grace*. Some Christians wrongly treat faith as some type of *good work* by which they can *merit* prosperity as a reward. Faith is instead a God-appointed means of receiving God’s prosperity by His conditional unmerited grace.

But note we must understand that the prosperity John was praying to see in Gaius’ life in all areas was according to *God’s definition* of it. God’s definition of prosperity does not equate with all believers being multi-millionaires according to “the American Dream”.

In 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul uses another form of the word “euodoo” found in 3 John 2. 1 Corinthians 16:2-3 says: “*On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.*” Here Paul reveals that the Corinthians may prosper by *different amounts* on *different weeks*. As a result, they would have different contributions each week to help the poor at the Jerusalem church.

Vine says that “*as he may prosper*” means “in material things; the continuous tense suggests the successive circumstances of *varying* prosperity as week follows week” (page 495). Vine here refers to the continuous tense of the Greek word for prosperity in this verse. In context here, the continuous tense relates to the *changing degree* of prosperity each week for each Corinthian believer.

In Greek, the expression “*he may prosper*” is in the present tense, passive voice and subjunctive mood. The context relates to week by week. So the present tense refers to being prospered in an *ongoing* sense. The passive voice means another, in this case *God*, does the action of prospering the believer. In Greek, the subjunctive mood refers to *possibility*. In other words, Paul is saying there is *no definite nature* about the *measure* or *degree* God will prosper believers from week to week. The measure of prosperity will possibly change each week.

The possibly varying degrees of prosperity from week to week are also evidenced in the usage by Paul of the Greek expression “o ti ean” which is just before the expression “*he may prosper*”. “Ean” means “*if*” (Bauer, page 211). “Ti” is an *indefinite* pronoun which can mean “anyone, anything, someone, something, many a one or thing” (Bauer, page 819). In his “Intermediate New Testament Greek”, Richard Young says that when used with relative pronouns like “o”, the word “ean” can mean “whatever, whoever or whenever” (page 184). In his Interlinear Greek New Testament, Marshall translates “o ti ean” as “*whatever*”. The New King James translates it as “*as*”. The more accurate translation of the Greek of “*as he may prosper*” is instead “whatever he may be prospered”.

Paul used the subjective mood of the Greek verb *“he may prosper”* with the word “ean” meaning “if” combined with “o” and with the indefinite pronoun “ti”, to emphasise the prosperity of New Covenant believers may vary greatly week to week from a smaller to a much larger amount.<sup>8</sup> This is *God’s promise* in 1 Corinthians 16:2. This verse does not promise to make all believers multi-millionaires.

Paul used a similar expression in 1 Corinthians 16:6. He said *“whenever I may go”* (N.A.S.B.). In Greek, the word *“whenever”* is “ou ean” and the expression *“I may go”* is in the present tense and subjective mood also. Remember the subjective mood refers to *possibility*. In 1 Corinthians 16:6, Paul said: *“and perhaps I shall stay with you, or even spend the winter, that you may send me on my way wherever I may go.”* (N.A.S.B.)

Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 16:2 explain why he said in Philippians 4:11-12 that sometimes he had an *abundance* and at other times he had a *lack*. Later we will look at Paul’s comments in more detail.

## God prospered the Antioch believers to varying degrees

Acts 11:27-29 relates also to prosperous believers helping other believers who were in financial need: *“And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.”* In Greek, the expression *“his ability”* is a non-literal translation of a form of the verb “euporeo”. The specific form of the word “euporeo” used in Acts 11:29 literally means “was prospered” (Marshall, page 379 and Green, page 853). “Euporeo” itself means “to be well provided for, to prosper” (Vine, page 670) or “have plenty, be well off” (Bauer, page 324) or “to be in prosperous circumstances, enjoy plenty” (Perschbacher, page 181).

Acts 11:27-29 teaches that when compared with each other, the believers at Antioch had experienced *varying levels of prosperity* from God. This confirms what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 16:2.

## Read the whole counsel of God’s Word!

Note 3 John 2, 1 Corinthians 16:2 and Acts 11:27-29 must be interpreted in relation to verses like Hebrews 10:32-34 and 11:37-39 which show people of strong faith at times can experience the loss of possessions in persecution, sufferings and a lack of material blessings.<sup>9</sup> We must read the *whole counsel* of God, not just single verses which suit our liking.

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<sup>8</sup> As we will see later, 2 Corinthians 8:14 reveals the Corinthian Christians were generally being blessed with abundant prosperity at the time Paul was writing. But note in the same verse, he stated that the Corinthians may in future suffer lack: *“but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack – that there may be equality.”* In Greek, the second usage of the word “lack” is “husterema”. In this context, “husterema” means “want, need, poverty” (Perschbacher, page 423) or “need, want, deficiency in contrast to abundance” (Bauer, page 849).

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 10:32-34 says: *“But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for*

God wills to prosper New Covenant believers by His undeserved grace and not as a totally deserved reward. He wants to prosper us by His definition of prosperity. This prosperity may vary from week to week and can include times of testing and lack. The prosperity which we as New Covenant believers receive in this earthly life is only the *firstfruits* of their promised inheritance. The fullness of this inheritance and associated prosperity will be received after we go to be with the Lord.

## **New Covenant believers and the Mosaic Law's earthly curses and rewards**

Galatians 3:13 shows that New Covenant believers are *freed* from the *curse* they deserve which is listed in the Mosaic Law: "***Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree').***" The curse of the Law is death.

One view also suggests that as our *representative*, Jesus Christ obtained for New Covenant believers promised in the Law for those who obey its commands and statutes. Christ perfectly obeyed the Mosaic Law (see Matthew 5:17). Because we are *in Christ*, God by *unmerited grace* credits to us the earthly blessings promised in the Mosaic Law in passages like Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14. These earthly blessings are then given to us in God's decided measure, time and way as *totally undeserved gifts* and *not as deserved* rewards.

Passages like Philippians 4:19 and 1 Timothy 6:17 reveal that God gives us earthly blessings under the New Covenant as *free gifts* through Jesus Christ.

## **Jesus' teaching on New Covenant giving and rewards**

One view suggests that when in Matthew 6:4, 6:6 and Luke 6:35, Jesus used the future tense in Greek in relation to God rewarding New Covenant believers for their good works, He was referring to rewards in this earthly life. But note in Luke 6:23, Christ reveals that God will reward New Covenant believers in heaven: "***Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.***"

Luke 6:23 is a part of the same sermon in which Jesus spoke the words of Luke 6:35 to the same listeners. Also note Jesus' words in Matthew 6:4 and 6:6 are part of the Sermon on the Mount. Luke 6:20-49 is either Luke's account of the same sermon or is a very similar sermon to the Sermon on the Mount. So by considering the context of Jesus' references to future rewards in Matthew 6:4, 6:6 and Luke 6:35 and cross-referencing them, it is obvious Christ was referring to rewards in heaven and not to earthly rewards.

## **Paul's marvellous teachings about giving and receiving**

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*yourselves in heaven.*" Hebrews 11:37-39 states: "***They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise.***"

In Romans 11:35-36, Paul attacked the underlying foundations of the religious philosophy of giving to God in order to try to receive earned rewards or merited blessings in return: ***“Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”*** Paul here declares that because all things were created by and through Him and are for Him, it is ridiculous to suggest that by giving to Him what He already owns that He then owes us a repayment or fully earned reward as a debt in return. In these verses, Paul also shows that even the partially deserved rewards believers receive for giving to God are in one sense not really deserved or merited either.<sup>10</sup>

In Greek, the expression ***“first given”*** in Romans 11:35 is a form of the word “prodidomi” which is made up of the words “pro” meaning “before” and “didomi” meaning “give” (Vine, page 265). Forms of “didomi” are used in Matthew 19:21 and Luke 11:41 in the context of religious people *giving* to the *poor*. In Acts 20:35, Paul uses a form of the word “didomi” when he declared it is more blessed to give to others than to receive. Acts 20:33-35 states: ***“I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”***

In Greek, the expression ***“it shall be repaid”*** in Romans 11:35 is a form of the word “antapodidomi” which means in this context “to give back as an equivalent, to requite, recompense (the ‘anti’ expressing the idea of a complete return)” (Vine, page 513) or “give back, repay, return” (Bauer, page 73) or “to pay something back to someone as the result of an incurred obligation” (Louw and Nida, page 575). Forms of “antapodidomi” are used in Romans 12:19, 2 Thessalonians 1:6 and Hebrews 10:30 in the sense of God repaying the wicked the punishments they fully *deserve* or *merit*.

Also, note a form of “antapodidomi” is used by Jesus in Luke 14:14 in relation to the rewards believers will receive at the Final Judgement: ***“And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”*** Luke 14:12-14 shows believers will be rewarded in heaven for their generous giving to the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. But as Paul taught in Romans 11:35, even such rewards are in one sense not really deserved.

## **The giving principle of grace**

2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15 refers to the taking up of a collection among God’s people to help the poor church at Jerusalem. Acts 11:29, 1 Corinthians 16:1-3, 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 and 8:16-9:5 refer specifically to this gift for the needy. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15, Paul relates giving by believers to the undeserved grace of God 6 times. In 2 Corinthians 8:1, 8:9, 9:8 and 9:14, Paul refers to God’s totally unmerited grace which in these verses is a form of the word “charis” in Greek. 2 Corinthians 9:9 and 9:15 mentions God’s totally *free* undeserved giving.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, Paul refers to God blessing believers who cheerfully give: ***“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward***

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<sup>10</sup> In Romans 11:35-36, Paul does not discuss where Old and New Covenant believers will receive rewards – on Earth or in heaven.

*you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: 'He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness remains forever'. Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God."*

Note in 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, Paul says God will give great blessings in this life to generous believers by His undeserved *grace*. Paul mentions nothing here about God *rewarding* New Covenant believers in this earthly life because of their generous giving. In fact, none of the Greek words for "reward" are used anywhere in the whole of 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15. Many churchgoers wrongly think 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15 refers to believers totally deserving earthly rewards from God because of their generous giving to Him and others. These passages, however, relate to the giving principle of grace. The giving principle of grace refers to:

- we as believers *copying* the *grace-based attitudes and behaviour* of *our Heavenly Father* in giving generously to others because of *love* for them and *concern* for their welfare.
- This is even though the receivers have not earned or merited what we give them. Such giving is not based on any selfish ulterior motive. It is *not giving with the aim of receiving in return*. It is giving from a gracious generous heart and not from the motives of a shrewd investor. Shrewd investors will sometimes donate thousands of dollars to charities if this is a good advertisement for their firm which increases their long-term profits.

The total grace nature of the giving of the Corinthians is seen in the fact that in 2 Corinthians 8:6, 7 and 19, Paul calls their giving "**grace**". In Greek, the word "**grace**" in these three verses are forms of the word "charis". 2 Corinthians 8:8 and 24 show Paul believed the grace-based giving of the Corinthians should be based on *love*. True love gives with the *motive* of *blessing the receiver* and *not* with the *ulterior motive* of obtaining blessings in return. Our attitude should be: "If we are blessed as a result, praise God. If we are not, praise Him also."

Much teaching these days tells believers to give primarily for the ulterior selfish motives of being blessed in return. This is a perfect illustration of the inroads of humanism these days into the church. A principle of God's love is twisted into a humanistic selfish type of love. It is a form of *worldly religiosity*.

Note in 2 Corinthians 9:15, Paul relates the grace giving of believers to God's indescribable gift of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection: "**Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!**" Because of perfect love, God gave Jesus Christ to die for every human being (see John 3:16).

- This is even though He foreknew the majority of humans would not give Him back their appreciation, thanks, love, lives or anything else in return. Even though He foreknew that most humans would respond in this way, this did not result in Him not giving His Son to die a dreadful death for all of them. This is the type of giving God wants us to copy.
- God blessing us further as an *unmerited grace result* of Him seeing us operating in the same grace principles by which He operates. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul said: "**For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.**" Here again, Paul emphasises God blessing us through undeserved grace.

Note in 2 Corinthians 8:6, 8:7 and 8:19, Paul refers to giving by Christians as “**grace**”. In Greek, the word “**grace**” in these three verses are forms of the word “charis”. The word “charis” means “that which is given *freely* and generously” (Louw and Nida, page 569) or “*free favor, free gift, grace*” (Perschbacher, page 436). Because grace is *totally free*, the person who gives in grace *does not expect a return payment* from their giving. The person who gives with the expectation of receiving a recompense or an earned payment for self in return is not giving in grace. He is giving as a *business investment*.

Note in Romans 4:4, Paul contrasted God’s “grace” and Him being indebted to us because of our good works: “**Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.**” In Greek, the word “**debt**” above is a form of the word “opheilema” which means “what is owed, one’s due, it is not considered a favor” (Bauer, page 598). Also in Greek, the word “**wages**” above is misthos” which means “a recompense based upon what a person has *earned* and thus *deserves*” (Louw and Nida, page 491) or “pay, wages, reward or punishment” (Bauer, page 523). Therefore, Paul is contrasting God’s grace to rewards. Grace is *unmerited* and *not based on good works* like tithing and giving to God. Rewards are *merited* by *good works* like tithing and giving.

In context, Romans 11:6 is referring to election and salvation. But it also contains a more general principle of how God operates: “**And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.**” This verse teaches that if we can merit blessings by good works, these blessings are then not by God’s grace.

Modern Mosaic Law-centred churchgoers want to return us to the Old Covenant mentality of giving to God so we can try to earn merited rewards in return.

When 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 refers to God giving blessings by His undeserved grace to generous givers, it calls this *sowing* and *reaping*.

Galatians 6:7-10 also mentions sowing and reaping: “**Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.**” In context, Galatians 6:6-10 seems to be referring to sowing and reaping either eternal life or everlasting destruction and not earthly blessings.

It is very sad that some have corrupted the wonderful principles of unselfishness, love and giving found in Galatians 6:6-10 into a never-fail-get-rich scheme. As a result giving is no longer based on unselfishness and love but instead is centred on what self can get in return. Sowing and reaping is a *grace giving principle* and *not a Law-based, earning-totally-deserved rewards-formula*.

Also note in the context of 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15, Paul does not relate the sowing and reaping principle to tithing to the Church or to receiving merited rewards. This passage relates to giving generously to poor needy fellow believers and not to tithes for providing the needs of church leaders. 2 Corinthians 9:7 emphasises that the sowing and reaping principle mentioned in the previous verse does not relate to tithes. It does this by saying: “**So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**”

In Greek, the word “**necessity**” is “anankes” which means “an obligation of a compelling nature” (Louw and Nida, page 671) or “compulsion” (Perschbacher, page 20). Tithing under the

Mosaic Covenant was a command or obligation or compulsion. This is why Malachi 3:8-11 cannot be applied to any verse in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15. The latter relates to free-will giving to the poor and not tithing under compulsion. Also, as shown later, the sowing and reaping verse – 2 Corinthians 9:6 – refers to God giving free gifts and not merited rewards to believers who generously give free gifts to poor other believers.

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15, Paul refers to the giving by prosperous believers at the Church at Corinth and surrounding areas to believers in financial hardship in Judea. 2 Corinthians 9:8 says: “**And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.**” Note that here Paul refers to the collective abundance of the Church at Corinth and the surrounding Roman province of Achaia. His words here do not reveal whether some or many or every member of the Church at Corinth and Achaia were economically prospering.

In this verse, Paul refers to the possibility that the believers in Corinth and surrounding areas “**may have an abundance for every good work.**” In Greek, the expression “**you may have an abundance**” is a form of the word “perisseuo” which means “to have such an abundance as to be more than sufficient” (Louw and Nida, page 561). So Paul is referring to the possibility of them having plenty in order to be able to help needy other believers. As we will see later, the New American Standard Bible translates a form of “perisseuo” as “**prosperity**” in Philippians 4:12.<sup>11</sup>

Note Paul relates this having of a financial or material abundance to God causing His *unmerited grace* to abound towards these giving believers. The expression “**to make abound**” is also a form of the word “perisseuo” in Greek. Here we see the prosperity which New Covenant believers receive is based totally on God’s undeserved grace. Such New Covenant prosperity is *not a deserved* reward in any way.

Paul was so balanced in his teaching. In 2 Corinthians 9:11, he told the believers at Corinth and surrounding areas: “**you are enriched in everything for all liberality**” (N.K.J.V.) or “**you will be enriched in everything for all liberality**” (N.A.S.B.).<sup>12</sup> Paul recognizes the fact God had enriched or would enrich these believers in these lands.<sup>13</sup>

But then in 2 Corinthians 8:14<sup>14</sup> and 9:12 Paul spoke of the great financial needs of the believers in Judea. In 2 Corinthians 8:14, Paul speaks of the financial *lack* of believers in Judea compared to the relative financial abundance of the believers at Corinth and surrounding areas. In Greek, the word “**lack**” used twice is “husterema” which means in this context “need, want, poverty” (Vine, page 350) or “need, want, deficiency in contrast to abundance” (Bauer, page 849) or “that which is lacking in what is essential or needed” (Louw and Nida, page 562). In

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<sup>11</sup> Note the expression “**you may have an abundance**” is in the subjective mood in Greek. The subjective mood refers to the fact their having an abundance was a strong possibility but not necessarily a fact.

<sup>12</sup> In Greek, the expression “**are enriched**” or “**will be enriched**” is a form of the word “ploutizo” and is in the present tense. The New King James Version translates this present tense form of “ploutizo” in a present ongoing sense. But the New American Standard Bible translates it in a future ongoing sense. In Greek, the present tense does not relate primarily to time, but instead refers mostly to ongoing – continuous or repeated – action. So this explains the disagreement between the expert translators.

<sup>13</sup> In Greek, the verb “**are enriched**” or “**will be enriched**” is in the passive voice. The passive voice signifies the fact that someone else was or would be enriching them. The context of this verse suggests God is the enricher of the believers at Corinth and Achaia. This is because the previous verse refers to Him supplying seed to the sower and bread for food.

<sup>14</sup> Another view suggests the “**others**” of 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 refers to the Macedonian believers and not to those in Judea.

Greek, the word “*abundance*” used first in 2 Corinthians 8:14 is “*perisseuma*” which means “that which exists in abundance” (Louw and Nida, page 600).

In 2 Corinthians 9:12, Paul spoke of “*the needs of the saints*” in Jerusalem. In Greek, the word “*needs*” is also a form of the word “*husterema*”. In 2 Corinthians 11:9, Paul uses the word “*husterema*” in relation to his own lack at a particular time. This confirms what he said in Philippians 4:12 about him experiencing lack at times: “*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.*” (N.A.S.B.) In Greek, the expression “*to live in prosperity*” in Philippians 4:12 is a form of the word “*perisseuo*” and “*suffering need*” is a form of the word “*hustereo*”. “*Perisseuo*” was defined earlier. “*Hustereo*” means “to be lacking in what is essential or needed” (Louw and Nida, page 562) or “lack, be lacking, go without” (Bauer, page 849).

A form of the word “*hustereo*” is used in Hebrews 11:37 in relation to the fact that various heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11:35-40 experienced great financial lack or being destitute at times.

In Romans 15:26, Paul refers to “*the poor among the saints at Jerusalem*”. In Greek, the word “*poor*” here is the plural form of the adjective “*ptochos*” which means “pertaining to being poor or destitute” (Louw and Nida, page 564) or “dependent on others for support” (Bauer, page 728).

## God’s unmerited grace through believers to other believers

Note in 2 Corinthians 8:1, Paul calls the giving of the Macedonian believers to poor believers in Judea “*the grace of God*”. By calling their giving “*the grace of God*”, Paul was emphasising it was an undeserved unmerited gift by God through the Macedonians to His people in Judea and not a merited reward to the Judean believers in any way.<sup>15</sup> In Greek, the word “*grace*” in 2 Corinthians 8:1 is a form of the word “*charis*”. The same form of “*charis*” is used in 1 Corinthians 16:3 in relation to the gift of the Corinthians to the needy believers in Judea.

Acts 2:44-45, 4:32, 4:34 and 4:37 reveal how exceptionally generous the wealthier Jewish believers had been previously towards the poorer believers in Jerusalem. According to Matthew 6:2-4, Jesus promised that God would in future repay or reward believers who give to the needy with good motives. Matthew 6:3-4 states: “*But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*”(N.A.S.B.)

In Greek, the word “*repay*” here is the future tense form of the word “*apodidomi*” which means in this context “to render, reward, recompense” (Bauer, page 90) or “to recompense someone, whether positively or negatively, depending upon what the individual deserves; to make a payment, with the implication of such a payment being in response to an incurred obligation” (Louw and Nida, pages 491 and 575). A form of “*apodidomi*” is used in Revelation 22:12 in relation to Jesus Christ giving believers rewards for their good works. The context of this latter verse relates to rewards after Jesus’ Second Coming.

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<sup>15</sup> In Romans 15:26-27, Paul stated that in one sense, the Macedonian and all other Gentile believers were *indebted* to the Jewish believers for having passed on a spiritual heritage and the Gospel to Gentile believers. But note these verses do not say that God was indebted to the Jewish believers. Instead the reverse was true. The Jewish believers were totally indebted to God.

The generous New Covenant Jewish believers mentioned in Acts 2:44-45, 4:32, 4:34 and 4:37 would receive partially deserved rewards from Christ after His Second Coming for their giving. But added to this, Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 8:1 that God's financial blessings to them in this earthly life were expressions of His totally undeserved grace and were not merited rewards. In 2 Corinthians 8:6, 7 and 19, Paul again calls the giving of God's people to the poor believers in Jerusalem "**grace**". Note also 2 Corinthians 8:1 and 8:6 use exactly the same form of the Greek word for "**grace**" – "charis" – used in Romans 4:4. In Romans 4:4, Paul emphasises the opposite nature of God's unmerited grace and His merited rewards for good works: "**Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.**"

So God gave financial blessings to the New Covenant believers in Judea as an expression of His undeserved grace and not as a merited reward or repayment for their good works of giving, prayer, fasting and so on. These latter good works would be rewarded after Jesus' Second Coming.

## **Sowing and reaping earthly free gifts and not earthly rewards**

2 Corinthians 9:6 says: "**But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.**" One popular modern legalistic interpretation of the above verse claims it teaches that if we give generously to the Church and/or the needy, God will give us merited earthly rewards in response. This is claimed to be a "universal law of rewards or repayment". Millions of dollars have been made by various preachers through the sale of their books and tapes related to this teaching.

But note 2 Corinthians 9:6 does not have anything to do with merited rewards. Instead, it relates to the *unmerited consequences* of believers fulfilling the God-determined condition of sowing bountifully. The reaping bountifully consequence is a result of God's pure undeserved grace. Proof of this is the fact the expression "**and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully**" is in Greek "kai o speiron ep eulogiais ep eulogiais kai therizei". The Greek word "eulogiais" used twice here is a plural form of the noun "eulogia" which means in this context "a blessing, a benefit bestowed" (Vine, page 70). Note in the previous verse – 2 Corinthians 9:5, Paul uses a singular form of the noun "eulogia" which is translated "**generous gift**" (N.K.J.V.) or "**bountiful gift**" (N.A.S.B.), when referring to the gift the believers in Corinth and Achaia were giving to needy believers in Jerusalem. In the context of 2 Corinthians 9:5, Louw and Nida say "eulogia" means "that which is bestowed or *given* as a blessing or benefit" (page 570) and Perschbacher says it means "a gift, benevolence" (page 181). "Benevolence" is "an act of kindness; generosity" (Modern Home Dictionary, page 96) and is not a deserved reward. So in context, 2 Corinthians 9:6 teaches God gives bountiful blessings as *free gifts* to those who give bountiful *free gifts* to the needy. In context, this sowing and reaping verse does not teach God gives earthly blessings as merited rewards or earned payments for our free gifts to others. "Ep eulogiais ep eulogiais" means "blessings for blessings" or "free gifts for free gifts".

Refer to the later section "A wonderful promise but linked partly to turning from known sin" for details about how the Greek word "eulogia" is used numerous times in other New Testament verses in relation to free gifts of God's grace.

Someone may argue "This cannot be right. Very rarely does any human give free gifts to those who give free gifts to others." But note just because humans rarely give free gifts to those who

give free gifts to others, does not mean God is like the former. In Isaiah 55:9, God said **‘My ways are higher than your ways.’**”

## **Eliphaz’s version of sowing and reaping**

Job 1:9-11 and 2:4-5 record Satan asked God’s permission to take Job’s earthly prosperity, family and health away from him. God granted this request. Job 2:11-13 reveals that after Job’s three friends – Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar – heard of Job’s dreadful suffering, they came to comfort him and mourn with him. They wept for him and sat with him on the ground for seven days and nights without saying a word. His three friends also did what Joshua and the elders of Israel did after the Israelite army had been defeated at Ai (see Joshua 7:6). They put dust on their heads and tore their clothes.

Then after Job had spoken about his suffering (see Job 3:1-26), these three men of “faith” corrected Job. On a surface reading, the words of Job’s three friends seem to be in agreement with the teachings of the written Word of God. But as Job 42:7-8 shows, God was not pleased with their simplistic religious ideas: **“And so it was, after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has. Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you. For I will accept him, lest I deal with you according to your folly; because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.’”**

Eliphaz saw Job’s suffering in terms of a *supposed universal law of sowing and reaping*. Job 4:7-8 records his simplistic explanation of Job’s loss of earthly prosperity and health: **“Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off? Even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.”**

In Matthew 13:3-9, Jesus Christ spoke about sowing the *seeds* of the *Gospel*. 1 Peter 1:23-25 refers to the *Gospel* as a *seed*. Also as stated previously, the Apostle Paul taught a sound version of the principle of sowing and reaping in relation to *receiving eternal life* or *eternal destruction* (see Galatians 6:7-9) and to *the giving principle of grace* (see 2 Corinthians 9:6-11). But Jesus, Peter and Paul did not teach sowing and reaping as some type of universal law which applies to every human circumstance.

Eliphaz, however, believed that any person who is experiencing a lack of earthly prosperity and health must be sinning in some way. He taught that poverty and sickness were *always caused* by the person sowing the wrong way. Also he had the false belief that the wicked experience dreadful physical pain every day (see Job 15:20).

Tragically in recent decades, numerous sincere zealous fellow Pentecostals and Charismatics have been bombarded through the Christian media with an Eliphaz-type teaching on such matters. Note I strongly believe God prospers and provides the needs of New Covenant believers (see 1 Corinthians 16:2 and Philippians 4:19). I also believe physical healing was provided in the atoning death of Jesus Christ (see Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 8:16-17 and 1 Peter 2:24) and that sickness is *sometimes* caused by sin (see Psalm 31:10 and James 5:16).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Refer to the section “Healing is in the atonement” in Chapter “Healing” in Volume for more details.

But to suggest that every believer who is presently experiencing any lack of earthly prosperity and health must have unconfessed known sin and/or is sowing and reaping the wrong way is to teach the false doctrines of Eliphaz. As shown in the sections “Read the whole counsel of God’s Word!” and “Paul’s example”, the Apostle Paul and many others with great faith have experienced times of great lack or financial difficulty (see Philippians 4:11-12 and Hebrews 11:36-39). But note the Word of God does not accuse Paul and the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:36-39 of causing their own lack of earthly prosperity through unconfessed known sin, a lack of faith and/or not sowing and reaping the supposedly right way.

Eliphaz was so sure of the “truth” of his own religious theories about sowing and reaping, prosperity and suffering that he was certain Job must have committed great wickedness. In Job 22:5-9, he accused Job of committing sins which Job had never done: ***“Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquity without end? For you have taken pledges from your brother for no reason, and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have not given the weary water to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. But the mighty man possessed the land, and the honorable man dwelt in it. You have sent the widows away empty, and the strength of the fatherless was crushed.”*** In Job 22:23, Eliphaz also implies Job must have turned from the Lord to be suffering so much.

### **Eliphaz-type beliefs are common today**

In Job 12:6, Job stated that some or many wicked people at his time were prospering: ***“The tents of robbers prosper, and those who provoke God are secure – in what God provides by His hand.”*** But in Job Chapters 15:17-35, Eliphaz attacks Job’s above ideas. Eliphaz said that the wicked never prosper but only suffer in their earthly lives. Job 15:20 and 29 records Eliphaz’ words: ***“The wicked man writhes in pain all his days...He will not be rich, nor will his wealth continue, nor will his possessions overspread the earth.”***

Zophar was another of Job’s comforters. Zophar disagreed with Eliphaz slightly. He admits the wicked can prosper for a *short time* in this earthly life. In Job 20:5, Zophar says: ***“...the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment.”*** In Job 20:21, Zophar refers to the earthly well-being of the wicked would sooner or later lose all their earthly prosperity. He said Job was an example of this type of briefly prosperous wicked person. Jesus Christ’s words about poor Lazarus and the wicked rich man in Luke 16:19-26 contradict this idea. This latter man remained wealthy until the time of his death.

Similarly, I have read many Eliphaz-type books which argue that believers who are experiencing any present lack of earthly prosperity must have much unconfessed sin or have turned from the Lord in some way. Some such cultic “Christian” books even suggest the only reason Paul suffered lack, beatings, imprisonment and other great hardships (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 and 12:10) was he lacked faith. This is despite God’s Words in Acts 9:16, 20:23 and Galatians 6:17. Some of these same Biblically imbalanced writings make the ridiculous claim that the reason believers in Communist countries used to suffer so much before in the 1900’s was they lacked faith.

It is amazing how false religious teachings continually reappear throughout human history. Eliphaz’s belief in a universal law of sowing and reaping which applies to every human circumstance has found many sincere unsuspecting victims in the Church in recent decades. The modern-day teachers of Eliphaz’s overgeneralised simplistic ideas have used Paul’s godly

words in Galatians 6:7-8 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 as supposed proof for their views. But they apply Paul's God-inspired words in these verses to every human circumstance – something Paul never did.

Eliphaz believed in God (see Job 4:9 and 15:15). He was not a heathen, pagan, atheist or agnostic. Job 5:8 records he spoke wonderfully about seeking God: ***“But as for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause.”*** Job 5:9-16 reveals Eliphaz also said some beautiful things about God. He rightly believed God could prosper and bless those who returned to Him from their sins (see Job 22:23-28). Job 4:12-21 may suggest Eliphaz had a dream from God. As we see in Job 42:9, he wanted to obey the Lord. But like many others he had been deceived by *man-made religious traditions* and his own false *reasonings* about what he had experienced in his observations of the lives of other humans. In Job 15:17-19, he said: ***“I will tell you, hear me; what I have seen I will declare, what wise men have told, not hiding anything received from their fathers, to whom alone the land was given, and no alien passed among them.”***

This is similar to numerous modern-day very sincere Charismatics and Pentecostals. They believe in God, are seeking His face and desire to obey Him. But they have been deceived by man-made religious traditions and their own human reasonings about why believers sometimes suffer. They imagine their beliefs about these matters are revelations of God. They have been assured by various people that their Eliphaz-type beliefs are “based on the Word”. But tragically, they do not realize that their attitudes are based on simplistic overgeneralisations which have become man-made traditions bringing bondage to God's people.

This is similar to how in Jesus Christ's time, some of the Jews had twisted the Old Testament teaching about personal sin sometimes resulting in sickness (see Deuteronomy 28:15 and 27-28) into the man-made tradition that all sickness is caused by personal sin. Christ corrected this man-made overgeneralisation in John 9:1-3: ***“Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And his disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.’”***

Ezekiel 18:1-2 records a similar man-made religious tradition had developed in Ezekiel's time. The Jews were misinterpreting Exodus 20:5 to mean that the *guilt* of the sins of one generation is transferred to the following generation even if the following generation is very godly. Ezekiel 18:1-18 corrects this false religious tradition. These Jews had interpreted Exodus 20:5 contrary to Deuteronomy 24:16. The latter verse says: ***“The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.”*** Note 2 Kings 14:6 and 2 Chronicles 25:4 refer to King Amaziah obeying the principle of not holding children guilty for the sins of their fathers.

Exodus 20:5 and 2 Samuel 21:1-14 shows the *consequences* of the sins of the parents sometimes comes on the children. But personal guilt is not transferable.

By misinterpreting verses like Exodus 20:5 and 2 Samuel 21:1-14 by their own human reasonings about what they have observed among their fellow Jews, a false man-made religious tradition had developed by Ezekiel's time. Ezekiel 18:2 reveals this idea had become a popular *false proverb*. These Jews in Ezekiel's time had probably observed the sufferings of children with wicked parents and then reasoned that God regarded the guilt of the parents as being the children's also. To support their reasonings, they could quote Exodus 20:5 and 2 Samuel 21:1-

14. But they did not realise they were interpreting such verses contrary to other verses on the same topic.

In Jeremiah 31:29-30, Jeremiah corrected the same false proverb: ***“In those days they shall say no more: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.”***

## **God crediting our giving to our account**

In Philippians 4:15-17, Paul reveals that supplying the needs of God-ordained church leaders results in God crediting this to our account: ***“Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.”*** In the original Greek, the word ***“account”*** above is the word “logon”. In the context of Philippians 4:17, the word “logon” means “a record of assets and liabilities” (Louw and Nida, page 583) or “settlement (of an account)” (Bauer, page 478).

The same word “logon” is used in Matthew 12:36, 18:23, 25:19, Luke 16:2, Romans 14:12, Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Peter 4:5 in relation to humans *giving account to Jesus Christ after their death* and them receiving rewards at that time if they are real Christians or punishments if they are not. The usages of “logon” in these seven other verses tends to support the idea that in Philippians 4:17, Paul is referring to their generous giving being recorded by God on an account and Him later rewarding them at Jesus’ Judgement Seat.

In Philippians 4:19, Paul tells the same Philippian believers that God will supply their earthly needs by His undeserved grace through Christ: ***“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”*** This verse refers to God supplying the needs of the Philippians ***“according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus”*** which means by *undeserved grace through Jesus Christ and not by fully deserved rewards*. Note in Romans 9:23, Ephesians 1:7, 2:7, 3:8 and Colossians 1:27, Paul uses the same word ***“riches”*** in relation to His *undeserved mercy and grace* through Jesus Christ. Romans 9:23 speaks of ***“the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy”***. Ephesians 2:7 refers to ***“the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”***.

Matthew 25:14-29 is a very good example of what the word “logon” or ***“account”*** means in Philippians 4:17. Matthew 25:19 uses the word “logon” in Greek. In this parable, Jesus Christ taught that His accounting with humans at His Judgement Seat after His Second Coming is similar to that of a human master who later settled accounts with his slaves to whom he had entrusted his material possessions and money while he was away. Note in the original Greek, the word ***“talent”*** used many times throughout Matthew 25:14-29 is the word “talanion” which referred to a sum of money (Vine, page 617). The master gave them his possessions and money not as their permanent possession, but in trust while he was away (see verse 14). Note verse 18 calls the money ***“his lords money”***, and verse 27 reveals the master regarded the money he gave to his slaves as his money even after he gave it to them. In verse 27, the master called the money ***“my money”***. This parable symbolically teaches that Jesus Christ – our Heavenly Master – will require us to ***“settle accounts”*** with Him when He returns. In Matthew 25:19, Christ said: ***“After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.”***

The usage of “*account*” in this parable fits in with the fact that in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus spoke of His future Final Judgement. Note in the Parable of the Talents, verses 21 and 23 symbolically teach Jesus will reward His servants after He returns, just as the human master will reward His servants after he returns. It is also important to note there is not one verse in the New Testament which uses the word “*account*” or “*logon*” in the sense of Jesus settling accounts with believers by giving them merited rewards during their earthly lives.

## **Give and it will be given to you**

Our previous discussion leads on to Jesus’ words in Luke 6:38: “*Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.*” The above verse is one of the most abused verses in the whole of the Bible. This verse is often quoted out of the context Jesus spoke it. The result is it is frequently given meanings contrary to what Jesus intended. We must read the whole passage it comes from – Luke 6:27-38 – and compare it to the Matthew 7:1-2 parallel account of Jesus’ same Words, to understand what the Lord was really saying. Note:

- In Luke 6:27-30, Jesus teaches we should love our enemies, do good to those who hate, curse and spitefully use us. In these verses, He also instructs us to do good to those who hit us on the face and who steal our cloak from us. Luke 6:27-30 says: “*But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask for them back.*” In the above verses, Jesus did not command us to give to others with the primary motivation of receiving an even greater amount back in return.
- In Luke 6:31, Christ taught we should treat others *how we want them to treat us*: “*And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.*” I ask you, “How would you feel if your wife or husband, children or parents told you they are generous and kind to you primarily so they could receive much more back in return from someone else? Would you feel hurt? Would you regard their ‘love’ as superficial and based primarily on ulterior selfish motives?” Therefore Luke 6:38 is not teaching us to give generously and be kind to others from the main motive of receiving back.
- In Luke 6:33, Jesus challenged those religious people who only did generous things for others who were generous to them: “*And if you do good to those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.*” Christ said we are *no better than ordinary sinners* if this is the type of generosity and giving principles by which we operate.
- In Luke 6:34-36, Jesus teaches that if we give to others with the aim of receiving material blessings in return from them, we are not acting as sons of the Most High God but are *copying the behaviour of sinners*: “*And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Highest. For He is kind to the*

*unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.*” As previously said, Christ emphasises here that God is a kind or generous Giver even to evil people and those who give Him no thanks at all in return. Christ says that we will be truly acting as sons of our Heavenly Father if we love our enemies, do good to them, lend to them while hoping for nothing in return and are merciful to them in their need. Verse 35 above promises we will be rewarded by God if we *love our enemies* and *do good to them* without hoping for anything in return from them.

- In Luke 6:34-35, Jesus spoke of lending to our enemies in need, without wanting them to repay the loans. I have never once heard or read an advocate of the idea Luke 6:38 teaches that we should give primarily in order to receive blessings in return, say we need to do this also. If we are not lending like this to our needy enemies, we are phoney if we expect the earthly blessings of Luke 6:38.
- In Luke 6:34-35, Jesus amended one of the teachings of the Mosaic Law by bringing it into a *New Covenant superlative grace setting*. Under the Mosaic Covenant, God commanded the Israelites to not charge interest on loans to the poor or to fellow Israelites (see Exodus 22:25, Leviticus 25:35-38 and Deuteronomy 23:17-20). The Israelites were allowed to charge interest on loans to foreigners (see Deuteronomy 23:20). But under the New Covenant, Christ commanded we broaden our generosity about forsaking interest to include our enemies in need. This is real Holy Spirit-inspired *love*.
- In Luke 6:37, Jesus instructs us to not pronounce eternal condemnation on others and to forgive others. Forgiving others involves *giving* forgiveness. This verse also shows we should not set ourselves up as their Final Judge.
- All of Christ's previous comments are the background of Luke 6:38. So when Jesus said, **“Give and it will be given to you: good measure pressed down, shaken together...”**, He was referring to loving our enemies and *giving* and/or *lending* them *money* or *material goods* in their need. Christ was also meaning we should give *forgiveness* to them for hating, cursing and using us. Also, He was saying we should not pronounce eternal condemnation on them and should be kind and merciful to them. This is the context of Luke 6:38.
- Luke 6:27-38 does not specify that God promises to make all generous givers multi-millionaires like the Roman Emperors of the time.
- Luke 6:38 teaches we will receive back if we give generously. But note it does not say *precisely when* we will receive in return. In Greek, the expressions **“it will be given to you”** and **“will be put”** are both in the *future* tense. The future tense here may refer to later today, tomorrow, next month, next year or many years from now. Only God knows when.
- In Greek, the expression **“will be put”** is a third person, plural, future tense form of the word “didomi”. Therefore, it really means “they will give”. This is why the King James Version translates it as **“shall men give”**. Alfred Marshall’s “The Interlinear NASB – NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English” translates the above form of “didomi” as **“they will give”**. This may mean God will give to generous believers who forgive and love their enemies and so on, indirectly through other humans.
- The usage of the expression **“into your bosom”** in Luke 6:38 seems to confirm this verse is referring to receiving unmerited earthly blessings from God. This is because **“bosom”** in Greek is “kolpos” which means “the bosom of a garment, the hollow formed by the upper forepart of a loose garment, bound by a girdle and used for carrying or keeping things” (Vine, page 75). The bosom is the area related to carrying material blessings.

- Luke 6:38 is interpreted by many to mean God gives money and material blessings to others in the exact measure they give money and material blessings to others. For example, if someone does not give anything to needy people, ministries or local churches, it is claimed God will not give them anything. But such an interpretation is contrary to Luke 6:35 and Matthew 5:45 which show *God gives good gifts to evil, unrighteous and unthankful* people – many of whom obviously give no money or material blessings to needy people, ministries or local churches.
- Some claim Luke 6:38 relates to giving money to wealthy American television preachers or to our local churches. But the context of Luke 6:38 shows this verse has nothing to do with such things. If we add our extra meanings to verses of Scripture and interpret them contrary to other verses on the same topic, we are doing what Satan did in Matthew 4:6 when He quoted Psalm 91:11-12 in ways which added extra meanings to it which were contrary to Deuteronomy 6:16.

## **The giving principle of totally undeserved grace and mercy**

Luke 6:38 refers to the same grace giving and unmerited grace consequences principle found in 2 Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9. This totally undeserved grace principle has nothing to do with totally or even partially deserved rewards.

The immediate surrounding context of Luke 6:38 suggests this verse cannot relate to deserved rewards. For example, the previous related verse 37 says in part: “*...forgive and you will be forgiven.*” There is a very close relationship between Luke 6:37 and 38. Throughout the whole Bible, forgiveness of sin is by God’s totally undeserved grace and mercy, and is *never* a deserved reward in even the slightest way. The expression “*for it will be put into your bosom for with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you*” partly relates to Jesus’ prior words, “*forgive, and you will be forgiven*”. If we forgive others, God does not forgive us as a deserved reward in any way. God sets our forgiving others as the condition on which He will forgive us by His totally undeserved grace. Fulfilling the God-determined condition does not result in a deserved reward. Instead, fulfilling the condition results in a promised manifestation of God’s unmerited grace.

Matthew 7:1-2 is Matthew’s account of Jesus’ same words found in Luke 6:37-38. They are both parts of the same Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7:1-2, Christ said: “*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgement you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you.*” Here Matthew relates “*the measure you use, it will be measured back to you*” to not trying to act as other people’s Final Judge. In Luke 6:37-38, Christ links not judging others to forgiving our enemies. When we do not judge those who hate and curse us, but instead forgive them, we are being *merciful, gracious and loving* towards them. Earlier in Luke 6:27-36, Jesus commanded us to be merciful and loving like this. Therefore, in a sense we are “giving” grace, mercy and love to our enemies when we treat them like this. In Luke 6:38, God promises to give expressions of His unmerited grace and mercy in response to such giving of love, grace and mercy.

In Luke 6:35, Jesus says God is “*kind*” or “*chrestos*” in Greek. In Romans 2:4, Paul uses a form of the word “*chrestos*” when He says God is kind to sinful unbelievers. When used to describe persons, the word “*chrestos*” means “*kind, loving, benevolent*” (Bauer, page 886) or “*good, gracious, kind*” (Vine, page 343). “*Chrestos*” relates to God’s unmerited grace or kindness. In 1

Peter 2:3, the word “chrestos” is translated as “*gracious*” in the New King James Version: “...*the Lord is gracious.*” The close link between forgiving others and being kind to them is seen in Ephesians 4:32: “*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.*” The word “*kind*” in the above verse is a form of the Greek word “chrestos” used also in Luke 6:35 of God’s treatment of those who do not deserve anything from Him.

In Luke 6:35, Jesus refers to God being kind to the unthankful and evil. But note God is only kind to evil people *in this earthly life*. After unrepentant evil people die, God is no longer kind or gracious to them. Instead He punishes them (see Hebrews 9:27). When God is kind to unrepentant evil people, He is acting in pure undeserved grace and is not giving them deserved rewards. In Luke 6:36, Christ refers to God acting in mercy. God’s undeserved mercy and His giving of deserved rewards are two different things. Luke 6:27-34 refer to believers doing good *in this earthly life* to those who *do not deserve such blessings*. In other words, in these verses Christ instructs believers to treat others with undeserved kindness, grace and mercy and not to treat them on the basis of whether they deserve such treatment.

Despite the sole mention of believers being rewarded in verse 35, the whole context of Luke 6:27-37 refers to undeserved grace and mercy being manifested here on Earth and not to any supposed deserved rewards on Earth. Therefore, Luke 6:38 is teaching: *Give out of undeserved kindness, grace and mercy to those who do not deserve these things at all and receive blessings as totally unmerited consequences in this earthly life from God out of His mercy and kindness.* In other words, Luke 6:38 relates to God’s conditional unmerited grace.

### **Final comments on Luke 6:35 and 6:38**

Note:

- Luke 6:35 shows we will be rewarded after death by God for our loving response, kindness and generous giving to our enemies, but we should not do these things with the prime motivation of receiving in return.
- Luke 6:38 contains a wonderful God-given unmerited grace promise. But may we be delivered from usages of it which lead us into bondage, carnality and selfishness – the very things Jesus in Luke 6:27-37 is teaching us to avoid.

### **Slightly deserved rewards in heaven undergirded by God’s grace**

Luke 6:35 refers to God rewarding believers. In this verse in Greek, Christ uses the word “misthos” meaning “pay, wages, reward” (Bauer, page 523) or “a recompense based upon what a person has *earned* and thus *deserves*” (Louw and Nida, page 491). Luke 6:35 refers to slightly deserved rewards undergirded by God’s grace and not fully deserved rewards for perfect obedience every day to the Law. This verse relates to God rewarding believers after they die on the basis of their treatment of those who hate, curse, hit and/or spitefully use them. As recorded in Luke 6:23, earlier in the same sermon Jesus said our rewards are received *in heaven*. So I believe the later rewards referred to in Luke 6:35 will be received in heaven and not on Earth.

Someone may argue, “Because Luke 6:38 is in the same broader context as Luke 6:35, this means Luke 6:38 refers to merited earthly rewards.” But note in other parts of the New Testament, teaching about God’s grace through Christ is found near teaching about merited

rewards in heaven (see Philippians 4:19 and 23 compared to Philippians 4:15-17, Hebrews 10:29 compared to Hebrews 10:35 and 2 John 3 compared to 2 John 8). So there is no problem regarding Luke 6:38 as referring to the unmerited grace results of fulfilling God's stated conditions and Luke 6:35 as relating to rewards in heaven.

## **Prosperous carnal Corinthians and needy more godly Macedonians**

According to the simplistic Mosaic Law-based version of prosperity taught by many modern preachers, those New Covenant believers who give generously to support church leaders and to help the needy and who live more godly lives in general should be prospering economically more than believers who do not manifest such generosity and good works.

But note, Paul taught that:

- God was economically prospering the believers at Corinth and in the surrounding Roman province of Achaia (see 1 Corinthians 16:2 and 2 Corinthians 8:14). This is despite the fact the Corinthian Church contained so many very carnal, unspiritual worldly Christians (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-3) who only understood the very basic "milk" of God's Word and who were knowingly practicing many sins openly. They were constantly fighting (see 1 Corinthians 3:3) and had very little unity (see 1 Corinthians 1:11-13). They were allowing one of their members to live in an open adulterous relationship with his step-mother (see 1 Corinthians 5:1-13). Some were getting drunk (see 1 Corinthians 11:21). Many or all of the Corinthians regarded Paul's public speaking as "*contemptible*" and his Biblical letters as being "*weighty*". In Greek, the word "*contemptible*" is a form of the word "exoutheneo" which means "to despise someone or something on the basis it is worthless or no value" (Louw and Nida, page 763). "*Weighty*" in Greek is a form of the word "barus" meaning figuratively in this context "burdensome, difficult to fulfil of obligations (or) demands, severe" (Bauer, page 134).

But as 2 Corinthians 11:20 shows, many of the Corinthians had allowed false apostles to devour them. In Greek, the word "*devours*" in this verse is a form of the word "katesthio" which means "to take advantage of someone" (Louw and Nida, page 758) or "exploits, robs" (Bauer, page 422). The Corinthians had allowed false apostles to exploit them. Mark 12:40 uses a form of "katesthio" in relation to the scribes devouring the houses of widows.

In 2 Corinthians 8:10-11 and 9:1-5, Paul shows that the Church at Corinth had been previously gathering a gift to help the poor believers in Jerusalem. But the context of 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15 reveals the prosperous Corinthian Church had lost its zeal for giving this gift. It is possible that the greedy false apostles who had recently gained strong influence at the Corinthian Church had encouraged this change of attitude. These false apostles were primarily interested in obtaining big offerings for themselves from the Corinthians. These exploiters were manipulative covetous fund-raisers.

Paul compared his and Timothy's ministry to the false apostles in 2 Corinthians 2:17 when Paul said, "*for we are not, as so many, peddling the Word of God...*" In Greek, the word "*peddling*" here is a form of the word "kupeleuo" meaning "to be a *retailer*, to peddle, to *hucksterize*" (Vine, page 130) or "to *engage in retail business*, with the implication of deceptiveness and greedy motives" (Louw and Nida, page 581). A huckster is someone who

bargains or haggles for money. Huskers use many different types of clever schemes and tricks to extract as much money as possible from their listeners.

In 2 Corinthians 11:7, Paul asked the Corinthians whether they thought he had sinned by preaching the Gospel to them free of charge. In Greek society at the time, professional philosophers sold their wisdom for money. It is possible that the false apostles who were demanding much money from the Corinthian churchgoers, were saying that proof that their “gospel” was better and contained more wisdom than Paul’s amateur message was theirs was priced so much higher than his free Gospel. They may have argued that because they were professional speakers and Paul was only an amateur in speaking (see 2 Corinthians 11:6), their message obviously was of higher quality than Paul’s.

Many or all of the Corinthian believers had later accepted a false gospel, a false Christ and a different spirit to the Holy Spirit, after originally receiving the right Gospel, the true Christ and the Holy Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 11:2-4). In 2 Corinthians 12:20-21, Paul catalogues their sins: ***“For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and licentiousness which they have practiced.”*** Despite all this, God was economically prospering many of their members by His undeserved grace and mercy.

- The Philippians were generally suffering great economic lack or poverty. The Philippian Church was one of the churches in Macedonia. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-3, Paul said: ***“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing.”*** In verse 2 here, Paul mentioned the ***“deep poverty”*** of all or most of the Macedonian believers. In Greek, the word ***“poverty”*** here is “ptocheia” which means “a state of having insufficient possessions” (Louw and Nida, page 564) or “poverty” (Bauer, page 728). The word ***“deep”*** in this verse in Greek is a form of the word “bathos” which means in this context “an extreme degree” (Perschbacher, page 65) or “an extreme point on a scale of extent” (Louw and Nida, page 687). Bauer says that when used together in 2 Corinthians 8:2, “bathos” and “ptocheia” mean “extreme poverty” (page 130).

Despite being in such deep poverty, the Macedonian churches, including the Philippian Church, had very generously helped the even more poverty-stricken believers in Judea.

The Judean believers were worse because Judea was suffering a severe famine, as predicted by the prophet Agabus (see Acts 11:27-30). Another reason for the poverty of the Hebrew Christians was persecution. After initially having favor with non-Christian Jews in Jerusalem (see Acts 2:47), the Jewish Christians were strongly persecuted at various times (see Acts 8:1-3 and 12:1-4). Hebrews 10:32-34 records: ***“But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.”*** Also unbelieving Jews

socially and economically ostracized Jewish Christians. This persecution and exclusion of Christians increased their economic hardship.

Also note in Philippians 4:10-18, Paul stressed that the Philippian believers had very generously supported his ministry time and time again. Philippians 4:10 and 15 records: ***“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity...Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.”*** Here Paul states that the Philippian believers had been extremely generous in their giving to his ministry right from the time he first preached at Philippi. As Acts 16:6-18 reveals, Paul first preached the Gospel at Philippi long before he preached at Corinth. Also as a result, the Philippian Church began *before* the Corinthian Church. So even before Paul recorded the words in 2 Corinthians 8:1-2 about the Philippian and other Macedonian churches experiencing deep poverty, the Philippian Church was actively supporting Paul financially.

Paul does not say it was only a few individuals at Philippi who were materially supporting him. He said the Church at Philippi as a collective unit was supporting him. In Philippians 4:18, Paul reveals that he was experiencing an *abundance* through the giving of the Philippians and their giving to him was regarded as a sacrifice to God: ***“Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.”*** Epaphroditus was the messenger who carried the Philippian gifts to Paul to fulfil his needs (see Philippians 2:25).

Note also in the Book of Philippi, Paul praises the Philippians for their generous giving and does not accuse them of being as carnal and worldly as the Corinthian Church. The Philippians were so remarkably generous in their giving that in 2 Corinthians 8:3-4, Paul said they gave ***“beyond their ability”*** to the more needy believers in Judea. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul commanded the Corinthians to give according to their ability or prosperity. Acts 11:27-29 reveals the believers at Antioch gave according to their ability or prosperity. But the Philippians, Thessalonians and other Macedonian churches gave ***“beyond their ability”***. Considering the Philippians and other Macedonians were already in economic hardship themselves, their giving was tremendous. Also note Paul did not accuse the Philippians of lacking in unity and of regularly practicing the sins which 2 Corinthians 12:20-21 records many Corinthian churchgoers were. Actually in Philippians 2:12, he says the Philippians were always very obedient to the Lord: ***“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence...”***

- The Thessalonian Christians were generally suffering poverty or great economic hardship. The Thessalonian Church was another one of the Macedonian Churches which Paul referred to in 2 Corinthians 8:1-3.

Note in 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 1:8, 3:6-7, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 1:4 and 1:11, Paul mentioned the *faith* of the Thessalonian believers. In 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8, Paul said that the faith of the Thessalonians was a tremendous example to the other believers in all of Macedonia and Achaia: ***“so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.”*** The Roman province of Macedonia contained cities such as Philippi, Berea and

Neapolis and surrounding rural areas. Achaia was the name of the Roman province which comprised all of Greece south of the province of Macedonia. So in 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8, Paul was saying that the Thessalonians' faith was a great example to all believers in the areas of Macedonia and Greece. That was a very high recommendation.

Paul boasted to others about the strong faith of the Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 records this: "***We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure.***" Note also Paul here said that:

1. the Thessalonian Christians *faith* was growing "***exceedingly***". Like all believers, none of the Thessalonians had perfect faith (see 1 Thessalonians 3:10). But the Thessalonians' faith was increasing greatly. In Greek, the phrase "***grows exceedingly***" is a form of the word "huperauxano" which means "grow wonderfully, increase abundantly" (Bauer, page 840) or "to increase exceedingly" (Louw and Nida, page 685 and Perschbacher, page 418) or "increase beyond measure" (Vine, page 283).
2. the love of the Thessalonian believers was abounding or increasing towards each other.

Throughout the Books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Paul praised all the Thessalonian believers except the lazy unruly few mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. In 2 Thessalonians 3:4, Paul told the majority of the Thessalonians: "***And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you.***" In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul spoke about the "***work of faith***" of the Thessalonian Christians. This reveals the faith of the Thessalonians was expressing itself in their actions.

Compare this to Paul's words about the weak faith of the Corinthians and their lack of love for each other. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul questioned their faith: <sup>17</sup> "***Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified.***" As seen earlier, the Corinthian Church contained many very carnal, unspiritual, worldly believers. Also as shown in Chapter "Carnal and spiritual believers", some of the Corinthian churchgoers had backslidden in their hearts from the better attitudes they had had at the time of their conversions.

How different many or all of the Corinthians were to the Thessalonian believers! The Thessalonians mostly showed great love towards each other. But many of the Corinthians were regularly fighting with each other (see 1 Corinthians 1:11-13, 3:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 12:20).

But despite this, God was generally economically prospering the Corinthian believers far more than the Thessalonian believers. This is even though the Thessalonian Church had so many people with *strong faith* and Biblical lifestyles and the Corinthian Church had mostly either worldly believers with weak faith and carnal lifestyles or backsliders.

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<sup>17</sup> In 2 Corinthians 8:7, Paul said that the Corinthians "***abounded in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence and in your love for us.***" But note, however, in 2 Corinthians 6:12-13 and 12:15, Paul showed that the love of the Corinthians for him was limited and did not abound. Therefore in 2 Corinthians 8:7, Paul may have been speaking in faith about what he knew the Corinthians could be *potentially* in Christ. In 2 Corinthians 9:2-4, Paul spoke in similar ways about the potential giving of the Corinthians. This is even though they had not actually given as yet to the needy in Judea.

The persecutions and tribulations which the unbelieving Jews inflicted on believing Jews was one major cause of the latter's poverty. A small minority of carnal Thessalonian churchgoers were not prospering because they were idle (see 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, Paul says that if such people would work, they would not have so many unfulfilled needs.

But the lack of prosperity of the godly majority at the Thessalonian Church was probably at least partly caused by "*the persecutions and tribulations*" which they endured from unbelievers (see 2 Thessalonians 1:4). 1 Thessalonians 2:14 also refers to these persecutions: "*For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews.*"

So the New Testament itself proves that:

1. a more carnal, worldly, sin-practicing local church can be prospered economically far more than a more godly local church. This is at least for a short period of time. This partly explains why many very carnal worldly churches are prospering at present more than some more godly churches.
2. generous giving by believers does not always result in the short-term in God financially prospering them. (If such prosperity was a fully merited reward, God would be indebted to give it immediately it was earned. But since such prosperity is merely an undeserved grace consequence of those with faith in God fulfilling His conditions of giving and of other good works, God can give it *whenever He chooses*. Also, any rewards that He gives at Christ's future Judgement-Seat, for giving and other good works, are only slightly deserved anyway. Refer to the early sections of Chapter "Rewards 1" for more details on the differences between totally deserved rewards and slightly deserved rewards undergirded by God's grace. Because rewards at Christ's future judgement are only slightly deserved, God is not indebted to give them at the exact moment that they are earned in this earthly life.)
3. those with *very strong faith* may experience great lack for certain periods of time (see Hebrews 11:35-40), while those like the Corinthians may be prospering financially *despite their weak faith*.
4. In the New Covenant, God promises to supply believers' needs. In the same covenant, He promises to prosper believers by His grace. But note the examples of the churches in Judea, Philippi and Thessalonica suffering periods of great economic hardship or lack show that the promises of earthly blessings by God's undeserved grace and mercy in Mark 10:29-30, Romans 8:32, 1 Corinthians 16:2, 2 Corinthians 9:6, Philippians 4:19, 1 Timothy 6:17, 3 John 2 and Luke 6:38:
  - can *sometimes* take *years* before they are fulfilled.
  - can be fulfilled in such a way that there are *short or long periods of lack or great need interspersed* throughout the times of prosperity given by Him.

## **Believers sometimes in need of help from other believers**

1 John 3:17 refers to believers who are financially prosperous helping brothers in Christ who are in need: ***“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”*** In Greek, “need” above is a form of the word “chreia” which means “that which is lacking and particularly needed” (Louw and Nida, page 563) or “need, lack, want, difficulty” (Bauer, page 885).

A form of the word “chreia” is also used in Philippians 4:19 when God promises to supply all our needs through the grace of Jesus Christ: ***“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”*** There are many ways God can fulfill this promise. He can do it through our job or business or investments or family inheritance and so on. Or He can do it through fellow believers giving to us (see Galatians 2:10, James 2:15-16 and 1 John 3:17). But sometimes, some believers suffer periods of great lack because of *persecution* (see Hebrews 10:34 and 11:37), a *God-sent famine* on a nation (see Acts 11:28-30), wealthy believers refusing to obey God’s commands in 1 John 3:17 and James 2:15-16 and other reasons. James 2:15-16 says: ***“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit.”***

## **Paul’s example**

One teaching of “Biblical dinosaurs” is that under the New Covenant, every believer can be guaranteed enormous financial prosperity and exceeding wealth and little or no suffering in their earthly lives as *totally deserved rewards for their faith and/or obedience* to God about tithing, offerings and other things. Another associated ridiculous unbiblical teaching that if there is any time when New Covenant believers are *not economically rich, they must be sinning or lack faith*.

It is true God desires to prosper New Covenant believers but this is according to *His definition* of prosperity and not necessarily ours.

Paul is a classic example of someone with great faith and obedience to God who was prospered by God, but in ways different to what some worldly Western Christians these days would define as prosperity. Philippians 4:12-13 reveal Paul experienced *both abundance and lack* of material blessings: ***“I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*** Sometimes, Paul was blessed with an abundance of earthly material blessings from God. At other times, he experienced a lack of these.

Also he spent much time in Roman goals and suffering in other ways. Acts 9:16 records what God said to Ananias about Paul: ***“For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”*** In 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, Paul lists some of his sufferings: ***“Are they ministers of Christ? – I speak as a fool – I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in the perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often,***

*in cold and nakedness.*” Refer also to Acts 20:23. Also, note Paul generally lived a very godly life after he was born-again (see 2 Corinthians 7:2 and 1 Thessalonians 2:10). The New Testament does not say Paul suffered so much and lack continuous great wealth because of unrepented sin.

Some modern Western Hollywood movie star-like hyper-prosperity preachers have said that Paul and the Apostles suffered so much and were not continually very wealthy because the latter lacked faith. But after being baptized in the Holy Spirit, Paul and the Apostles manifested great faith in Christ. These modern preachers proudly think that Paul – the man who had awesome revelations from God in Paradise (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-4) – missed out by not being able to read their “revelations” of their so-called “laws of prosperity” or should I say “laws of hyper-prosperity”?

Hebrews 11:35-39 reveals that *some* of those with strong faith suffer *greatly* and experience great lack of earthly blessings in their earthly lives. In Philippians 1:29-30, Paul taught that God grants suffering on behalf of Christ to varying degrees to *all* those who believe in Christ: ***“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.”*** Such suffering can range from a *small* to a large degree. Hebrews 12:5-7 and 10-11 reveals why God allowed Paul to experience such hardships.

It is wrong to make the ascetic pagan claim that the more we suffer, the more prosperous we are. But if your definition of prosperity excludes any notion of being prospered during times of suffering and hardship, you have a non-Christian unbiblical view of prosperity.

## **A wonderful promise but linked partly to turning from known sin**

1 Peter 3:9-12 contains a New Testament promise about life and good days: ***“not returning evil for evil or reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For he who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*** Peter here refers to the righteous receiving the fulfilment of this promise. The New Testament teaches that all humans are unrighteous in themselves (see Romans 3:10) and can only be righteous by God’s undeserved grace through Christ (see Romans 3:10-24). Romans 4:1-4 teaches we are declared righteous by God because of His grace and not as deserved reward or wage for works of service.

In 1 Peter 3:9-12, Peter reveals it is only those justified believers, who fulfil the conditions of blessing those who do evil to them, preventing their tongue from speaking evil and deceit, turning from all known sin continually, doing good and seeking peace, who will receive the fulfilment of the promises made in these verses.

1 Peter 3:9-12 is a quote from Psalm 34:12-16. Psalm 34:12-16 is said in relation to those who *trust* God (see Psalm 34:8) and through *faith* are not condemned by Him (see Psalm 34:22).

Note in the original Greek of 1 Peter 3:10, the word ***“life”*** is a form of the word “zoe”. In the New Testament, the word “zoe” usually refers to eternal life but sometimes it can refer to life in a natural sense (see Luke 16:25). Bauer argues that in 1 Peter 3:10, the form of “zoe” used refers

to blessed eternal life in the future perfect age. But it is possible “zoe” in this verse refers to our natural life.

The expression “*good days*” seems to refer to the *quality* of believers’ days here on Earth. In Greek, the word “*good*” in 1 Peter 3:10 is a form of the word “agathos” which does not relate to a large number but instead refers to the quality of being good. Note in context, 1 Peter 3:10 cannot be promising no suffering, troubles or tribulation. This is because most of the following verses in 1 Peter 3:13-4:19 refer to godly believers suffering persecution and trials. 1 Peter 3:9-12 promises good days in the middle of trials and sufferings for those believers who do what 1 Peter 3:9-12 instructs. It is possible to argue “*good days*” in verse 10 refers to a form of spiritual, emotional, mental, bodily and material prosperity occurring in times of suffering, persecution and trials.

If the word “zoe” in 1 Peter 3:10 refers to eternal life, the refraining from speaking evil and deceit, ceasing committing our known sins, doing good and seeking and pursuing peace mentioned in verses 10 to 12 are the *post-conversion fruits* of conversion and therefore apply to *all* believers. As seen in Chapter “Conversion”, Chapter “Faith” and Chapter “Repentance” in Volume , we do not receive eternal life or broader salvation on the basis of the above types of things, but the above things are the normal post-conversion fruits of conversion. Note that in Greek, the expression “*let him turn away*” is a form of the word “ekklino” which in the context of this verse means “to *cease* doing something, with the implication of engaging in some alternative” (Louw and Nida, page 660) or “to decline or turn away from, *avoid*” (Perschbacher, page 127). “Ekklino” is not one of the usual words used in the New Testament for turning in one’s heart from sin to God at the point of conversion. These latter words are “strephe”, “epistrephe” and “epistrophe”. Nor is “ekklino” one of the words used normally in the original Greek New Testament for repentance in our hearts at the point of conversion. These latter words are “metanoia” and “metanoeo”. “Ekklino” is used in 1 Peter 3:11 in relation to our post-conversion actions of *ceasing* or *stopping* doing various known sins.

But if “zoe” refers to natural life, then 1 Peter 3:10-12 is speaking about a *result*, which is based on *God’s unmerited grace*, of our fulfilling His *conditions* stated in these verses. It would relate to God giving us natural blessings as an unmerited grace consequence of our fulfilling the condition of living blameless before Him through faith. The mention of “*Let him turn away from evil and do good*” relates to being blameless. Refer to Chapter “Integrity” in Volume for more details. Refer also to the section “ ” in Chapter “ ” for many examples of the unmerited grace consequences of our fulfilling God’s stated conditions about various matters.

1 Peter 3:9-12 does not refer to merited rewards. This is because:

- in Greek, it does not use any of the words for rewards or earned wages or merited payments.
- in verse 9, it uses the word “*blessing*” which in Greek is a form of the word “eulogia”. Forms of the word “eulogia” are used in Galatians 3:9 in relation to the *totally unmerited* blessings of the *Abrahamic Covenant* and in Ephesians 1:3 for the *undeserved spiritual blessings* of the *New Covenant*. A form of “eulogia” is found in Hebrews 6:7 to mean God’s unmerited gifts to the ground and in 2 Corinthians 9:5 in relation to the *free gift* that the believers at Corinth and Achaia were giving to the needy believers in Judea. The word “eulogia” is used in James 3:10 to mean “the act of blessing by which men call down upon

other men the *grace* of God” (Bauer, page 322). “Eugolia” relates to undeserved grace blessings and not merited rewards.

### **A key but often neglected condition**

Note Peter emphasises here that one of the conditions for experiencing life and seeing good days is to *stop doing our known sins*. This key condition is left out of the messages of most hyper-prosperity teachers. They say earthly prosperity comes from merely believing, visualising and confessing God will give it to us. We can believe, visualise and confess prosperity and peace all day long for years and be involved in a form of *dead religiosity* if we do not turn from our known sins in practice.

The false prophets in Jeremiah and Ezekiel’s time repeatedly believed and confessed peace and associated prosperity *without ceasing doing their known sins and without encouraging their listeners to stop doing these also*. Read Jeremiah 6:13-15 and 8:8-12 and see that false prophets who were greedy for money had deceived God’s people. Jeremiah 8:8 says these Israelites said they were wise and had the Law of the Lord with them. This is even though they were misinterpreting it. Jeremiah 8:8 states: **“How can you say, ‘We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us’? Look, the false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood.”** This is similar to now. Some say, “I am wise because I have the Word of God” even though they misinterpret it to suit their own lusts.

I believe in positive confession of God’s Word and in prophecies from the Holy Spirit which are not contrary to the Word. But I am grieved in my spirit greatly when I hear people trying to manipulate God by believing and confessing various things without them wanting to stop doing their known sins.

In the above, I am not saying all hyper-prosperity preachers are false prophets. I believe some are. Others are like Balaam who was a true prophet who backslid and destroyed his ministry and the lives of many others because of his greedy love of money (see Numbers Chapters 22 to 24, 25:1-3, 31:15-16, 2 Peter 2:15, Jude 11 and Revelation 2:14). Other hyper-prosperity preachers are sincere godly people who have been seduced by others’ appealing highly motivating words which on the surface sound like God’s perfect solution to all their personal and church’s financial problems. We all have financial needs which tempt us to feel insecure about our future. So anyone, who comes along with “10 Laws of Great Riches and Success” which are supposedly proven from the Bible, is going to *feed off such insecurities* and gain followers among those who rarely read the Bible or have only been fed on the milk of the Word.

### **Stand free in the superlative unmerited grace of the New Covenant**

Would not it be wonderful to see all born-again New Covenant believers on Earth teaching and operating in the New Covenant unmerited grace-based prosperity and giving practices instead of the Old Covenant Mosaic Law merited earthly rewards-based prosperity and giving. It is a sign of ignorance or spiritual immaturity when New Covenant believers live under practices which relate to a previous covenant which has been replaced by the New Covenant. Hebrews 8:6-9 stresses that the Mosaic Covenant has *faults* and the New Covenant is based on *much better promises* than the Mosaic Covenant: **“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought**

*for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: 'Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.'"*

It is amazing that many modern believers wish to try to obtain prosperity through practices which are a mixture of the New Covenant of superlative grace and the faults and poorer promises of the Mosaic Covenant and Law. Such believers are similar to the Colossians who were also tempted to mix the New Covenant with the Mosaic Covenant by food and drink offerings and celebrating the festivals, new moon feasts and sabbaths commanded in the Mosaic Law. In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul commanded: ***"Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ."***

In Galatians 5:1, Paul warned the Galatian believers about bringing themselves again under the inferior Mosaic Covenant: ***"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."***

Are you living in the true freedom of Christ under the New Covenant with its enormous emphasis on unmerited grace?