

Sowing And Reaping

Eliphaz-type versions of sowing and reaping

In Matthew 13:3-9, Jesus Christ spoke about sowing the *seeds* of the *Gospel*. In these verses, Jesus revealed what types of human response to God's Word produce good results, symbolised by good harvests, and what responses produce bad results. 1 Peter 1:23-25 refers to the *Gospel* as a *seed*. 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).

Galatians 6:7-10 teaches that if humans sow to the flesh they will reap everlasting destruction or corruption and if humans sow to the Holy Spirit they will reap eternal life: ***“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.”*** These verses apply to *every* human and *every* situation and therefore have universal application. The principles in Galatians 6:6-10 are not just good generalisations.

But note at present, many churchgoers wrongly interpret the Bible versions in Galatians 6:6-10 and 2 Corinthians 9:6 on sowing and reaping to be *universal laws* which apply to *every aspect* of God's dealings with *every human in every situation*. These churchgoers have interpreted Jesus' and Paul's Biblical teaching of sowing and reaping to mean that God in every situation gives believers totally deserved earthly rewards for their good works. Some of these churchgoers also say that if any believer is ever sick or not rich, this is always a result of God giving these believers totally deserved earthly punishments for their sins. These teachings are similar to the ideas Eliphaz which God condemned in the Book of Job.

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 Eliphaz’s 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.”***

Eliphaz wrongly believed that every 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).

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).¹

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. 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 his faith in the Lord to be suffering so much.

This is similar to today. Some naïve churchgoers say that all Christians, who are not wealthy, have unconfessed unforsaken known sins and/or have weak faith in the Lord. But in numerous cases, the believers who suffer lacks have turned from all their known sins, this including the sin of having weak faith in God.

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.”***

¹ Refer to the section “Healing is in the atonement” in Chapter

“Healing” for more details.

Some modern Biblically unsound hyperprosperity books 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. Acts 9:16 records God said to Ananias about Paul: ***“For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.”***

Some of these same type of Biblically imbalanced writings use to make the ridiculous claim that the reason believers in Communist countries used to suffer so much before in the 1900's was the latter believers lacked faith.

Hyperprosperity refers to extremist Biblically unsound versions of the wonderful Biblical teachings on God prospering people. Hyperprosperity views are sinful because they take verses out of context, ignore very large numbers of verses which teach contrary to their claims, change giving into a form of selfishness instead of love for God and others and justify some preachers becoming multimillionaires partly from the gifts of widows and other needy Christians.

Eliphaz was a sincere believer in God

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 said some beautiful things about God. Job 42:9 shows he wanted to obey the Lord. Eliphaz also 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.

But like many others, Eliphaz had been deceived by *man-made religious traditions* and his own false *reasonings* about what he had experienced when observing 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.”***

Many sincere modern Charismatics and Pentecostals are like Eliphaz

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 Biblically imbalanced Eliphaz-type beliefs are “based on the Word”. But tragically, they do not realize that their attitudes are based on certain American preachers' simplistic overgeneralisations which have become man-made traditions bringing bondage to God's people.

Similar religious bondages in Jesus, Ezekiel and Jeremiah's times

Similarly, in Jesus Christ's time, some of the Jews had twisted the Old Testament teaching about personal sins sometimes resulting in sickness (see Deuteronomy 28:15 and 27-28) into the man-made tradition that all sickness is caused by personal sins. 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 false man-made religious tradition had developed in Ezekiel’s time. This man-made tradition involved the Jews misinterpreting Exodus 20:5 to mean that the *guilt* of the sins of one generation is always transferred to the following generation even if the following generation is very godly. Ezekiel 18:1-18 corrects this false religious tradition.

These misled Jews in Ezekiel’s time 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.”*** 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 because of 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.”***

Paul’s example

One modern version of sowing and reaping teaching which is based on Eliphaz’s false and not Jesus and Paul’s God-inspired version of it, is taught by “Biblical dinosaurs” who say that under the New Covenant, every believer can be guaranteed enormous financial riches 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 exceptionally 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 at different times: ***“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 Paul spent much time in Roman jails 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.

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 lacked continuous great wealth because of unrepented of sin.

Some modern Hollywood movie star-like hyper-prosperity preachers who follow Eliphaz’s unbiblical teachings, 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”.

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.