

PROVERBS

What is the Purpose of Prosperity?

I have found that the current proverb of study provokes an important question. What is the purpose of prosperity? When I first began to read Proverbs 3:9-10, I was taken off guard. Perhaps you were as well, and having studied this proverb, you are beginning to ask the question – “How does this teaching harmonize with the sacrificial lifestyle that Christ calls us to?” Consider Matthew 6:19-21: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” And what are we to make of Jesus’ command to the disciples in the parallel passage of Luke 12:33-34: “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Are the commands of Christ and the wisdom of Proverbs at odds?

They are not at all at odds. The answer is found in the priority and purpose of Proverbs 3:9-10: “Honor the Lord.” The one who has seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:3-6) has but one treasure, and that is Christ Himself. He is the good news of the gospel!

How sad it is that so many across the globe have misinterpreted passages such as this proverb to make material gain the good news. How wrong this is! For Christ said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35),” and He personally demonstrated this by becoming poor that we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

Prosperity should propel you to action. Paul wrote of this in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15: “For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, ‘Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack [cited from Ex. 16:18].’” The Corinthians were desirous to meet the needs of others. Paul reminded them that the call to give is not a call to asceticism, but to generosity in the meeting of other’s needs out of their prosperity.

David made an observation in his lifetime. He writes, “I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread (Ps. 37:25).” With the ability that you have, whether a widow’s mite or barns that burst at the seams, you are to honor the Lord by being generous with the prosperity that He has provided.



LOOK CLOSELY

observation

Proverbs 3:9-10 (NKJV)

9 Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.

Mark the action in v 9.

Mark the recipient of the action in v 9.

Mark the words “possessions” and “firstfruits” in v 9.

Mark the two verbs in v 10.

Mark the words “barns” and “vats” in v 10.

Identification Key

Develop your own key for identifying the various words and phrases in the text provided. Use different colored pencils, circles, boxes, underlining, etc., but be consistent from week-to-week.



THINK CAREFULLY

interpretation

The verb **honor** refers to giving that which is “heavy” or “great.” To honor God is to give back to God something that reflects the greatness, honor, and glory He possesses.

The word **possessions** is a general word referring to the substance, material, or wealth that is in one’s possession. The point is that when we recognize that God is the source of all we possess, we will seek to honor Him with it.

In the Law **firstfruits** refers to the first produce harvested from the land. It was to be given as an offering to God in recognition that the entire crop was not only from God, but that it also belonged to Him.

The imagery of **barns** and **vats** are words that picture an agrarian culture. The word **barns** refers to storehouses where harvested grain was kept protected until needed for food or for seed. If the storehouse was filled with grain, then there would be bread for the table. The priority Solomon is urging his son is to honor the LORD and leave the provision of bread to Him.

The word, **vats** refers to the stone depression in the ground hewn out as a place where grapes were pressed. The juice would flow out of the stone vat to a lower stone depression where it would then be collected. **New wine** that **overflows** the vats pictures the abundance of fresh juice that results from a bountiful harvest of grapes. Again, in vivid language, Solomon is urging his son to honor the LORD first and leave the provision of the harvest to Him.

- What is wrong with a giving-to-get approach to life?

- Read Malachi 3:8-11. We saw in our proverb that one of the results of honoring the LORD is that *our* storehouses (barns) will be filled. However, in Malachi 3, God urges Israel to give so that *His* storehouse is filled. If God doesn't need us to give to Him (since He owns everything), why does God want His people to honor Him by giving to Him?

- The concern for many people today is to ensure that their personal storehouses are filled even if it means neglecting God's storehouse. What kind of attitudes does this approach to life reflect?

- If the word **possessions** means something beyond income, how should this effect the way we **honor the Lord**?

- How might a person give the **firstfruits** of his increase to God?



RESPOND WISELY

application

- In what ways are you honoring the Lord with your possessions?

- Describe how parents can teach their children the concept of putting God first with their possessions?

- In what ways are you doing this?

- Discuss some other practical ways we can honor the Lord besides giving?

- As a family, memorize 2 Corinthians 9:7.