



"If truth were told, most of us spend longer each day on personal cleanliness than on practical godliness."

—Alistair Begg

01-Aug-14

Why Is Life So Hard? (Part Two)

In Part One, we saw that pressure, hardship, and anguish are not elements of a Christian's life that suddenly disappear because of [faith](#) and God's calling. It also became clear that trial and [affliction](#) are not sure signs of God's displeasure with us, as He may be using some form of pressure to improve an element of our character. The spirit of [this world](#), however, wants us invariably to equate blessing with righteousness and hardship with [sin](#), when that is not always the case.

We can see another example of this misleading spirit in [I Timothy 6:3-5](#)

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord [Jesus Christ](#) and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that *godliness is a means of gain*. (ESV; emphasis ours)

At the end of Paul's description of those causing friction in the church, he includes the mindset that "godliness is a means of gain." In other words, these people believe more godliness means a better physical life. This idea of godliness is warped, though, because they are not pursuing it with a desire to resemble our Father, but believing that if they are more righteous, then [God](#) will give them more material blessings.

The word "gain" (*porismos*) brings physical wealth to mind, which is only part of what is implied. The next verse uses the same word, saying that "godliness with contentment is great gain." We can read of many godly and content people who were not wealthy, so we must broaden the scope of the word "gain." *Thayer's Lexicon* says it means "to cause a thing to get on well, to carry forward, to convey, to acquire." In other words, it is related to our concept of the "good life" that the natural man seeks: a life where things go well, where there is direction and momentum, where scarcity or lack are unknown.

Paul teaches that those who are depraved in mind and deprived of truth believe that godliness is a path to gain such a life. However, what matters is a life where things go well, with direction and momentum and abundance, in *spiritual* terms, regardless of the physical circumstance. *That* is truly great gain.

If we ever find ourselves thinking, "If I were a better person, this trial—this affliction, this hardship—wouldn't be happening to me," it may be time to re-examine our thinking to see if it lines up with the whole counsel of God. True, we certainly can behave ourselves into hardship, and, yes, sin always brings on affliction of some sort. Yet the presence of hardship and affliction does not automatically mean that our sin or poor choices are the cause.

The King James Version renders the end of verse 5 in the reverse, reading that these people suppose that "gain is godliness." It means that they conclude that their "gain"—their wealth, their forward momentum, their good life—is evidence of their godliness. Their "gain" feels like a pat on the back from God. Here is where matters become slippery, though, because God certainly does bless for righteousness. However, we also know from Christ's [letter to Laodicea \(Revelation 3:14-22\)](#) that one can be rich and increased with goods, yet evaluate his spiritual condition exactly opposite of how He sees it.

We must remember that God makes the "sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" ([Matthew 5:45](#)). Blessings come to the good and to the evil, and tribulation also finds both the sinner and the saint. It requires careful consideration, with God's guidance, to discern the reason for hardship. In this vein, Paul warns about a carnal mindset that focuses entirely on things going well and that misunderstands godliness.

Thus, a life in which everything seems to be going well is not necessarily a good gauge of God's pleasure, nor is a life of anguish and affliction a sure indicator of God's wrath. The lives of the heroes of faith, prophets, the prosperous wicked, the apostles, and Jesus Christ Himself all show this to be true.

Another pointed example appears in [Romans 5:1-4](#):

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have [peace](#) with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in [hope](#) of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Verses 1-2 describe our standing before God, showing that since we have been justified, we have peace with God. We have access to His grace and are on track to share in His glory. This is a very privileged position, one not shared by people under God's wrath. Then the very next thing that Paul writes is that we—the ones who have peace with God and live under His grace—will experience tribulations: burdens, anguish, hardships, afflictions, suffering, persecution.

A good standing with God and sore trial are not contradictory at all. A life of hardship for a believer is the rule, not the exception! Part Three will expand on why that is so.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Prosperity: What Is True Wealth?](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Martin Collins, distinguishing between prosperity and wealth, asserts that prosperity is success that comes to those who have been active in achieving it and/or by divine grace, usually as a result of effort. Along with material wealth are offspring, and spiritual blessings such as character or grace in the eyes of an influential person. Notable Old Testament examples of prosperity were Abraham, Joseph, Hezekiah, David, and the nation of Israel's acquisition of the Promised Land. Though obedience and thankfulness to God are clearly linked to prosperity, .mitigating circumstances (as in Job's case) sometimes overturn the equation :Hard work= Prosperity/ Laziness and sin = Poverty. New Testament examples reverse this Old Testament emphasis, focusing instead on upon the wealth of spiritual character, salvation, and eternal life.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Does God Want You to be Rich?](#)

by Staff

Laodiceans think of themselves as rich, while God sees them as poor. On the other hand, the Smyrnans see themselves as poor, yet God says they are rich! What are true riches?

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
