

Why the Fiscal Cliff Doesn't Matter for Christians

In God's financial system the path to prosperity isn't dependent on government legislation. Find out what requirements God has established that lead to a pathway of prosperity? The Bible reveals several overarching keys.

1) Seek Him. Jesus said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). All *what* things? All the things He mentioned in the verses preceding verse 33—such as treasures upon earth or what you will eat or drink or wear. We are not to seek those things first. We are to seek the kingdom first.

What does it mean to seek the kingdom? It is seeking to do His will. His will is what He did on the earth, such as healing all (Acts 10:38), casting out devils (Mark 16:15-18) and preaching repentance (Matt. 4:17).

Jesus went about teaching and preaching the gospel (Matt. 4:23) and told us to preach the good news of salvation: setting people free from bondages, laying hands on the sick and feeding the poor (Is. 61:1-2; Matt. 25:35-36; Mark 16:15). How could we feed the poor and support the gospel if we are broke ourselves?

Colossians 3:2 states: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (KJV). So, let us understand that He will not prosper us unless we are committed to seeking Him first.

2) Help the poor. Proverbs 19:17 says: "He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given" (NKJV). Throughout the Bible we are instructed to help the poor. Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33) to illustrate giving of ourselves for the welfare of

others.

Tommy Barnett, co-founder of the Dream Center urban outreach ministry in Los Angeles, explains it this way: "The secret to a successful, happy life is giving yourself away. According to the Bible, you will succeed in direct proportion to how much you give yourself away.

"Giving is truly the key to blessing ... because we have learned to focus more and more on servanthood, downward mobility, on giving everything away."

He goes on to say: "We are conditioned to think in terms of limits, and therefore the world operates on the principle of lack.

"God approaches life from the opposite angle. He operates on the principle of plenty. In God's kingdom, the successful man or woman is the one who gives the most away. The world says, 'He who dies with the most toys wins.' The kingdom says, 'He who gives the most away wins.'"

Jesus also said in Matthew 6:19-21 not to "lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. ... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This is the only 100-percent-safe investment. For us to be about the Father's business is laying up treasures in heaven.

3) Examine ourselves. When my wife and I are faced with challenges, we take time out to pray, read God's Word and examine ourselves to see where we may have missed the mark.

This is a biblical exercise. We see it in, among other verses, Ecclesiastes 7:14: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity *consider*: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other" (emphasis added); 2 Corinthians 13:5: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves"; and Haggai 1:7: "Thus says the Lord of

hosts: 'Consider your ways!'"

In examining ourselves, we are not to feel that we cannot come to Him if we have not kept every Scripture verse. No, because it is by grace that we receive the things we desire from Him. We do not try in our flesh to live holy. We live holy because we desire to, and it's by His grace we can do it.

In addition, God loves us regardless of how we perform. We don't score points with God, and if we are good enough He will love us more.

No, He loves us already the way we are. However, His desire is for us to grow and mature in Him. Anytime God corrects us, it is because He loves us. Hebrews 12:6 states, "Whom the Lord loves He chastens."

4) Obey His Word. I want to make it clear that I am not talking about legalism when it comes to obeying God's Word. We are not trying to earn God's grace or to be burdened under "performance." We can't earn anything, as it has already been given to us freely.

We are justified by Christ's blood and by faith in what He did for us on the cross only. (See Rom. 3:24-25; 4:25; 5:9, 16, 18; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Titus 3:7; 1 John 1:7-9.)

God's grace empowers us to obey His Word. We cannot obey by our own power or ability but only by His Spirit.

The difference is, when you are truly in love with God, you are eager to please Him. It is not a burden to keep His Word but a delight. We keep His Word because of a heartfelt desire and not our performance (Ps. 119:16, 24, 47, 72).

When we understand His grace, there is a joy that comes to us, because we see it is not based on our power to keep His Word or resist sin, but by His power. However, searching the Scriptures to be sure we are obeying His Word doesn't nullify

grace; being obedient to His Word is a result of grace.

We are to continually strive to better ourselves by receiving correction from His Word. Our desire should be to grow from glory to glory. Our goal is to become more like Him (2 Cor. 3:18). If we say we love Him and do not obey Him, we are liars. We don't really love Him (1 John 2:3-4), and we don't know Him (John 14:15).

It is our attitude that makes the difference. An obedient heart seeks to do what pleases Him.

God's Word is a mirror, and if we look into the face of His Word, we can see where we are. It should give us the desire to want to improve ourselves and please Him.

David said he loved God's commandments above gold (Ps. 119:127). Solomon said God's wisdom was better than rubies (Prov. 8:11). Both comparisons are to "treasures" of significant material value "hidden" in the ground.

If I told you I had \$10 million hidden for you and gave you the treasure map, you wouldn't feel *burdened* to go look for it, would you? No, you would be *excited* to look for it. In the same way, we are to value God's Word and apply it to our lives (Prov. 3:1-2). We are to seek after wisdom, knowledge and understanding as hidden treasure (Prov. 2:1-6).

Another important truth we need to apply to our lives is that God's Word is also *holistic*—it all ties together. There are built-in safeguards in His Word that cause it to work in its fullness only as a whole.

For instance, if you don't tithe, you won't prosper God's way (Mal. 3:8-9; Matt. 23:23). However, if you do tithe and do not build God's house (focus on saving souls), the money you are blessed with will have holes in the bag and run out the door (Hag. 1:5-9).

If you do not have faith, you will not receive anything from God (James 1:6-7). However, if you have great faith to move mountains and have not love, it will not do you any good (1 Cor. 13:2-3).

Yet, if we do all of these, but do not honor our parents, it will not go well with us (Eph. 6:2-3).

If we do not put on all the armor of God, we won't be able to withstand in the evil day (Eph. 6:13). If we do not submit ourselves to God and resist the devil, he won't flee from us (James 4:7). If we don't forgive anything, Satan will get an advantage over us (2 Cor. 2:10-11).

If we labor for souls but lose our zeal for the Lord, we have left our first love, and Jesus says He will remove our candlestick (Rev. 2:2-4).

Do you see how God's Word all fits together? It is our responsibility to learn all of God's precepts and do them. As we do, God will prosper us, as Joshua 1:8 reveals: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate ... [and] observe to do according to all that is written in it. For *then* you will make your way *prosperous*" (emphasis added).

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