

Thank God every day for the hedge

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BIG SANDY, Texas—Did you know that the "protection gospel" is a variation of the "health-and-wealth gospel"?

Someone may ask: What is the health-and-wealth gospel?

It goes something like this: "If you obey God, you will always be healthy and wealthy. If you are sick or poor, the reason is disobedience."

Let me give you a few thoughts about this flawed concept.

- Many religious people, including many from the Church of God heritage, believe this theory.
- Many televangelists, including some from the Church of God heritage, use this theory to build their following and financial base.
- Those who believe this theory generally come to this conclusion because of a wrong emphasis on Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26.
- Many New Testament scriptures show the error of this theory.
- One of the greatest proofs against the health-and-wealth gospel is in the Old Testament. The book of Job shows that God uses bad circumstances to love good people.

Empty promises

Someone may ask: What was that protection gospel that you mentioned earlier?

It goes something like this: "If you obey God, you will always be protected from trials."

Considering the martyrdom of Jesus and some of His faithful followers, such a theory is certainly bogus.

Here's another variation of the protection gospel: "If you obey our church leaders, you will be protected from the coming tribulation."

Think about it. If obeying God Himself does not guarantee physical protection, how does obeying the whims of physical rulers guarantee physical protection?

Someone will undoubtedly say: Revelation 3:10 proves that my church organization will be protected from the coming tribulation.

My response: Although Revelation 3:10 shows that some believers were historically protected and some believers will be protected in the future, this verse does not promise protection for all obedient believers. Anyone who claims this verse is discussing his specific group is only giving his private interpretation of prophecy.

Pulled back the hedge

When a believer looks at the story of Job, he learns a lot about the "hedge" that provides protection.

Notice a few things about the story.

- God viewed Job as an upright servant who respected God and hated evil (Job 1:1, 8).
- Satan mentioned that the reason Job respected God was a hedge that was put around Job, his family and his business (verse 10).
- Satan challenged God to pull back the hedge and God would see how quickly Job would curse Him (verse 11).
- God pulled back the hedge and allowed Satan to touch Job's possessions, but God prohibited Satan from touching Job (verse 12).
- Satan hurt Job's family and business (verses 13-19).
- Job worshiped God (verse 20).

Back a little farther

Satan wanted to torment Job even more and therefore asked for more leeway in Job's life.

Notice how the story continues.

- God still viewed Job as an upright man who respected Him and hated evil (Job 2:3).
- Satan challenged God to allow Job to feel physical pain and God would see how quickly Job would curse Him (verses 4-5).
- God pulled back the hedge and allowed Satan to touch Job's flesh. But God prohibited Satan from killing him (verse 6).
- Job initially did not sin with his lips (verse 10).
- As the trial progressed, Job did sin. Who besides Jesus Christ wouldn't have sinned under those conditions? But in the end Job repented, and God blessed him.

Valuable lesson

We can learn many things from the book of Job.

Some of the lessons are:

- Bad things happen to good people.
- Many “friends” give worthless advice, especially when they use the health-and-wealth-and-protection gospel as their guide.
- Bad things influence good people to draw closer to God.
- Satan is much stronger than people, but God is much stronger than Satan.
- God has placed a hedge around people to protect them from Satan.
- We should thank God for the hedge during the rough days of trials. Even when God pulls back the hedge, it still protects us from Satan’s full wrath.
- We should also thank God for the hedge during the peaceful days of life.

In fact, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to thank God for the hedge every day of our lives.