

Southland's Position on Healing, Suffering and Prosperity.

Outline of this paper:

- A. Intro – definition of Prosperity Gospel and Total Healing theologies.
 - 4 reasons why it is important to refute Prosperity Gospel & Total Healing Theologies.
- B. Compare & Contrast between our position and the Prosperity Gospel position.
- C. The book of Job was written to counter and oppose Prosperity Gospel-type theologies.
- D. Suffering is sometimes God's will for believers and is often in our best interest.
- E. God gets as much glory (or more) through our suffering and weakness as through our blessing.
- F. What about Psalm 91? Do the Scriptures promise us a long life and no sickness in this lifetime – or not?
- G. Now-not-yet theology: The Scriptures teach that healing and prosperity are only partial in this lifetime, not being completed until after the Resurrection.
- H. God's will on earth as it is in heaven? . . . and other common arguments made in favor of the total-healing-in-this-lifetime-doctrine.
- I. Appendix: Scripture passages to ponder.

A. Intro:

1. For the purposes of this paper we are defining the Prosperity Gospel and Total Healing theologies as 4 basic positions:
 - a) God's will is for every believer to prosper materially in this lifetime.
 - b) God's will is for every believer to be healed of all physical illness/disease/disability in this lifetime – if a believer is not healed it is because of some fault of theirs (ie. lack of faith, lack of prayer, sinfulness, etc.), not because God doesn't want to heal them.
 - c) It is never God's will that a believer suffer.
 - d) A person's destiny is completely dictated by the principle of reaping and sowing – if a person suffers it is because of negative words, thoughts and actions they have sowed; and if a person prospers it is because of positive words, thoughts and actions they have sowed.
 - ◇ For the rest of this paper, for the purposes of simplicity, we will lump the Prosperity Gospel and Total Healing theologies into one group (with the above 4 positions) and refer to them simply as 'PG.'
 - ◇ It may be easiest to think of our church (SC) position as the Both/And position, and the PG position as the all-or-nothing position. We believe that God often heals, but sometimes not. PG believes that God will always heal; only a believer's lack of faith or sinfulness will prevent it.
2. Why is this important? Someone may wonder why it is even important to debate this topic. They may wonder if it is worth our time to discuss – why not just let people believe whatever they want to believe on this matter?
 - ◇ **4 reasons why it is important to refute the Prosperity Gospel theologies:**
 - a) **The Prosperity Gospel hurts suffering people.**
 - ◆ The Prosperity Gospel puts shame and guilt onto suffering people (in addition to the trials they are already facing) by blaming their problems on a lack of faith, or worse, sin.

b) The Prosperity Gospel hinders Christians from growing *in the midst of* suffering and learning *from* their suffering.

◆ Because the Prosperity Gospel teaches that suffering is never God’s will for believers, it keeps believers from seeing God’s purposes for suffering. The Prosperity Gospel teaches people that all suffering is bad; therefore, you must fight against all suffering. But sometimes God Himself sends suffering to people for their good (more on this later). In such cases fighting against the suffering is useless; worse, it is counterproductive. In such cases people can only have victory by submitting to God *in* the suffering (as opposed to fighting against the suffering), and embracing the suffering, thereby growing in character and intimacy with God *through* the suffering.

c) The Prosperity Gospel causes many Christians to become disillusioned with God, and some to even fall away from God.

◆ What happens to believers who are indoctrinated with the teaching that God *always* wants them to be healed and healthy, and *always* wants them to be wealthy and successful, but who then encounter severe trials in their life (ie. a child dies tragically; a spouse contracts cancer; an economic collapse destroys their business, etc.) which no amount of prayer removes? We have witnessed Christians who were indoctrinated in Prosperity Gospel theology, who got mad at God and walked away from their churches and their faith because of the death of a loved one, or some other trying circumstance. Why? Because they were led to believe the lie that God always wanted them to be comfortable and successful in this lifetime. So when life took a tragic twist, their only options were: (1) either God didn’t care; or (2) God couldn’t do anything; or (3) God doesn’t exist.

◆ It is the duty of Bible teachers everywhere to prepare people for suffering, not to encourage escapist fantasies! Jesus said, *“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”* – **John 16:33 (NLT)**

◆ Jesus never encouraged people by telling them they wouldn’t have trials; He encouraged them to persevere *in* their trials, by pointing to Himself as the ultimate over-comer.

d) The Prosperity Gospel encourages an unhealthy preoccupation with worldliness: wealth and prosperity in this lifetime.

◆ The Prosperity Gospel is not just wrong theology, it’s dangerous. Why? Because it encourages people to pray for, expect and seek wealth and worldly success in this lifetime.

1) Paul said we should be content with little: *Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.* Furthermore, according to Paul, the desire to be rich is deadly: *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.* – **1 Tim 6:6-10 (ESV)**

◇ The question for prosperity teachers is: why would you want to develop a ministry focus that encourages people to pierce themselves with many pangs and plunge themselves into ruin and destruction?

2) Jesus said, *“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”* His disciples were astonished, as many in the “prosperity” movement should be. So Jesus went on to raise their astonishment even higher by saying, *“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a*

rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” They respond in disbelief: “Then who can be saved?” Jesus says, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:23-27).

- ◇ The question for prosperity preachers is: Why would you want to develop a ministry focus that makes it harder for people to enter heaven?
- 3) Elsewhere, Jesus again warned about the inherent dangers of having wealth in this lifetime, saying –*And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. – Lk 8:14 (ESV)*
 - ◇ The point of this passage is not that every person who becomes wealthy automatically becomes ungodly. Not at all; the point is that worldly wealth and success are like a dangerous substance – they must be handled with extreme care. And people who chase after these things will be ‘choked’ (Jesus’ own words!) to death in their pursuit.
 - ◇ The question for prosperity preachers is: Why would you want to encourage people to pursue the very things which Jesus said would choke the life out of them?

B. Compare & Contrast: where we (SC) agree and disagree on with Prosperity-type theologies.

• Where we agree:

1. **We agree that all suffering is the result of original sin:** All sickness, death, pain and trouble is ultimately the result of the Original Sin, and the curse which followed. God is not to blame for any of these things; He did not make the universe with sickness, death, pain or trouble in it, and they were not part of His will for creation – Adam brought these things onto all of us, and onto all of creation through his free-will act of disobedience.
2. **We agree that we reap what we sow:** Our individual sinful choices bring additional pain, sickness, death and trouble into our lives today. The Original Sin brought death and decay to the whole universe so that now every human being experiences death and decay (no matter how righteous or how wicked). But, in addition to this fact, we also reap what we sow. This means that, in addition to the pain and suffering caused by Original Sin (universal death & decay), we bring further pain, suffering and death into our personal lives, and into the lives of those around us, through the sinful choices we make and the words we say, day-to-day.

◇ Where we disagree:

- ◆ **PG says:** When someone suffers it is *always* because they are reaping what they sowed; it's *always* their fault.
SC says: Both/and – Often we DO suffer directly because we sinned; but often suffering is NOT the direct result of our own personal sin(s) (The entire book of Job; Lk 13:1-5; John 9:1-3).
3. **We agree that God heals:** God can heal, God has healed, and God continues to miraculously heal many people of many sicknesses and diseases today. We also agree that ultimately 100% of God's children will be 100% healed, because in heaven there will be no sickness, pain or tears. We have seen many people at Southland miraculously healed through prayer.
 - a) **Where we disagree #1:**
 - ◆ **PG says:** God will heal *everyone* who has enough faith and who perseveres in prayer *in this lifetime*.
SC says: Both/And – Often God does respond to faith and persevering prayer by healing them in this lifetime; but sometimes He responds by giving the sufferer grace in the midst of the trial. The life of the apostle Paul is a great example of this Both/And reality when it comes to healing in this lifetime. Paul had the faith to heal many people (Acts 19:11-12; 14:8-10; 16:16-18; 28:8), even raising a man from the dead (Acts 20:9-10) and healing every single person on the island of Malta (Acts 28:9). Yet there are many other examples in Scripture where he was not able to heal – either himself or others:
 - 1) He couldn't be healed of his thorn in the flesh, though he persevered in prayer. In fact, God actually said 'no' to his prayer for healing (2 Cor 12:7-10).
 - 2) He also couldn't heal his faithful co-workers Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25);
 - 3) Timothy (who had 'frequent illnesses,' see 1 Tim 5:23);
 - 4) or Trophimus (2 Tim 4:20), who he left behind on a missions trip because of sickness. Obviously this had nothing to do with Paul's lack of faith – or theirs!
 - ◆ PG proponents will argue from Matthew 4:23 that Jesus heals *all* our diseases. However, the grammar in this passage clearly indicates that Jesus didn't heal every time he saw sickness; the anarthrous construction means He healed every KIND of disease & sickness, which is exactly how many major translations translate it (ASV, NASB, NLT, WNT, CEV, KJV, NJB, LB, TEV, NKJV).
 - b) **Where we disagree #2:**
 - ◆ **PG says:** God *always* gets the *most* glory when someone is healed.
SC says: Both/and – Sometimes God gets more glory through healing and sometimes more glory out of giving us strength and joy in the midst of sickness than He does from healing us of that sickness.

c) **Where we disagree #3:**

◆ **PG says:** It is *always* in a person's best interest to be healed.

SC says: Both/and – We would say that sometimes it is in our best eternal interest to be healed in this lifetime, and sometimes it is not in our best eternal interest to be healed in this lifetime. Sometimes God deems that it is in our best eternal interest to be healed, but other times He desires us to instead learn perseverance (James 1:2-4), grow in Christ-likeness, grow in dependence on Him and intimacy with Him *through* on-going suffering. Sometimes He may even allow us to die in order to save us from something worse (Isa 57:1-2). Ultimately, if we pray in faith, we believe that God will always do what's best for us - *with regards to eternity*; this may mean sometimes not having our painful circumstances and/or sicknesses alleviated in this lifetime (2 Cor 12:7-10; Phil 1:12-26).

◇ Furthermore, sometimes it is in other people's best interest that a believer be sick. God has a much larger perspective than we do and He has often used the physical illness and suffering of godly believers for the greater purpose of winning lost people to Christ. In Gal 4:12-15 we read that *because* of his illness Paul was able to preach the Gospel to the Galatians.

4. **We agree that faith is important & powerful:** Faith is important and faith is powerful. We agree that faith is an essential component of a walk with God – without it no one can walk with God, please God or be saved. Without faith people can also miss out on healing and deliverance from various problems and trials.

◇ **Where we disagree:**

◆ **PG says:** Everyone who has enough faith will *always* be healed and delivered from their problems in this lifetime.

SC says: Sometimes faith is to be exercised for healing and deliverance and sometimes for strength, joy and perseverance in the midst of no deliverance & not seeing the fulfillment of promises in this lifetime (Heb 11:32-39).

5. **We agree that words are powerful:** Words are powerful – a person reaps what they sow. A person who constantly speaks negative words will reap negative fruit as a result of those words. A person who sows positive words will reap positive fruit as a result of those words (Jam 3:1-12; Gal 6:7).

a) **Where we disagree #1:**

◆ **PG says:** *Everything* that happens in a person's life is a result of his words.

SC says: There are also many things, positive and negative, which happen to a person quite apart from their words and which cannot be changed (for good or bad) simply by speaking. Certainly every situation can be improved (to some extent) by speaking positive words (attitude at the very least), and every situation can be worsened by negative words; but not all negative situations can be removed simply by using positive words, and many positive situations cannot be created, no matter what positive words a person uses. (eg. A person cannot make themselves a billionaire simply by saying over and over, "I am able to be a billionaire." eg 2. A person cannot talk their city out of an earthquake or hurricane. eg. A hog farmer cannot talk his way out of a hog industry crisis (John 9:1-3; Heb 11:32-39; Job).

b) **Where we disagree #2:**

◆ **PG says:** To talk about negative circumstances, at all, is to acknowledge them, give them power and bring a curse on ones' self.

SC says: Truthful words – spoken in love, infused with hope but based in reality – are positive, even if they describe negative realities. This is why the Bible encourages us to 'share each other's burdens' (Gal 6:2). It is possible to talk about negative circumstances in a way that does not deny reality, and which brings glory to God, all without cursing one's self. All of the Bible writers spoke honestly about negative realities – they talked of their pain, when they had pain, they acknowledged their distress when under pressure or persecution and when people died (Num 23:8; Deut 23:5; Prov 26:2).

C. The Book of Job was written to counter and oppose Prosperity Gospel-type theologies.

1. One major problem with the prosperity gospel is that it teaches that it is *never* God's will for His followers to suffer.
 - ◇ So when a proponent of PG sees a person suffering, they are forced to assume that it must be that person's 'fault' in some way: perhaps they do not have enough faith to be healed; or, perhaps they sowed negative words in their life; or, perhaps they have a stronghold (ie. bitterness, unforgiveness, etc.) which is giving the Devil a foothold and keeping God from doing a miracle.
 - ◇ Of course, some of them are nicer about this than others, and many would not actually tell a suffering person to their face that their suffering is their fault. However, the moment a person accepts the premise that it is *never* God's will for His followers to suffer, then there must always be some reason other than God's will as to why godly people suffer – and that reason must have something to do with a deficiency on the suffering person's part, since God doesn't want them suffering.
 - ◇ A big part of the reason why the book of Job was written was to counter this type of thinking. Two things we learn from the book of Job, which run counter to this prosperity gospel tenet (it is never God's will for His followers to suffer):
 - a) **Job gives credit to God for the calamity in his life (ie. *sometimes it is God's will for His followers to suffer*):**
 - ◆ *Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. – Job 1:20-22 (ESV)*
 - 1) Who does Job say took away his kids, his wealth, his home, his everything? Was it Satan? No. Was it bad people? No. Was it bad luck? No. Was it faithlessness, prayerlessness or sin on Job's part? No. God Himself was the one who took away all that Job had. Of course, Satan was the one who carried it out, but only because he had permission from God. This Scripture clearly teaches that ultimately, God was responsible for everything that happened to Job – nothing happened to Job that wasn't God's will for him.
 - 2) Moreover, the writer of the Scriptures explicitly says that 'Job did not charge God with wrong' (v. 22). But wait a minute – didn't Job *blame* God for taking away everything he had? Yes – but he didn't charge God with wrong, since he also acknowledged that everything he had lost originally came from God in the first place. Essentially he said, 'God took everything I have from me, but it was His right to do so since it was all His to begin with and I did not deserve what He had given me in the first place.' Job was simply back at square one, where he started: 'naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return' (v.21).
 - ◇ This was a breath-taking acknowledgement, by Job, of God's Sovereignty, in the midst of intense suffering. God was responsible for the blessing in Job's life and God was also responsible for the suffering; and in all of it, God was Good and God was in the right.
 - b) **Job is blameless but suffers greatly** – As stated above, because PG proponents reject the notion that suffering is ever God's will, they must always find fault in the person who is suffering. The thinking goes something to the effect that "If God doesn't want people to suffer, the only reason they suffer is because they've either done, or are doing, something wrong." But the book of Job clearly shows this thinking to be false!
 - ◆ *And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?"⁹ Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason?¹⁰ Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land."¹¹ But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."¹² And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord. – Job 1:8-12 (ESV)*

- ◆ The Bible is very clear that Job was blameless and upright in *God's* sight. That's quite a statement – not many people in history could ever have claimed to be that! So there was nothing wrong with Job's behavior, thought life or speech – and yet God allowed/brought tremendous suffering into his life. Obviously, in His all-knowing Goodness and Wisdom, it is sometimes God's will for His followers to suffer – it must be for our good.
- ◆ Many advocates of PG-type theologies think that a God who wills for His followers to suffer is evil. They cannot reconcile God's allowance of suffering with their picture of what a loving father should be. This shows that their understanding of love, suffering and God's Goodness is deficient, because Job himself responded to his suffering (which he knew was from God) with worship! *Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped.* ²¹ *And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."* ²² *In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. – Job 1:20-22 (ESV)*

2. A second problem with prosperity gospel-type theologies is that they take the principle of reaping and sowing too far. Essentially what they say is that everything that happens in a person's life is a result of what they've sowed with their words, thoughts and/or actions.

- ◇ Our problem is not with the principle of reaping and sowing, since it is quite clearly a biblical principle. The Bible states that a man *always* reaps what he sows (Gal 6:7). But this is not the same as saying that everything that happens to a person is a result of what they have sowed! It is true that *some* people are physically sick because of sinful attitudes, actions or words (1 Cor 11:30). Things like bitterness, negativity, unforgiveness and sinful vices are certainly major causes of sickness and disease in society today. But this is not the same as saying that *every* sickness in the world is caused by sinful attitudes, actions or words. Some sickness and suffering is caused by other things and NOT because of sin or lack of faith (Lk 13:1-5, John 9:1-3).
- ◇ If reaping and sowing was the only principle which guided whether good things or bad happened to people, then wicked people would ALWAYS suffer and righteous people would ALWAYS prosper. This is, in fact, what PG theologies teach – so long as a righteous person has enough faith to enact their prosperity. But the Bible consistently teaches that the wicked often prosper (in this lifetime) and the righteous often suffer (in this lifetime) – Ps 73:3, 16; Eccl 7:15; 8:12; Jer 5:28; 12:1; etc..
- ◇ Once again the book of Job strikes a resounding blow against PG's way of thinking:
 - a) **Job observes that in this lifetime the wicked often prosper** – **"Why do the wicked prosper, growing old and powerful?"** ⁸ *They live to see their children grow up and settle down, and they enjoy their grandchildren.* ⁹ *Their homes are safe from every fear, and God does not punish them.* ¹⁰ *Their bulls never fail to breed. Their cows bear calves and never miscarry.* ¹¹ *They let their children frisk about like lambs. Their little ones skip and dance.* ¹² *They sing with tambourine and harp. They celebrate to the sound of the flute.* ¹³ *They spend their days in prosperity, then go down to the grave in peace.* ¹⁴ *And yet they say to God, 'Go away. We want no part of you and your ways.* ¹⁵ *Who is the Almighty, and why should we obey him? What good will it do us to pray?' ¹⁶ (They think their prosperity is of their own doing, but I will have nothing to do with that kind of thinking.) ¹⁷ "Yet the light of the wicked never seems to be extinguished. Do they ever have trouble? Does God distribute sorrows to them in anger? ¹⁸ Are they driven before the wind like straw? Are they carried away by the storm like chaff? Not at all! ¹⁹ "Well,' you say, 'at least God will punish their children!' But I say he should punish the ones who sin, so that they understand his judgment. ²⁰ Let them see their destruction with their own eyes. Let them drink deeply of the anger of the Almighty. ²¹ For they will not care what happens to their family after they are dead. ²² "But who can teach a lesson to God, since he judges even the most powerful? ²³ One person dies in prosperity, completely comfortable and secure, ²⁴ the picture of good health, vigorous and fit. ²⁵ Another person dies in bitter poverty, never having tasted the good life. ²⁶ But both are buried in the same dust, both eaten by the*

same maggots. ²⁷ “Look, I know what you’re thinking. I know the schemes you plot against me. ²⁸ You will tell me of rich and wicked people whose houses have vanished because of their sins. ²⁹ But ask those who have been around, and they will tell you the truth. ³⁰ Evil people are spared in times of calamity and are allowed to escape disaster. ³¹ No one criticizes them openly or pays them back for what they have done. ³² When they are carried to the grave, an honor guard keeps watch at their tomb. ³³ A great funeral procession goes to the cemetery. Many pay their respects as the body is laid to rest, and the earth gives sweet repose. ³⁴ “How can your empty clichés comfort me? All your explanations are lies!” – **Job 21:7-34 (NLT)**

b) **Job’s three friends preached the prosperity gospel to Job.** Interestingly enough, Job’s three friends preached a theology which was almost identical to modern-day PG theology. And God was very angry with them (Job 42:7-9).

◆ They made 2 main points:

1) **Only suffering comes to the wicked:**

◇ **Zophar:** ¹³ “If only you would prepare your heart and lift up your hands to him in prayer! ¹⁴ Get rid of your sins, and leave all iniquity behind you. ¹⁵ Then your face will brighten with innocence. You will be strong and free of fear. ¹⁶ You will forget your misery; it will be like water flowing away. ¹⁷ Your life will be brighter than the noonday. Even darkness will be as bright as morning. ¹⁸ Having hope will give you courage. You will be protected and will rest in safety. ¹⁹ You will lie down unafraid, and many will look to you for help. ²⁰ But the wicked will be blinded. They will have no escape. Their only hope is death.” – **Job 11:13-20 (NLT)**

This is classic PG theology! In this passage Zophar asserts that:

- (i) If only Job prayed more he could be healed and have no more suffering (v. 13).
- (ii) If only Job confessed his sins and repented his suffering would go away (v. 14). In other words, Job doesn’t have enough faith/prayer to be healed, and his suffering is a result of his sin.
- (iii) When people confess their sins and get right with God EVERYTHING in their life will begin to prosper and become wonderful (v. 15 – 19).
- (iv) Wicked people always suffer (v. 20). This belief has led Zophar to conclude that since Job is suffering he must have sinned – the fault must be with him, because it couldn’t be God’s will otherwise.

◇ **Eliphaz:** *Is it because you’re so pious that he accuses you and brings judgment against you?* ⁵ No, it’s because of your wickedness! There’s no limit to your sins. ⁶ “For example, you must have lent money to your friend and demanded clothing as security. Yes, you stripped him to the bone. ⁷ You must have refused water for the thirsty and food for the hungry. ⁸ You probably think the land belongs to the powerful and only the privileged have a right to it! ⁹ You must have sent widows away empty-handed and crushed the hopes of orphans. ¹⁰ That is why you are surrounded by traps and tremble from sudden fears. ¹¹ That is why you cannot see in the darkness, and waves of water cover you. ¹² “God is so great—higher than the heavens, higher than the farthest stars. ¹³ But you reply, ‘That’s why God can’t see what I am doing! How can he judge through the thick darkness?’ ¹⁴ For thick clouds swirl about him, and he cannot see us. He is way up there, walking on the vault of heaven.’ ¹⁵ “Will you continue on the old paths where evil people have walked? ¹⁶ They were snatched away in the prime of life, the foundations of their lives washed away. ¹⁷ For they said to God, ‘Leave us alone! What can the Almighty do to us?’ ¹⁸ Yet he was the one who filled their homes with good things, so I will have nothing to do with that kind of thinking. ¹⁹ “The righteous will be happy to see the wicked destroyed, and the innocent will laugh in contempt. ²⁰ They will say, ‘See how our enemies have been destroyed. The last of them have been consumed in the fire.’ – **Job 22:4-20 (NLT)**

◇ Like Zophar, Eliphaz is convinced that since Job is suffering he must have sinned. In his theology, much like PG, everything that happens to a person is a result of them reaping what they have sowed; if a person is experiencing negative things, they must have sowed something negative.

2) **Only prosperity comes to the righteous:**

◇ **Eliphaz:** *Submit to God, and you will have peace; then things will go well for you. ²² Listen to his instructions, and store them in your heart. ²³ If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored— so clean up your life. ²⁴ If you give up your lust for money and throw your precious gold into the river, ²⁵ the Almighty himself will be your treasure. He will be your precious silver! ²⁶ “Then you will take delight in the Almighty and look up to God. ²⁷ You will pray to him, and he will hear you, and you will fulfill your vows to him. ²⁸ You will succeed in whatever you choose to do, and light will shine on the road ahead of you. –*

Job 22:21-28 (NLT)

This, again, is classic PG theology! In this passage Eliphaz asserts:

- (i) If you submit to God everything will go well for you in your life (v. 21);
- (ii) If you put God first in your life you will succeed in everything you choose to do (v. 28).

◇ **Elihu:** *Elihu continued speaking: ² “Let me go on, and I will show you the truth. For I have not finished defending God! ³ I will present profound arguments for the righteousness of my Creator. ⁴ I am telling you nothing but the truth, for I am a man of great knowledge. ⁵ “God is mighty, but he does not despise anyone! He is mighty in both power and understanding. ⁶ He does not let the wicked live but gives justice to the afflicted. ⁷ He never takes his eyes off the innocent, but he sets them on thrones with kings and exalts them forever. ⁸ If they are bound in chains and caught up in a web of trouble, ⁹ he shows them the reason. He shows them their sins of pride. ¹⁰ He gets their attention and commands that they turn from evil. ¹¹ “If they listen and obey God, they will be blessed with prosperity throughout their lives. All their years will be pleasant. ¹² But if they refuse to listen to him, they will be killed by the sword and die from lack of understanding. ¹³ For the godless are full of resentment. Even when he punishes them, they refuse to cry out to him for help. ¹⁴ They die when they are young, after wasting their lives in immoral living. –*

Job 36:1-14 (NLT)

- (i) In this passage Elihu takes on the responsibility of defending God’s character in the light of Job’s suffering. Like teachers of PG he argues that since God is good He would never cause the righteous to suffer (v. 3-7).
- (ii) He goes on to say that if people listen to God and obey Him, they will be blessed with prosperity throughout their lives (v. 11).

◇ Again, this is classic PG theology, and it runs completely counter to Job 1:8 which clearly states that Job was blameless and upright in God’s eyes – yet he suffered.

c) **God condemns the prosperity Gospel:**

- ◆ *After the Lord had finished speaking to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “**I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has.**”⁸ So take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer on your behalf. I will not treat you as you deserve, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has.”⁹ So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite did as the Lord commanded them, and the Lord accepted Job’s prayer. – **Job 42:7-9 (NLT)***
- ◆ Here in this passage God gives His divine stamp of approval to the accuracy of Job’s doctrine and rejects the doctrine of Job’s friends (v.7).
- ◆ **What, then, was the doctrine Job preached? Job’s ‘accurate’ theology:**
 - 1) It was God who brought the calamity into Job’s life (1:20-22). [Thus we know that it is sometime’s God’s will for His followers to suffer.]
 - 2) Not only suffering, but prosperity comes to the wicked (ch. 21).
 - 3) Not only prosperity, but suffering comes to the righteous (ch. 1:8-12).
 - 4) If blessing depended solely on righteousness (or faith, or anything else human), no one would be blessed (9:1-2).
 - ◇ **Job 13:9 (NIV)** *Would it turn out well if he examined you?*
 - ◇ **Job 12:5 (NLT)** *People who are at ease mock those in trouble. They give a push to people who are stumbling.* This passage makes it clear that any theology which puts a blanket of blame on people for their suffering is wrong.

3. **Special Note – Was Job a real person and is the book of Job based on actual events in history?**

- ◇ Because the book of Job is somewhat mysterious and because it messes with some people’s theology, there are those who wish to discount it by saying that Job was not a real person. They argue that the book of Job is an allegorical story, not based on actual people or events. (Of course, even if Job wasn’t a real person (he most certainly was!), that still would not negate the purpose or teaching of the book, which is the inspired Word of God. Even if Job never existed, that still wouldn’t change the fact that God approved of Job’s doctrine and disapproved of the Prosperity Gospel in chapter 42, see above.)
- ◇ But Job *was* a real person, and the events of his story were actual events. We know this because other authors of Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, believed him to be a real person. Anyone who teaches that Job was not a real person positions himself as a higher authority than both the prophet Ezekiel and the apostle James on this matter, and in direct contradiction to the Scriptures:
 - a) *[E]ven if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord God. . . .¹⁹ “Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast,²⁰ even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither son nor daughter. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness. – **Ez 14:14, 19-20 (ESV)***
 - ◆ In this prophecy God told Ezekiel that Job was in a very select group with Noah and Daniel of righteous men from history. The context of the prophecy is that God was describing how wicked the nation of Israel had become; it was so wicked that even if Noah, Daniel and Job lived there, God would not spare it. Obviously, both God and Ezekiel assume that Job was a real person – just like Noah and Daniel.
 - b) *Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. – **James 5:11 (ESV)***
 - ◆ Again, James assumes that Job was a real person; someone we should look up to because he suffered and remained steadfast. Since James was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we should make the same assumption!

D. Suffering is sometimes God's will for believers and often in our best interest.

- Prosperity teachers teach that sickness, suffering and early death are NEVER God's will for any believer.
 1. One implication which follows from this belief, is, as stated in the Job section above, that if any of those things occur in a believer's life, it is always the believer's fault: they either didn't have enough faith to appropriate the healing God wanted to give them, or they must have sinned so that the Devil got a foothold in their life.
 2. A second implication which results from this belief is that suffering is always bad for a believer. This means that believers shouldn't seek to learn or grow in suffering, but only fight to immediately get rid of any (& all) suffering which comes into their life.
- But the Bible teaches that God Himself sometimes sends sickness, pain and suffering to His children (in this lifetime) to discipline us and test us (Heb 12:5-11; James 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-7) – for our *eternal good*. We wholeheartedly affirm that in the future, when the New Heavens and Earth have been created God will completely and permanently rid the universe of suffering (Rev 21:4). In the mean-time, however, during this temporary lifetime, the Bible makes it clear that God does send sickness, adversity, pain and even death into believer's lives (as necessary) for our *good*.
- There are many implications to this truth, here are just a couple:
 1. Rather than immediately rejecting all suffering as evil (not from God), we need to seek God's will whenever we encounter suffering. Sometimes it may be God's will that we be healed, in which case we need to contend (through prayer, fasting, etc.) for that healing. But other times it may be God's will for us to submit to Him and rely on Him *through* the suffering (2 Cor 12:7-10) for His greater purposes. To resist the suffering in such cases is to resist God Himself and His purposes for us. As Job once said, "*Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?*" (Job 2:10)
 2. We must never condemn (silently or otherwise) believers who suffer from sickness, trials or death – it's not necessarily their fault! God is sovereign over our lives and sometimes, for our own good, He determines to take certain of His kids home to be with Him earlier than others (Isa 57:1-2). Many others are sick for reasons that have nothing to do with their lack of faith, but rather, God's greater purposes in their lives and the lives of those around them.
- Some passages from Scripture which show that God Himself sometimes sends sickness and suffering to His followers for their good:
 1. *But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* ⁸ *We are **afflicted in every way**, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; **struck down**, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you. ¹³ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. ¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. **Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.** ¹⁷ For this **light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,** ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. – 2 Cor 4:7-18 (ESV)*
 - a) Paul says 'we are afflicted in EVERY way,' verse 8. What kinds of afflictions does this include? A: All of them! Being afflicted in EVERY way would include poverty, sickness and persecution. Did Paul not have enough faith?
 - ◆ Verse 16: Paul says his 'outer self is wasting away,' which means he was definitely NOT healthy and prosperous. Was God not getting glory in this situation? Did Paul not have enough faith?
 - b) On the contrary, Paul said his afflictions were good for him! Verse 17: Paul says that his sufferings and afflictions were preparing him for an 'eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.'

◆ In other words, we aren't ready for what is awaiting us in heaven. We aren't ready to experience and enjoy the tremendous level of pleasures and prosperity and responsibility and presence of God which exist in heaven. So we *need* suffering in this lifetime to prepare and strengthen us!

2. A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness: ¹⁰ I said, In the middle of my days I must depart; I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years. ¹¹ I said, I shall not see the Lord, the Lord in the land of the living; I shall look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world. ¹² My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd's tent; like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom; from day to night you bring me to an end; ¹³ I calmed myself until morning; **like a lion he [God] breaks all my bones; from day to night you [God] bring me to an end.** ¹⁴ Like a swallow or a crane I chirp; I moan like a dove. My eyes are weary with looking upward. O Lord, I am oppressed; be my pledge of safety! ¹⁵ What shall I say? **For he has spoken to me, and HE HIMSELF HAS DONE IT.** I walk slowly all my years because of the bitterness of my soul. ¹⁶ O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit. Oh restore me to health and make me live! ¹⁷ Behold, **it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness;** but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. – **Isa 38:9-17 (ESV)**

◇ In this passage Hezekiah states that:

- a) God broke all of his bones (v.13);
- b) God made him sick (v.15);
- c) God made him sick and made him suffer for his good ('welfare')! (v.17)

◇ Hezekiah eventually was healed of his illness (2 Chron 32:24), but that does not negate the fact that God made him sick and that his illness was *good* for him! Also, there are other instances where godly people died of their illnesses (see Elisha's death, 2 Kings 13:14).

3. Of course a proponent of PG theology may argue at this point that Hezekiah did get healed in the end and may try to twist the story to fit with his/her theology. But the Scriptures are clear that God also takes His followers home to be with Him early (ie. 'die young'), for their good! *The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.* ² *Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.* – **Isaiah 57:1-2 (NIV)**

a) According to this passage, God doesn't just allow righteous people to die young, He actually 'takes them away.' And why does He do this? For their good: to spare them from further suffering and evil in this world.

◆ But PG proponents simply cannot accept this kind of thinking – they think that ALL death and ALL suffering are bad. They think that God wants every Christian to live a long, healthy life in this lifetime. The Bible's perspective is very different however: when righteous people die they aren't worse off, they're actually better off (they 'enter into peace' and 'find rest' in death v.2).

b) *For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.* – **Phil 1:21 (ESV)**

◆ Paul says that dying is GAIN! If death is gain for a person who loves Jesus, then how is it possible that we should say that a loving God ALWAYS wants to heal us in this lifetime? That would mean that God always wants to give us a lesser gift.

4. And **though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction,** yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. ²¹ And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. ²² Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, "Be gone!" – **Isa 30:20-22 (ESV)**

- ◇ In this passage Isaiah teaches that the Lord Himself sometimes sends the ‘bread of adversity’ (trials) and ‘the water of affliction’ (sickness) in order to help us see and know Him better (v. 20), and to help us listen to Him better (v. 21).
5. *I form light and create darkness, I make well-being **and create calamity**, I am the Lord, who does all these things. – Isa 45:7 (ESV)*
- ◇ God takes credit, here, BOTH for giving people health (‘well-being’) AND for creating calamity. This does not mean that all calamity in your life is from God: it may be the result of your own poor choices, and reaping what you sow. But this verse does clearly state that *some* calamities are from God; which means that believer’s cannot be faulted for every calamity that comes their way. It’s not necessarily a lack of faith or sin that caused the calamity, it could very well God’s way of helping you and a sign of your maturity!
6. *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” ⁷ **It is for discipline that you have to endure.** God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. – Heb 12:5-11 (ESV)*
- ◇ Why do we have to endure pain and suffering? One reason is because God is disciplining us, helping us to grow in maturity and righteousness. Why does He discipline us? Because He loves us and treats us like His kids . . . pain and suffering is for our good, when it comes from God!
7. *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. – James 1:2-4 (ESV)*
- ◇ In this passage James commands believers not to fend off or try to escape suffering but to embrace it. Why? Because suffering tests our faith, which grows our character. This just shows again, that it is possible for a loving God to send short-term suffering into the lives of His children in order to promote their long-term gain.
8. *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. – 1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV)*
- ◇ There are things which are more precious to God (and valuable for us in eternity) than our comfort in this lifetime. One such thing is our faith. According to Peter it is not just good but ‘necessary’ that our faith be tested by ‘various trials’ in this lifetime in order to bring increased glory to God at Jesus’ 2nd Coming.

E. God gets as much glory (or more) from our suffering and weakness as from our blessing.

- Prosperity teachers teach that God only gets glory (or gets the most glory) through healing His children of all sickness and blessing them with material provisions. But the Bible teaches the opposite – that God gets tremendous glory through the death and righteous suffering of His people.

1. *What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. – Phil 1:18-23 (ESV)*

- a) Here Paul clearly affirms that God can get glory EQUALLY either by miraculously sparing Paul, or by allowing Paul to be killed (assuming Paul dies well) – v.20.
 - ◆ Prosperity teachers often teach that God becomes most attractive to unbelievers when His kids are healthy and prosperous. But this is simply not true! Never in the history of humankind has a human being ever fallen in love with Jesus because of some Christian's BMW, or some other material possessions. But *many* unbelievers have come to Christ through watching Spirit-filled people suffer and/or die with love in their eyes, a smile on their lips and peace in their hearts.
 - ◆ All one needs to do is read Foxe's book of Martyrs, or any one of countless missionary stories (like David Brainerd, Amy Carmichael, Corrie Ten Boom, etc. etc.) to see that many unbelievers are attracted to Christ through the WAY that godly people face suffering, persecution and sickness.
- b) One thing PG proponents lose sight of is God's awesome and righteous commitment to His own glory. God places a much higher priority on His glory than He does on our comfort. Since this is true, there is no question that He will sometimes allow us to die and to be sick and to suffer FOR HIS GLORY; rather than healing every time.

2. **Truth: God is most glorified in us not when we are strong (ie. healthy, prosperous, etc.) but when our weakness showcases His strength.**

- a) *So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. – 2 Cor 12:7-9 (ESV)*
 - 1) Paul prayed 3 times for healing, and God said 'No.' This passage, by itself, is enough to destroy the entire framework of Prosperity-type theology. Here we have a blatant example of God refusing to heal a godly person who is filled with faith and contending in prayer.
 - 2) Why did God not want to heal Paul? Because God got more glory through Paul when Paul had a handicap through which God could work. As a result, Paul did not resist his suffering, attempt to escape it or to get rid of it – instead, he embraced it and began to boast about it!
- b) *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not*

inwardly burn? ³⁰ If I must boast, ***I will boast of the things that show my weakness.*** ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. – **2 Cor 11:24-31 (NIV)**

- 1) In this passage Paul boasts about suffering from poverty and weakness. Was this due to a lack of faith on his part? No!
- 2) According to Paul, God gets more glory from our WEAKNESSES than from our strengths (health and prosperity).

3. *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* – **1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV)**

- ◇ Peter says here that when godly people are refined by suffering it will result in *more* praise and glory and honor for Jesus at His 2nd Coming – not less.

F. What about Psalm 91? Do the Scriptures promise us a long life and no sickness in this lifetime – or not?

- Psalm 91 is probably the favorite Scripture passage of Prosperity Gospel advocates everywhere – without it, they probably wouldn't even have their theology. PG enthusiasts love to claim this Scripture as a blanket promise that God will deliver us from every sickness, trouble and trial in this lifetime (assuming a person has enough faith, of course). It is also on this passage that they base their theology that it is God's will for every Christian to live a long, good life. And, at first glance, they seem to have a point: *Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place— the Most High, who is my refuge—* ¹⁰ *no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.* ¹¹ *For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. . . .* ¹⁶ *With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.*” – **Psalms 91:9-11, 16 (ESV)**
- But immediate problems arise – if the PG interpretation of Psalm 91 is correct, what then are we to make of the following passages?
 1. *Some [speaking of champions of the faith] were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.* ³⁶ *Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.* ³⁷ *They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—* ³⁸ *of whom the world was not worthy— wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.* ³⁹ *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,* ⁴⁰ *since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.* – **Heb 11:35-40 (ESV)**
 - ◇ God *Himself* commended these people for their faith (v. 39), and yet they were tortured, killed, destitute, afflicted, etc. etc.. Each of the champions of the faith listed in this passage suffered much evil, and none of them lived a long life. This passage is in complete contradiction with Psalm 91, if we accept PG theology's interpretation of the Psalm.
 2. *Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.* – **Psalms 44:22 (ESV)**
 - ◇ But wait a minute – didn't Psalm 91 say that 'no evil would befall us' (v.10) and that though 'ten thousand fall beside us' (v.7), we would not be harmed? Clearly, something is wrong with PG's interpretation of Psalm 91 – either that, or the Bible is filled with blatant contradictions and we all have to pick and choose the passages we like, discarding the rest.
 3. *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* – **John 16:33 (NIV)**
 - ◇ But doesn't Psalm 91 promise no evil will befall us? In this passage, Jesus promises the opposite: you *will* have trouble. How can we blame troubles on people's lack of faith if Jesus promised us all that we most certainly would have trouble?
 4. In another passage, Jesus waded into this debate by seeming to say completely opposite things!
 - a) *You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death.* – **Lk 21:16 (ESV)**
Then just 2 verses later . . .
 - b) *But not a hair of your head will perish.* – **Lk 21:18 (ESV)**
- Obviously we cannot interpret passages like Psalm 91 in such a way as to negate large swaths of the rest of Scripture. We must also avoid the temptation of so many Christians to pick one set of passages and ignore the rest. Our theology must take into account *the totality of Scripture*; any doctrine built solely on isolated passages, un-integrated with the rest of Scripture is false.
- So what are we to do? Thankfully, the apostle Paul synthesized both sets of passages for us in Romans 8. As it is written, [Quoting Psalm 44:22, see also above] *"For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."* ³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* ³⁸ *For I am*

sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. –

Rom 8:36-39 (ESV)

1. Paul affirms both realities: that because of Jesus we are killed and suffer (v.36), AND that because of Jesus we are more than conquerors (v.37-39).
2. How does this work? In Scripture, promises like Psalm 91 need to be interpreted from God's eternal perspective, not from our temporal one. Here are 2 keys to understanding the promises of Psalm 91:
 - a) #1: **No evil befalls the saints but what God, in His love, permits.** As a result, not only can these evils not conquer us, they turn out for our good! (Rom 8:28)
 - ◆ The Psalmists proclaimed absolute safety to the saints not because they were naïve, but because under the impulse of the Holy Spirit they felt an indomitable hope that God *rules* and *cares* for his people. From the Psalmist's point of view, if God is All-Sovereign (He is), and All-Powerful (He is), than nothing can come into a believer's life except what He allows. Correspondingly, since He is also All-Good, He would never allow anything into a believer's life, except it be in that person's best interest. Therefore, no painful or evil thing can come into a believer's life, except there be some greater good for that person in it (even if the person can't see it).
 - b) #2: **No evil befalls the saints except that which is brief and temporary (this lifetime). Ultimate (ie. eternal) reality for the saints is life without evil or pain.**
 - ◆ *Permanent* (ie. eternal) evil simply can't befall the saints! In the short term we may experience some brief, temporary measure of evil and pain, but nothing which lasts longer than the blink of an eye (the length of our lives here on earth from God's perspective – Ps 39:5; Ps 89:47). And after this lifetime (120 or less years), God receives us into pain-free glory forever and ever (billions upon billions of years to infinity!)
 - ◇ Imagine that a doctor with a miracle vaccine promises people a life with no sickness and disease if they will simply allow him to give them a shot of his vaccine. Imagine that a person goes for their shot and afterward complains that the shot hurt, so the doctor's promise failed. You would be astonished – the brief pain which was experienced at the time the shot was administered did nothing to take away from the doctor's amazing promise of a disease-free life forever after!
 - ◆ In the same way, the promises of Psalm 91 are not negated because we do experience some pain and suffering in this lifetime. In the grand scope of eternity the evil we face in this lifetime is hardly worth talking about because the promised benefits are good forever after. Furthermore, the brief pain experienced in this lifetime actually increases the amount of goodness which can be experienced in eternity (Rom 8:28, 2 Cor 4:17)! Thus, in the perspective of eternity all of the promises of Psalm 91 are literally true – no evil will befall us; no plague will touch us; no evil person destroy us.
 - ◇ **Conclusion to the promise of Psalm 91.** This issue can be summed up theologically by the following statement: Nothing can happen to you, except that God ordained it for your good; and afterwards, God will reward you for all that you suffered through, which was working for your good anyway!

G. Now-not-yet theology – the Scriptures teach that healing and prosperity are only partial in this lifetime, not being completed until after the resurrection.

- The difference between SCC's position on prosperity and healing and PG's position is essentially one of timing. The PG position is that the *full* blessings of healing and prosperity are to be enjoyed *in this lifetime*, while our position is that healing and prosperity are *partially* enjoyed in this lifetime, only becoming complete in the *next lifetime* (after the resurrection). We believe in the now-not-yet concept of the kingdom of God: it is breaking into our world right now, but it will not fully arrive until Jesus' 2nd Coming. Our job as believers is to advance the kingdom of God further and further – but it's not fully here yet. This is why we can and will see *some* healing (kingdom breaking in), but why we cannot expect *full* healing and prosperity all of the time – until after the Resurrection.

- **3 biblical reasons for a now-not-yet theology of partial healing in this lifetime, full healing in the next:**

Summary of 3 reasons:

1. The Bible is clear that Death (which includes sickness) won't be conquered until after Jesus' 2nd Coming.
2. The Bible is clear that ALL of creation (which includes our bodies) will remain in bondage until the Resurrection.
3. Jesus told us to pray for God's kingdom to come. Why? Because it's breaking in, but it's not fully here yet.

- In detail:

1. ***The Bible is clear that Death (which includes sickness) won't be conquered until after Jesus' 2nd Coming.***

- ◇ The fact that PG can believe in total healing for this lifetime in spite of the obvious fact that every person on planet earth still dies is, in our opinion, inconsistent and absurd. The Bible is very clear that we will not be fully healed until we receive our resurrected bodies at Jesus' 2nd Coming. Here are some passages which confirm this position.

a) From the apostle Paul:

- 1) *I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* ⁵¹ *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,* ⁵² *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed [the Resurrection].* ⁵³ *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.* ⁵⁴ *When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."* ⁵⁵ *"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"* – **1 Cor 15:50-55 (ESV)**

- ◇ When will Death be swallowed up in victory? At the moment when a person gets saved? No! At the moment when they work up enough faith? No! Death will not be swallowed up in victory until *after* the Resurrection. Until then death will continue to have power over every single one of us, believer and non-believer alike.

- 2) *For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.* ²² *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.* ²³ *But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.* ²⁴ *Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power [after the Millennium Age].* ²⁵ *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet [the Millennium Age].* ²⁶ *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.* – **1 Cor 15:21-26 (ESV)**

- ◇ According to this passage, death is the *last* enemy to be destroyed: it will first be destroyed in individual believers at the Resurrection (v.23) and completely destroyed throughout the whole universe at the end of the Millennium Age when Jesus hands the earth over to the Father (v. 24-26). Until then, death has not yet been conquered in either believers or in the rest of creation.

- b) The apostle John was also very clear as to the timing of all of our sickness, suffering and pain being healed – *after* we receive our resurrected bodies and *after* God the Father comes down to live with us on the New Earth. *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”* – **Rev 21:3-4 (ESV)**
- ◆ What are the ‘former’ things? Death, mourning, crying, pain, sickness, etc.. When do they pass away? After Jesus comes back – and not a moment before. Until then the former things are not yet former; no matter how much faith a person has, in this lifetime they will still have to deal with death, crying, pain and sickness. Of course, thanks be to God, through the gift of healing and through faith we can be alleviated of *some* sickness, pain and crying – but not all of it. We are living in the now-not-yet Age; the kingdom of God is here, and it is breaking in, but it is not yet fully realized.
 - ◆ In the book of Revelation the apostle John clearly prophesied that the moment when Death would be permanently defeated would not be during this present Age, but at the end of the Millennium Reign of Christ on earth. *And when the thousand years are ended [the Millennium Reign of Christ], Satan will be released from his prison . . . ¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. – **Rev 20:7-15 (ESV)***
 - ◇ Death itself will be thrown into the lake of fire at the Great White Throne Judgment (after the Millennium Age). We have no right to expect death to be defeated before that. Death is here to stay until the end of the thousand year reign of Christ; only at that point will God once and for defeat Death.
- c) **Has Jesus defeated *sickness* already, but not *death*?** It is right at this point that many proponents of PG want to do something tricky – they want to differentiate between sickness and death. They say that Jesus conquered all *sickness* for us right now (you have to claim this blessing through faith), but *Death* won’t be finished off until later (at the Resurrection).
- 1) First of all, as we showed above, there are *many* examples from Scripture where godly faith-filled people were not healed of physical illnesses (see paragraph B.3.a above). Only *one* such example from Scripture of a godly, faith-filled person not being healed is needed in order to disprove the notion that Jesus wants to heal *every* sickness in this lifetime.
 - 2) Secondly, nowhere in the Bible is a distinction between Death and sickness made, whereby Jesus defeats one first and then the other second. Sickness is merely one characteristic (out of many) – a subcategory, if you will – of Death, which will not be swallowed up until after Jesus’ return (1 Cor 15:54).
- ◇ It’s not like when Adam sinned, Death *and* Sickness entered the human race as two separate things. The Scriptures teach us that the moment Adam sinned, he brought only one thing on the human race – Death with a capital ‘D.’ *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man [Adam], and DEATH through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³ *for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. . . .* ¹⁵ *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many DIED through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. . . .* ¹⁷ *For if, because of one man’s trespass, DEATH reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of**

grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. – Rom 5:12-13, 15, 17 (ESV)

- (i) The Scriptures do not make a distinction between sickness and death. Sickness, in biblical thinking, is merely one (of many) practical outworking of the thing called Death. So when the Scriptures talk of Death they refer to all the things which sin brought into the world: separation from God, emotional pain, *physical sickness*, dying, hardships, relational problems, suffering, misery, heartache, etc. etc.. Sickness, disease and illness are merely one subcategory of the curse of Death.
- (ii) Notice that Jesus' death reversed Adam's mistake; whereas Adam brought Death on the human race, Jesus' death brings Life. Jesus does not have to defeat two things (Death *and* sickness), He only needs to defeat one thing – Death (sickness is then defeated, too).

◇ This fact is confirmed in Genesis – *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” – Gen 2:16-17 (ESV)*

- (i) Did Adam and Eve cease breathing the same day that they sinned and ate from the tree? No, they continued living for many hundreds of years afterward. So did God's curse of death fail? Absolutely not. The very day that Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil Death entered their lives; from that very day onward they suffered hardship, sickness, family problems (Gen 4:1-8), pregnancy problems, work problems (Gen 3:16-19) etc. – there's more to death than dying.

◇ Jesus' death on the cross was STEP ONE in defeating Death; salvation is now free for all. STEP TWO comes at Jesus' 2nd Coming when Jesus delivers believing Christian *individuals* from death (and with it sickness and pain and suffering) by giving us our resurrected bodies. STEP THREE comes at the end of the Millennium Age when God the Father remakes the heavens and the earth and delivers all of *creation* from Death (see Rom 8:18-23).

◆ **Conclusion:** The fact that sickness is just one component of Death is an important truth to realize. It means that we should not expect sickness to be fully defeated until Death is fully defeated.

◇ **Objection – doesn't the Bible say that Jesus will heal ALL of our diseases?**

Answer – Yes . . . but it never says He has to do it right now in this lifetime.

a) *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” – Rev 21:3-4 (ESV)*

- ◆ What moment in the future is this passage prophesying towards? The moment at the end of the Millennium Reign of Christ (1000 years after the Resurrection) when God the Father brings the New Jerusalem down to Earth, to live with us in the New Heavens and New Earth forever and ever.
- ◆ So when will God wipe away every tear from our eyes? When will we have no more mourning or crying or pain or death? In this lifetime? No! God will only take those things away *after* He comes down to live with us on earth at the end of the Millennium Kingdom. The 'former' things (which include death, sickness, pain, etc.) will not be *former*, until the New Jerusalem is in place, Satan is in hell and God is on earth – until then they remain *present* realities in all of our lives.

b) **Objection: But doesn't Psalm 103 promise that God will heal ALL of our diseases?** *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, ³ who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ⁵ who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. – Psalms 103:2-5 (ESV)*

1) Christians in the PG theology love to claim this verse as an absolute promise of healing for every sickness and disease in this lifetime. We agree with them that this verse is 100% true, and not at all symbolic; what we disagree on is the timing. God *will* heal ALL of our diseases – but not until the Age to come! Remember what Revelation 21 said (see above point) about the *timing* of God's complete healing of all people and things; *after* He comes down to earth to live with us in the New Jerusalem, *then* He will take away all of our pain and tears and dying.

◇ If Psalm 103:3 is interpreted to be a promise of total healing, all the time, in this lifetime, than an immediate contradiction is set up with other passages written by David. For example Psalm 73: *Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure. ² But as for me, I almost lost my footing. My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone. ³ **For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness. ⁴ They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong. ⁵ They don't have troubles like other people; they're not plagued with problems like everyone else. ⁶ They wear pride like a jeweled necklace and clothe themselves with cruelty. ⁷ These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for! ⁸ They scoff and speak only evil; in their pride they seek to crush others. ⁹ They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth. ¹⁰ And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words. ¹¹ "What does God know?" they ask. "Does the Most High even know what's happening?" ¹² **Look at these wicked people— enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply. ¹³ Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason? ¹⁴ I get nothing but trouble all day long; EVERY MORNING BRINGS ME PAIN. ¹⁵ If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to your people. ¹⁶ So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is! ¹⁷ Then I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked. ¹⁸ Truly, you put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction. ¹⁹ In an instant they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors. ²⁰ When you arise, O Lord, you will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning. ²¹ Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside. ²² I was so foolish and ignorant— I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you. ²³ Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth. ²⁶ **My HEALTH MAY FAIL, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever. ²⁷ Those who desert him will perish, for you destroy those who abandon you. ²⁸ But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do. – Psalms 73:1-28 (NLT)*******

◇ In this passage David clearly says that he often has pain (v. 14), and that his health may fail (v. 26). He even admits to sometimes envying the wicked because their bodies are so healthy and strong (v. 4). So clearly, he could not have meant in Psalm 103:3 that God will heal every one of our diseases in this lifetime!

2) In another instance David prayed and fasted for a week for his infant son to be healed, but the boy died (see 2 Sam 12:15-23). Clearly David did not consider his statement in Psalm 103, that God "heals all your diseases," to be an ironclad statement about God healing every single one of our diseases in this lifetime.

◇ Of course, to a certain extent, Psalm 103:3 is already true in that God does heal many people already today. Any person who has ever experienced a miraculous healing will already be able to enthusiastically

praise God using this verse. Already today God heals every kind of disease and sickness in the world – just not everyone, all the time. Not yet.

3) Later in Psalm 103 we see that, clearly, some of the promises in the chapter are time-sensitive and not to be fulfilled until Jesus' 2nd Coming: *The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all*. – **Psalms 103:19 (ESV)**

- ◇ What is this verse speaking of? Clearly not the present time. God's kingdom is currently not ruling over the world – that's why the world is so messed up. It's also why Jesus told us to pray "Your kingdom come" (Matt 6:10) – He wouldn't have told us to do such a thing if it was already here. Thus, the statement 'his kingdom rules over all' does not speak of the present time but looks ahead to the Millennium Rule of Jesus after His 2nd Coming. In the same way, verse 3's statement "heals all your diseases" is prophetic and will not be fully realized until Jesus' 2nd Coming.
- ◇ The moment you interpret Psalm 103:3 as meaning 'God will heal every single one of our sicknesses and diseases in *this lifetime*,' you run into a number of contradictions with the facts of Scripture:
 - (i) As stated in the point above, David's son died though he prayed and fasted (2 Sam 12:15-23);
 - (ii) Elisha, the awesome prophet of faith who did twice as many miracles as Elijah and who healed Naaman of leprosy, himself died of an illness (2 Kings 13:14-20);
 - (iii) Paul prayed 3 times to be healed, but God blatantly said 'No' (2 Cor 12:7-10);
 - (iv) Timothy, Paul's protégé, had frequent illnesses for which Paul did not recommend more prayer or an increase of faith, but rather, more wine! (1 Tim 5:23);
 - (v) Trophimus, one of Paul's ministering partners, got sick and Paul left him behind (2 Tim 4:20);
 - (vi) And the list goes on . . .

c) **Objection: But doesn't Matthew 4:23 say that Jesus healed every disease?** *And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people*. – **Matt 4:23 (ESV)**

- ◆ However, the grammar in this passage clearly indicates that Jesus didn't heal every time he saw sickness; the anarthrous construction means He healed every *KIND* of disease & sickness, which is exactly how most of the major translations translate it (ASV, NASB, NLT, WNT, CEV, KJV, NJB, LB, TEV, NKJV).
- ◆ Jesus clearly did not heal every person in Israel when He was there. At the pool of Bethesda, as just one example, 'crowds' of sick people were gathered, yet He healed only one man (John 5:1-13).

◇ **Conclusion to the Objections:** there are many passages of Scripture which promise us total healing of all sickness and disease in the Age to come, but there are no passages of Scripture which promise us total healing of all sickness and disease in this lifetime.

2. **Reason #2: The Bible is clear that ALL of creation (which includes our bodies) will remain in bondage until the Resurrection.**

◇ Paul said that all of creation is presently groaning under the bondage of death and decay: *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*¹⁹ *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God [the Resurrection].*²⁰ *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope*²¹ *that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption [death and decay] and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God [Creation to be healed in the same way as our bodies are to be fully healed when we are resurrected].*²² *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*²³ *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies [the Resurrection]. – **Rom 8:18-23 (ESV)***

a) Here in this passage Paul says that all of the creation (the physical realm we can see and touch) is in bondage to death and decay (v. 21); it is in pain (v. 22), and it longs to be free (v. 19).

◆ Our physical bodies are part of the physical creation; thus, we too suffer horribly in this lifetime (v. 18) under the effects of death and decay (our bodies ‘groan’ v. 23), which most certainly includes sickness and disease.

b) Once again, as in point 1 above, when will we be free of the death and decay which are causing our bodies to suffer? Not in this lifetime, but at the resurrection (v. 23). That is why Paul says we are ‘*waiting* eagerly for our adoption as sons . . .’ We have to *wait* for the resurrection because we do not yet enjoy the benefits of total healing from death and decay; which means we cannot expect healing from every sickness and disease, all the time, in this lifetime.

3. **Reason #3: Jesus told us to pray for God's kingdom to come. Why? Because it's breaking in, but it's not fully here yet.**

- a) Two key passages upon which the 'Now-not-yet' doctrine of the kingdom is based are these:
- 1) *Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. – Matt 6:9-10 (ESV)*
 - 2) *From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. – Matt 11:12 (NIV)*
- ◆ Ever since Jesus ascended back to heaven it has been our job (the Church) to *advance* His cause and kingdom. This job includes taking the Gospel to the nations, praying, doing acts of justice, healing the sick, etc.. It is almost too obvious to state, but if Jesus' command to the Church is to *advance* His kingdom that can only mean that His kingdom isn't fully arrived yet. And it won't ever be fully arrived until Jesus Himself returns to rule the earth in person (the 2nd Coming).
 - ◆ Since Jesus' kingdom is in the *process* of advancing here on earth, but not yet fully realized (not even close), how could we expect to enjoy the full benefits of the kingdom in this present lifetime? We can't! And this is exactly the reality which we see portrayed in Scripture: *some* people are healed in this lifetime by faith (see Heb 11:29-34), but others, by that *same* faith, are given strength to *endure* trials and suffering *instead* of being healed (see Heb 11:35-39).
 - ◆ Scripture records many examples of healing (so many, that it is not necessary to cite references). But it also records a number of instances where godly, faith-filled people prayed and were not healed (this list already cited previously):
 - (i) Paul prayed for healing for himself 3 times and God refused to heal him – 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.
 - (ii) Paul was not able to heal Epaphroditus who became so ill he almost died, though later he survived – Philippians 2:25-30.
 - (iii) Paul left Trophimus behind on a missions trip when he got sick – 2 Timothy 4:20.
 - (iv) Timothy experienced '*frequent* illnesses' – 1 Timothy 5:23. Paul's advice to Timothy wasn't to pray more, or to get more faith (I'm sure they had tried that already), it was simply to drink more wine in order to ease the suffering!
 - (v) Elisha (a prophet of tremendous faith and power) died of an illness – 2 Kings 13:14. Here was a man who had healed others in spectacular ways, but he himself died of an illness.
 - ◆ We are currently living in the now-but-not-yet Age of the kingdom; it isn't all-or-nothing. We get to enjoy and experience *some* measures of kingdom life and benefits (eg. healing gift), but we are still waiting for the full realization of kingdom life and benefits, at which time there will be no more sickness, crying, death or pain (Rev 21:3-4).

H. God's will on earth as it is in heaven? . . . and other common arguments made in favor of the total-healing-in-this-lifetime-doctrine.

1. One of the common arguments made by people who say that God heals ALL sicknesses and diseases in this lifetime (if people only have enough faith and will persevere in prayer), is based on the Lord's Prayer where Jesus taught us to pray that God's will would be done 'on earth as it is in heaven' (Matt 6:10). After quoting this passage, proponents of God-always-heals-sickness-in-this-lifetime will ask, "Is there any sickness in heaven?" The obvious answer of which is, 'No.' At which point they pounce; "Well, then, God's will is that there be no sickness here on earth either!" By this logic they believe that they have proved that in every situation of sickness or disease we should pray for complete healing, and expect that the person will be healed – because in heaven there is no sickness, and by faith we can declare it to be the same here.
 - ◇ This logic is flawed for a number of reasons.
 - a) First of all, as we covered in the previous section, it fails to take into account the now-but-not-yet reality of many of God's promises. Ultimately it ISN'T God's will that there be sickness and disease on the earth, and ultimately He *will* get rid of all sickness and disease and hurt . . . *after* the Resurrection! (see Rev 21:1-4; 1 Cor 15:50-56; etc.) Until then we will not all be fully healed all of the time.
 - b) Secondly, the people who use this logic are not consistent – in heaven there isn't any death either . . . does that mean we can pray that people will NEVER die, even of old age?!? Obviously not. 100% of all people die, even those who believe that God heals all sicknesses in this lifetime. But according to this logic, we should be able to pray for everything on earth to be EXACTLY as it is in heaven. And people don't die in heaven. Therefore, according to this logic, if we pray with faith we can keep people living forever here on earth as well. It's the same logic. And it clearly does not work.
 - ◆ In heaven there's no persecution either. If by 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,' Jesus meant that we could pray for things to be exactly on earth as they are in heaven, then we should be able to pray away persecution as well, and expect God to answer in the affirmative 100% of the time. By this logic Chinese Christians should be able to pray that all persecution in China would stop, and expect God to end it. Soon. And what about the millions of persecuted Christians in Islamic countries and the rest of the world? Do they just not have enough faith? The problem does not lie with their faith, but rather with the logic of those who interpret the Lord's Prayer as meaning that Jesus wants us to pray that things will be exactly on earth for us as they are in heaven.
 - ◆ Consider Jesus' statement: "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). Will we have trouble in heaven? No! Yet in this verse Jesus promises all of us that we will most certainly have trouble here on earth. Thus we can conclude that until the Resurrection it is God's will that some things remain very different between heaven and earth. Therefore, when Jesus told us to pray 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,' He was not telling us to necessarily pray that everything would be the same on earth for us as it is in heaven.
 - c) Which brings up a third point – God's *ultimate* will is the same in both heaven and earth, but the *means* through which that will is achieved often differs drastically between the two places because the context is so radically different. What is God's ultimate will and greatest desire? That every person be fully submitted to Him and wholeheartedly devoted to Him. Though God also cares about our health and comfort, these things pale in comparison to His desire for us to be wholehearted, and He is more than willing to sacrifice a little health and comfort in the short term to bring us to a place of wholeheartedness in the long term. In heaven God's greatest desire is already accomplished – those who dwell there are already fully submitted to Him and wholeheartedly in love with Him. But here on earth NONE OF US is either fully submitted or totally wholehearted. This is the biggest difference between heaven and earth. In heaven there is no sin or apathy or pride or selfishness or worldliness to deal with. But on earth those things exist in all of us in abundance! Thus,

on earth God is in some sense 'forced' to use sickness, disease and suffering to move people towards wholehearted submission to Him (consider 1 Pet 1:6-7; James 1:2-4; Isa 48:10). Does God ultimately like suffering and sickness? No! But He is more than willing to apply short term pain to our lives in order to refine and purify us for our long term gain (Heb 12:3-13), knowing that our sin-infected bodies tend to forget Him when things are easy (Deut 6:10-12). Once we have our resurrected bodies, however, we will no longer need discipline (ie. trials and trouble and sickness and the rest) in order to be wholehearted because wholeheartedness and submission will come as naturally to us as breathing. But until then God knows that testing is required to refine our faith just as hot fire is needed to purify gold (1 Pet 1:6-7).

2. **God forgives all of our sins . . . does this mean He also heals all of our diseases?** A second argument that is often made is based on Psalm 103, which says "*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, ³who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases*" (ESV).
- ◇ People who believe that we should always expect to be healed in this lifetime often quote this verse. They ask, "Has God forgiven all of our sins?" To which we respond wholeheartedly, "Yes!" After which they pounce again, "But it here says that He also heals all of our diseases – so you are being inconsistent if you say He forgives all of our sins, but that He doesn't heal all of our diseases."
 - ◇ People who use reasoning like this with Psalm 103 (and also Isaiah 53:5) don't recognize their own inconsistency here: they say that in order to be physically healed the Christian must exercise more faith, but do they say the same about forgiveness of sins? No. They say that the moment a person asks for forgiveness his/her sins are *automatically* forgiven forever. Who has ever counselled a person that they need more faith in order to have their sins forgiven? No one. We all agree that because of the cross our sins are forgiven *automatically* just by a person asking for forgiveness. Thus adherents of PG implicitly recognize that there is a difference between physical healing and forgiveness of sin – one is automatic for all who ask, and one requires 'more faith.' The biblical solution to this discrepancy is one of timing: at the cross provision was made for the total forgiveness of all our sins *now*, and for our total physical healing at *the resurrection* to come.

I. Appendix: Scripture verses to ponder.

1. **Job 1:20-22 (ESV)** Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” ²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.
2. **Job 21:7 (ESV)** Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?
3. **Job 23:10 (NIV)** But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.
4. **Psalms 44:22 (ESV)** Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.
5. **Psalms 73:1-28 (NLT)** Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure. ² But as for me, I almost lost my footing. My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone. ³ For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness. ⁴ They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong. ⁵ They don’t have troubles like other people; they’re not plagued with problems like everyone else. ⁶ They wear pride like a jeweled necklace and clothe themselves with cruelty. ⁷ These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for! ⁸ They scoff and speak only evil; in their pride they seek to crush others. ⁹ They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth. ¹⁰ And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words. ¹¹ “What does God know?” they ask. “Does the Most High even know what’s happening?” ¹² Look at these wicked people— enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply. ¹³ Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason? ¹⁴ I get nothing but trouble all day long; EVERY MORNING BRINGS ME PAIN. ¹⁵ If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to your people. ¹⁶ So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is! ¹⁷ Then I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked. ¹⁸ Truly, you put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction. ¹⁹ In an instant they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors. ²⁰ When you arise, O Lord, you will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning. ²¹ Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside. ²² I was so foolish and ignorant— I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you. ²³ Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth. ²⁶ My HEALTH MAY FAIL, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever. ²⁷ Those who desert him will perish, for you destroy those who abandon you. ²⁸ But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do.
6. **Ecclesiastes 7:14 (NLT)** Enjoy prosperity while you can, but when hard times strike, realize that BOTH come from God. Remember that nothing is certain in this life.
7. **Isaiah 30:20-22 (ESV)** And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. ²¹ And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. ²² Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, “Be gone!”
8. **Isaiah 38:9-17 (ESV)** A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness: ¹⁰ I said, In the middle of my days I must depart; I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years. ¹¹ I said, I shall not see the Lord, the Lord in the land of the living; I shall look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world. ¹² My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd’s tent; like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom; from day to night you bring me to an end; ¹³ I calmed myself until morning; like a lion he [God] breaks all my bones; from day to night you [God] bring me to an end. ¹⁴ Like a swallow or a crane I chirp; I moan like a dove. My eyes are weary with looking upward. O Lord, I am oppressed; be my pledge of safety! ¹⁵ What shall I say? For he has spoken to me, and HE HIMSELF HAS DONE IT. I walk slowly all my years because of the bitterness of my soul. ¹⁶ O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit. Oh restore me to

health and make me live!¹⁷ Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back.

9. **Isaiah 45:7 (ESV)** *I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.*
10. **Isaiah 48:10 (NIV)** *See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.*
11. **Isaiah 57:1-2 (ESV)** *The righteous man perishes, and no one lays it to heart; devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from calamity;² he enters into peace; they rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness.*
12. **Lamentations 3:37-38 (ESV)** *Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?³⁸ Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good AND bad come?*
13. **Habakkuk 3:17-18 (NIV)** *Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.*
14. **Matthew 5:45 (ESV)** *For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*
15. **Matthew 19:29 (NLT)** *And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life.*
16. **John 9:1-3 (NIV)** *As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*
17. **John 12:24 (NIV)** *I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.*
18. **John 16:33 (NIV)** *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*
19. **Romans 5:3-4 (NLT)** *We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance.⁴ And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.*
20. **Romans 8:35-36 (NIV)** *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*
21. **1 Corinthians 4:9-13 (NIV)** *For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.¹⁰ We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!¹¹ To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.¹² We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;¹³ when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.*
22. **2 Corinthians 1:3-7 (NIV)** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.*
◇ Note he didn't promise healings & miracles in everything!
23. **2 Corinthians 4:7-18 (NIV)** *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;⁹*

persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. ¹³ It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. ¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

24.2 Corinthians 6:4-10 (NIV) Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; ⁵ in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; ⁶ in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; ⁷ in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; ⁸ through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ⁹ known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

25.2 Corinthians 11:24-31 (NIV) Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? ³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying.

26.2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NIV) To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

27. Philippians 1:18-23 (ESV) What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

28. Philippians 1:29 (NIV) For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,

29. Philippians 3:10 (NIV) I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

30. Philippians 4:11-13 (NIV) I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of

being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

31. **Colossians 1:24 (NIV)** *Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.*
32. **1 Timothy 5:23 (ESV)** *No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your [Timothy] stomach and your frequent ailments.*
33. **2 Timothy 4:20 (ESV)** *Erastus remained at Corinth, and I [Paul] left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. (Why did Paul leave Trophimus behind? Didn't he have enough faith to get him healed?)*
34. **Hebrews 10:32-34 (NIV)** *Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴ You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.*
35. **Hebrews 11:13 (NIV)** *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.*
36. **Hebrews 11:32-40 (NIV)** *And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷ They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. ³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. ⁴⁰ God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.*
37. **James 1:2-4 (NIV)** *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*
38. **James 1:12 (NIV)** *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*
39. **1 Peter 1:6-7 (NIV)** *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*
40. **1 Peter 4:12-13 (NIV)** *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*
41. **Revelation 21:4 (NIV)** *He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*