

-ing to Christ does not remove us from this trouble. Jesus said: “...in this world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). In fact some hardships will come because of faith. Paul taught: “...All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (II Timothy 3:12). Being a Christian may mean persecution. It may mean alienation from family, friends, employers, or others. Does that mean that God is blind to our physical problems? No. The Christian has the privilege in Christ of “casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you” (I Peter 5:7). We have the assurance that we will have life’s necessities (Matthew 6:33). We have the assurance that we will not be tempted beyond what we can bear (I Corinthians 10:13). But that doesn’t mean that our relationship to God is in anyway connected to our material pros-



perity or comfort. The Christian must trust God even when things do not go our way. The Christian should look to prosperity in the life which is to come. “...Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (II Corinthians 4:16).

By Kyle Pope

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Faithful Sayings

Olsen Park Church of Christ

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Services

Sunday: 9:30 a.m.
10:20 a.m.
6:00 p.m.
Wednesday: 7:00 p.m.

Elders:

Ken Ford
Charles Kelley
Pat Ledbetter

Deacons:

Dean Bowers
Eddie Cook
Bill Davis
Pat Goguen
Neil Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Fred Perez
Rusty Scott

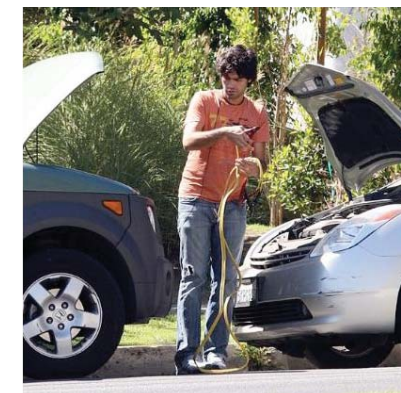
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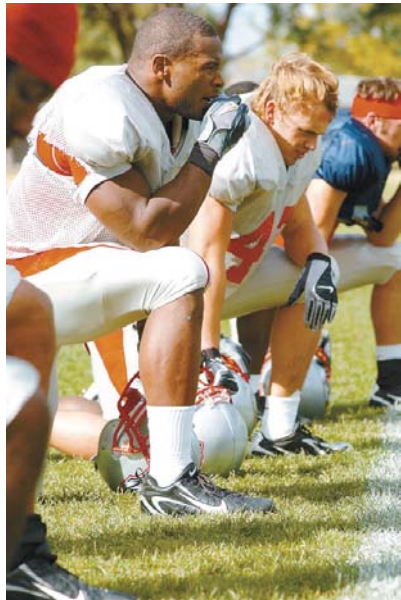
Spiritual Materialism

Some months ago, my wife and I, at the suggestion of some friends and family watched a movie entitled *Facing the Giants*. In many respects the movie was quite enjoyable. There was no vulgarity. There was no indecency. We sat and watched it as a family without worrying about inappropriate material being presented unexpectedly. In many ways it reminded me of one of the old Walt Disney “feel good”—“good guys always win” movies of the 1950’s and 60’s. The primary difference was the strong emphasis on religious faith. Characters were portrayed praying, reading the Bible and attending worship services—activities rarely seen in most films these days.



When the movie ended, in spite of the fact that we appreciated all of these positive elements, my wife and I both looked over

at each other to see the same puzzled, uncertain look on each other's faces. Neither of us could enthusiastically express our enjoyment of the film because of the underlying message it advocated. The story addressed the life of a football coach at a private religious high school. When the film begins, everything is going wrong for him. His team is losing, his old car is breaking down, his wife is unable to conceive children, and he is about to lose his job. After a number of soul-searching events, the coach becomes much more committed



in his faith. As a result, everything turns around—his team starts winning, he is given a new vehicle, his wife conceives, and his job is secure. *So what's the problem?*

Certainly it is good for a person to dedicate him or herself more to Bible study, prayer, and worship—but does that guarantee that all of the problems of life will evaporate? That's certainly the way the movie made it seem. The message was clearly, *if you just have enough faith all your problems will go away*. That makes a good movie, but is that the way that faith in Christ works? I would imagine that the producers felt that a movie which didn't offer a positive resolution to the problems introduced at the beginning of the film wouldn't be as enjoyable. However, I'm afraid that there was more to the choice of plot than just making an enjoyable movie. Many in the religious world hold the very same view that faith is inextricably connected to our material condition. If we prosper, it is because we have strong faith—if we suffer, it is from a lack of faith. What such a view really advances is an attitude of what we might call “spiritual *materialism*”

—that is the notion that if we are just spiritual enough our material condition will prosper.

If this view of faith were true, we would find ourselves immediately facing a number of dilemmas. How do we explain some examples of great faith in Scripture? Take for example, Stephen—the first Christian to die for his faith (Acts 7). What went wrong? Did he not have enough faith? Was he trusting too much in himself? We could look at the example of Paul. He faced much more than car trouble or a losing ball team. He lived: **“in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness”** (II Corinthians 11:27, NKJV). Was his faith deficient? Both examples show men of tremendous faith facing horrible hardships. Did something go wrong—or is this whole concept of “spiritual materialism” flawed.

If this view is correct how do we explain the numerous examples of people of faith in our own time who experience material hardships. I know of wonderful Christians who have lost their jobs. Was their faith flawed? Not all dedicat-



ed Christians that I know have cars that always run well. Are they trusting too much in themselves? Then there are those athletic believers who have lost in competitions—did they not pray enough? Or what about the faithful Christians I have known through the years that have never been able to have children? If this view is right, all of them could have had a houseful of kids if they had just dedicated themselves to their faith a little more.

The Bible makes it clear that this life is a life of trouble. Job said: **“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble”** (Job 14:1). Com-