

Teaching Sound Doctrine

The Prosperity Gospel: Is This the Word of the Lord?

‘The Almighty God has an abundance of financial and physical prosperity awaiting you. That’s his will for your life.’ ‘You need to claim your blessing and not allow Satan or anyone to rob you of what God has in store for you’ This is the teaching of the Prosperity Gospel which claims that once you have faith and donate to Christian ministries, especially the one in which the preacher has a vested interest, then your material prosperity is guaranteed. The Prosperity Gospel is the gospel of materialism that teaches that personal wealth is an indicator of a person’s spirituality, righteousness or holiness.

One of the key tenets of this doctrine is that of personal empowerment, alleviation of sickness and poverty, which are viewed as curses to be broken by faith. The prosperity gospel views the Bible as a contract between God and man: if we have faith in God, he will deliver his promises of security and prosperity. This is the teaching emanating from a number of televangelists: T.D. Jakes, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Hagin, Joyce Meyers and those cut from that cloth. Name it and claim it’ they say. The Prosperity gospel teaches that God wants believers to be materially wealthy. Is this the word of the Lord?

Advocates of this falsehood ground their theology in the promise made to Abraham recorded in Genesis 12:2-3 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed which they allege was fulfilled in Galatians 3:14: So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

The prosperity gospel affirms that the Abraham’s material prosperity was a central feature of the covenant that God made with him and that as

heirs of that covenant the Christian's material prosperity is guaranteed. Such interpretation is a misreading of the text and is as best nothing short of logical gymnastics and ignorance, and at worst a glaring example of wrongly dividing the word of truth.

The apostle, in Galatians 3:14, is expounding the ideas of justification, redemption, and the new birth in Christ insisting that all nations, Jew and Gentile alike, enjoy and are exposed to the same spiritual blessings in Christ which cannot be enjoyed through obedience to the law. It is the spiritual blessing available through faith in Jesus and not the material blessing of wealth that the apostle has in view in this text. The latter part of the verse makes clear 'So that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith'. verse 21-22.

The proponents of the prosperity gospel have, whether by intent or ignorance, failed to grasp the nature of the blessing promised to Abraham - that of justification from sin. Romans 4:16-24 is a clear rebuff of the argument of the prosperity gospel because it shows that the promise to Abraham was all about righteousness in Christ and not material prosperity.

Paul and the Prosperity Gospel

Much to the dismay of the prosperity gospel adherents, Paul's life was not always one of prosperity. His experience and admonition to the people of God that their ability to endure suffering will pale in contrast to their eternal reward is a death blow to this warped theology. Paul's escapades throughout his missionary journeys make a mockery of the claim of the advocates of the prosperity gospel. Suffering, inconvenience and pain were hallmarks of those journeys. 2 Corinthians 4:7-18 11:24-26; Philippians 4:10-13 The Apostle Paul was very much out of sync with the prosperity gospel because rather than grasping to get rich, he admonishes the child of God to exhibit contentment with what they have. 1 Timothy 6:6-11

Implications of the Prosperity Gospel

No false teaching is ever innocent and always carries with it grave implications for what the Bible teaches as a whole. The prosperity gospel is no different. Since there can be no other gospel but the one preached by the apostles and the Bible does not teach the prosperity gospel it is a

serious blunder to describe this teaching as gospel. Suffice it to say, this is the term used to describe such teaching. What then are the implications of this erroneous doctrine?

The prosperity gospel devalues God's relationship with man to the material and reduces the Almighty God to a cosmic vending machine or a kind of investment fund promising a hundred per cent return on your investment. Once you put your trust in Him out pops your material prosperity. Man's relationship with God degenerates into a 'tit for tat; 'something for something' a kind of 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours' relationship.

As we pointed out earlier this doctrine is Satanic to the core for this was the very theology espoused by Satan when he appeared before the presence of the Lord.

Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Job 1:9

Perhaps the most tragic implication of the prosperity gospel is that it makes people seek God for the wrong reasons; for what they can get rather than for the salvation he offers. When the motive for serving God is based on material rewards and when these are not forthcoming, then there is no reason to continue to serve him. This truth is made clear in the John 6. The chapter begins with the feeding of the five thousand (verse 1-13); we are told that having seen the miracles his followers judged him to be a prophet. However, the Master perceived that their motivation was flawed. verse 15 These disciples took their boats in search of him but again Jesus recognized that they were following him for dubious reasons. verse 24-27

In this text, Jesus is scorching in his criticism of their motivation for following him and in a rebuff of the prosperity gospel admonishes them not to seek for material prosperity but for that which endures to eternal life. Verse 29-59 Their motivation was spurred on by their greed for material things and not for the spiritual value of his teaching and consequently they turned back from following after God verse 61-67.

The prosperity gospel equates poverty with sin and financial well being with faithfulness. In prosperity theology, wealth is seen as a blessing

from God, physical health and economic prosperity are aligned with faithfulness and our riches make us right with Him. Jesus however does not share the convictions of these false teachers and warns us to be careful about gaining material wealth at the expense of our spiritual well being. Matthew 16:26; 6:19-21, 24.

We need to come to the recognition that the 'prosperity gospel' makes light of God's grace, glorifies and elevates materialism and promotes greed. The danger lies in the fact that it deceives people into becoming materialistic fostering one's covetousness. Colossians 3:5 The inherent evil in this doctrine is that it promotes the idolatry of money and misses the purpose for which Jesus went to the cross: to ensure our salvation from sin not our material wealth.. Luke 12:15

The ultimate fall out of the prosperity gospel is that it usually leads to the individual to become so consumed in his material possessions that he neglects God and over time leads to dependence on his possessions instead of God. While the prosperity gospel calls upon us to run after fleeting riches, instead hunger and thirst for righteousness Jesus invites us to: Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33.

We must come to the realization that what we teach and practice is important because correct doctrinal beliefs are essential to any wholesome relationship between the believer and God. Wrong teaching will lead to incorrect beliefs about God, His Word, and cannot bring us into a right relationship with Christ our Saviour.