**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**The “Prosperity Gospel” Examined**

There are preachers today who preach what is called a “prosperity gospel.” They teach that it is God’s will for every believer to be prosperous physically and materially. You may have heard some preachers say, "You can have what you say," or "The reason you haven't been healed is that you don't have enough faith," or "We can write our own ticket with God if we decide what we want, believe that it's ours, and confess it," or "What is the desire of your heart? Name it, claim it by faith, and it is yours! Your heavenly Father has promised it." This “gospel” has been ascribed by many names, such as the “name it and claim it” gospel, the “health and wealth” gospel, the “prosperity gospel,” or the “word of faith” movement.

The cardinal fault with the prosperity gospel is one central tenet: God wills the financial prosperity of every Christian, therefore, for a believer to live in poverty he is living outside God's intended will.

In the lesson today I want to look at some of the passages the proponents of this doctrine use to try to prove their doctrine and show that they are twisting scripture rather than expounding on scripture.

First of all, the “prosperity gospel” teaches that the primary purpose of the Abrahamic covenant was for God to bless Abraham and his children materially. Since Christians are now “Abraham’s spiritual children,” they consequently have inherited these material blessings of the covenant. Someone wrote, “Through the crucifixion of Christ, Christians have inherited all the promises made to Abraham, and these include both spiritual and *material well-being*.” They appeal to Gal. 3:14 which says, “that the blessings of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus. . . .”

Well, the promises God made to Abraham were three-fold. God promised that Abraham (1) would become a great nation, that (2) his descendants would possess a certain land, a land that once belonged to their enemies, and that (3) in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. (Read Gen. 22:17-18). The land promise did include a land flowing with milk and honey and the produce of that land. God promised that if the children of Israel (the descendants of Abraham) obeyed the voice of God, they would be blessed in the land. (Read Deut. 28:1-14)

The Nation and the Land promises have already been fulfilled and were fulfilled in the children of Israel (the Jews), not in Christians.

The “Seed” promise, that is, “in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” was fulfilled in Christ. Look with me back in Galatians 3 in verse 8, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’” In verse 16 Paul says, “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.” And so the covenant that God made with Abraham in the beginning was clearly aimed at the salvation of the whole world, through a descendant of Abraham. That descendant is Christ. In Christ all nations are blessed in that they all find “justification” (that is, freedom from the guiltof sin) by faith. And so the blessing of Abraham that comes upon all the nations in Christ Jesus is not materialprosperity, but salvation from sin.

Secondly, those who preach the “prosperity gospel” teach that both physical healing and financial prosperity have been provided for in the atonement, in the death of Christ. One proponent of this doctrine wrote that “the basic principle of the Christian life is to know that God put our sin, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, *and poverty* on Jesus at Calvary.” Their proof text is 2 Cor 8:9, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though* *He* *was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become* *rich.”*

In this verse Paul was in no way teaching that Christ died on the cross for the purpose of increasing our material wealth. He died so that we may be rich spiritually. Unto the church in Smyrna Jesus said*, “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you* *are rich)…”*  (Rev. 2:9) These faithful saints in Smyrna were rich, not with material riches because they were poor, but rich in spiritual blessings. They were rich because they were people of faith. My question is, why were they in poverty if Jesus died so they might be rich materially?

In **2 Cor. 8:1-5** Paul gives the Macedonian churches as examples of proper giving. Paul is urging the Corinthian church to complete the contribution they had promised for theneedy saints in Jerusalem. He gives the churches of Macedonia as examples in giving.The churches of Macedonia were in “deep poverty.” (**v. 2**), but they gave liberally. Theygave beyond their ability, more than Paul had expected. They did this because they “first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.” (v. 5)

In verse 9 Paul gives Jesus as an example. Jesus, “though He was rich, yet for your sakes hebecame poor, that you through His poverty might become rich,” that is rich spiritually. As Jesus gave of Himselfthat we might become rich spiritually, we ought to give of ourselves for the needy saints, is the point Paul is making.But if this passage is saying that Jesus died so that His people may be rich in material wealth, why were the faithful saints inMacedonia in “deep poverty?”

Thirdly, the proponents of the “prosperity gospel” say that 3 John 2 teaches that God wants all believers to “prosper in all things.” In 3 John 2 John is writing to a man by the name of Gaius. He said to him in verse 2, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”They see this verse as a promise of God. As one’s soul prospers then he will prosper materially.Someone said in explaining this verse, “You must realize that it is God's will for you to prosper.This is available to you, and frankly, it would be stupid of you not to partake of it”.Therefore, material prosperity is inseparably linked to spiritual growth, according to thisteaching.

However, this verse is a personal greeting and a prayer of John for Gaius. It is not a universal promise or guarantee of health and wealth for all God’s people. We may pray for one to be healed, and he not be healed as was the case with Paul, in 2 Cor. 12:7-9. Paul prayed that a physical ailment be taken away from him, but the Lord said “no” to his request.

The word “prosper” does not necessarily mean material wealth. It can mean that all things go wellwith him (as in the NIV), not that he increase in material riches. And so this passage is not a promise from God that all his faithful servants will prosper in material wealth.

And then also, those who teach the “prosperity gospel” teach that if you give generously, God will give back more in return, a promise of material prosperity.One of their proof texts is Mark 10:30. Mark 10:29-30 says, “So Jesus answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.” One proponent of this doctrine said, “You give $1 for the gospel's sake and $100 belongs to you; give $10 and receive $1000; give $1000 and receive $100,000. I know that you can multiply, but I want you to see it in black and white and see how tremendous the hundredfold return is.” He later said, “In short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal.”

Mark 10:30 does not promise that one will always receive 100 times what he gives. Jesus is promising that when one leaves all for Him, he will have all he needs materially, emotionally and spiritually. He is not promising that they will become materially wealthy. For example when the disciples lost their houses for the sake of the gospel, they would be given access to homes owned by fellow believers who would share with them as they moved from place to place preaching the gospel. Likewise when the disciples forsook their families for Jesus' sake, they entered new associations in the family of God that were a hundred times as great.

And common sense tells you that not everyone will receive back a 100 times what he gives. Why stop with $10,000. Why not give all you own? Before you know it, you will be a billionaire.

The “prosperity gospel” promotes improper motives in giving. The motive is give in order to get rich. Giving is motivated by covetousness, or greed. They may claim their giving is motivated by love for their neighbor, but they cannot deny that material riches for themselves is also their motivation. One explaining what he calls the “law of compensation” stated, "God's law that we should love our neighbor as we love ourselves is a perfect law. God set the law into motion, and it will always work for our good if we do it. . . . He designed the law to work wonders for us and to give us the greatest prosperity in our neighborhood.”

This teaching is diametrically opposed to the teachings of our Lord.

Matt 6:19 *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;”* Luke 12:15 *“And He said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does* *not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.’”* 1 Tim 6:9-10 *“9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into* *many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love* *of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their* *greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”* Heb 13:5 *“Be ye free from the love of money; content with such things as ye have: for* *himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee.” (ASV)*

The irreconcilable contradictions between prosperity teaching and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is best summed up in the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:24, *“You cannot serve God and* *mammon.”*

What about the great men and women of faith who did not prosper physically and materially?

What about Paul, the apostle? Would you agree that Paul was a man of faith living in the will of God?

If any preacher should be rich according to the teaching of the “prosperity gospel” surely Paul was that preacher. But Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, *“11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and* *homeless* (1 Cor. 4:11)

How can the health and wealth preachers think of Paul as being a faithful servant of God?

And what about Jesus? He was the only perfect person who ever lived. Jesus described His financial standing in these words, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” (Matt. 8:20)

Does the Bible teach that Christians will be rich in this world's goods? No, but it does teach that true Christians will be rich in heavenly goods. Jesus said, *“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”*  (John 6:27)

Our time is gone for today.

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