

## Is the “Gospel of prosperity” Jesus’ Gospel?

### Introduction

God approached mankind at different times and ultimately through Jesus Christ to offer us a life filled with things that are imperishable.

**For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 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. (2 Corinthians 4:17–18)**

In order to look for these imperishable things, one needs to look beyond the visible (transient) world. Though Jesus offered mankind this possibility, the recent decades have seen a huge rise in preachers of material abundance. Prosperity theology, gospel of prosperity, “name it and claim it”, “health and wealth” and the list goes on, has been finding popularity especially among the Charismatic and Pentecostal groups. It has been successfully drawing thousands of people from different backgrounds to “believe” that the God of the Christians wants to grant them health, wealth and any kind of personal success even more than what they really need. These blessings are claimed to be God’s promises for those with the appropriate “faith” and “obedience”.

We consider it important to assess this movement and understand the truth in the light of the Word of God since the prosperity preachers assert that the Bible is the source of their teachings.

### How the prosperity “gospel” works

Be obedient (i.e. donate) and faithful (i.e. pay regularly), and give to the Lord bountifully (i.e. to the prosperity preachers and their ministries). The more money you give, the more you will prosper financially, the more your health will improve, the more success you will have and the more your family and relationships will be blessed. These blessings will enable you to give even more.

### Statements by prosperity preachers

Stella Dhinakaran from “Jesus Calls Ministries”—Be a cheerful giver:

... The Bible says that the Lord takes great delight in blessing you when you give to Him abundantly. When you give to the Lord you will not lack but increase in your finances ... Honour the Lord with your faithful giving however small your income may be ... Prayer: Loving Heavenly Father, I thank You for Your Word that You love a cheerful giver and when I give to You, You will cause a supernatural increase in my finances. Help me to sow more into Your kingdom and let my eyes see the supernatural increase in my finances ...<sup>1</sup>

The above message of Stella Dhinakaran illustrates the way the “supernatural increase in finances” is to be sought, by being a “cheerful giver” to their ministries.

The “Jesus Calls Ministries” (Paul Dhinakaran and family) website is full of “encouragements” to donate. One can join partnership plans for young people, one’s family, business and many other purposes. Along with the donations one can send in his/her prayer requests. Here is an example:

Paul Dhinakaran on the “Business Blessing Plan”:

My dear businessmen, traders and industrialists! The Lord ... wants you and your business venture to go up to the national level! This is the plan of God for you! ... And, when you become a big and prominent industrialist or a businessman or a trader, the government will

<sup>1</sup> quoted from: <http://www.prayertoweronline.org/message/display.asp?t=20081113>

surely consult you when they formulate the trade, industrial and economic policies of the nation ... Yes! The Lord has chosen you, the people who are involved in business, to prepare the world for His Second Coming ... The Lord will prosper you, your family and your business establishment to reach the highest levels in the nation ... Then, the Lord explained to me in detail about the “Business Blessing Plan” and how this decision of His will be fulfilled ... \* You may give as much offering as you want to give every month to the ministry \* You may give a part of your monthly profit to the ministry ... But, the important feature of this plan is that the traders, the business people and the industrialists must be enrolled as the partners of this plan to serve Him and also to receive His abundant blessings.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible clearly condemns people, who “think that godliness is a means to financial gain” calling them “men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth” (1 Tim 6:3–5). Paul Dhinakaran targets the rich or those who want to become rich to give a pious label to their ambitions and thereby tries to draw money from them for his activities.

Benny Hinn—Prosperity ... Is It Biblical?:

I believe biblical prosperity is scriptural, and it is taught throughout the Bible. Giving to the Lord is so important that God has promised that those who give for the work of the Gospel will be blessed and protected ... Poverty does not belong to the righteous. It belongs to those who disobey God ... The reason for biblical prosperity is clear: the Gospel must be preached! This is why a wealth transfer is coming ... The Lord is watching everything we do for Him today. He is looking for a people He can trust, for the day will come when true riches will be committed to believers who are faithful. These true riches not only are the invisible power of God but also the coming wealth transfer on earth that will finance the end-time harvest! ... So give today faithfully. Give today with obedience. Give today with all your heart, with a cheerful heart. And God has promised not only to take care of you today and tomorrow, but also to trust you one day with the wealth of the sinner ... Now it is time that we as believers obey the Lord, and even ask Him for prosperity ... God wants us to prosper because the nations are calling and God continues opening doors. We must respond now before it is too late! ... Click here to plant a seed in obedience to His Word and help Pastor Benny take the life-saving, miracle-working Gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations!<sup>3</sup>

Benny Hinn’s point is to show that obedience means mainly to donate to his ministry without hesitation. Assess these statements of Benny Hinn yourself by comparing them with Paul’s attitude:

**I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ (Acts 20:33–35)**

### **What the Bible teaches**

The Bible instructs us to have a very different attitude from the one promoted by the Dhinakarans and Benny Hinn:

**But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grieves. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and**

<sup>2</sup> quoted from: <http://www.prayertoweronline.org/plans/bbp.asp>

<sup>3</sup> quoted from: <http://www.bennyhinn.org/finances/articledesc.cfm?id=986>

gentleness. (1 Timothy 6:6–11)

In his letter to Timothy, Paul emphasizes on the virtues of modesty and contentment, or thankfulness. Paul explains his point in verse 7, reasoning that the things of this world are temporary, and we cannot take them with us. Thus, it makes no sense to accumulate earthly riches as the pagans do. In verse 4 he warns Timothy of those who ‘want to get rich,’ asserting that even the desire for wealth and earthly prosperity can destroy a person spiritually and lead him away from God.

Jesus himself speaks of this matter in very clear words. In Matthew 6:19–21,24 he says:

**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also ... No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.**

Jesus calls us to invest our time on our heavenly treasures, rather than gathering wealth or earning fame/power. He adds that it is impossible to please God and to satisfy our own selfish desires at the same time.

The Bible sheds light on an encounter Jesus had with a rich young man in Luke 18:18. The man approaches Jesus asking, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”.

After a brief dialogue Jesus says:

**You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me ... Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (Luke 18:22–25)**

In this incident the rich man goes to Jesus, hoping to earn his eternal life by doing good things. But Jesus addresses the deeper root of his problem—his attachment to his wealth—due to which he prevents God from becoming the master of his life. In this way he denies himself eternal life, because of his stubbornness in clinging to the temporary and dissatisfying ‘treasures,’ which lead a man towards emptiness and loneliness.

The Apostle John writes in 1 John 2:15–17:

**Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.**

The Bible warns Christians against pursuing the worthless ambitions and glamour of the fading world. But Jesus’ promises remain for those who want to set themselves apart from all forms of deception and are willing to humbly allow God to renew their mind, not according to the greed of this age, but in harmony with God.

Read more from the Bible about the right attitude towards wealth and material things:

Matthew 8:20, 13:22

Luke 16:19–31

1 Timothy 2:9

Luke 6:24–25

Acts 2:44–46

Hebrews 13:5

Luke 12:13–34!

1 Cor 4:11–12

James 5:1–5

Bible passages prosperity preachers use and their assessment

**Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do. (Deuteronomy 29:9)**

This and similar verses like Deuteronomy 8:18 and 28:1,13 are often used to show that God wants to give material blessings also nowadays. The context of these passages though makes it clear that God speaks here through Moses about the nation of Israel and how he would help them to settle in the Promised Land. The small nation of Israel was only able to survive amidst so many other and usually greater and stronger peoples through God’s provision in both spiritual and material ways. In Deuteronomy 8:3–5 God reminds them that

**He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.**

Israel was familiar with suffering (i.e. hunger) which God had inflicted on them to learn to trust Him and to rely on his word and not on material security. Although in Old Testament times God often promised both spiritual as well as material blessings (meaning plentiful provision of what was needed rather than unnecessary luxury) for those who obey Him by keeping all His commandments (Proverbs 8:17–18, 21; Proverbs 15:6; Proverbs 22:4; Proverbs 28:20), God’s primary aim has always been that his people keep his commands and entrust themselves to His care. He has always condemned greed and love of money. Striving for wealth, fame and success show an earthly attitude which God never wanted.

**Two things I ask of you, O LORD; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD ?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God. (Proverbs 30:7–9)**

Job’s example shows that God has always wanted that our love and obedience for Him should be independent of any circumstances.

Even if he allows misery, persecution, illness, etc. believers should receive these thankfully from His hand:

**At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.” In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. (Job 1:20–22)**

Suffering and poverty are not necessarily an expression of being far from God or not being blessed or being forsaken by Him as Mr. Hinn and others claim.

Benny Hinn:

The Scriptures clearly say that it is not God’s will for any to perish, nor is it His will for any to live in sickness or poverty. Poverty comes when we refuse the Word of God. Proverbs 13:18 declares, “Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.” But when we obey the Lord’s Word, prosperity will be ours immediately, and for all of our days: “If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures” (Job 36:11). The Word of God says clearly in Proverbs 15:6 that in the house of the righteous is much treasure, not much poverty! Poverty does not belong to the righteous. It belongs to those who disobey God. Abundance and blessings belong to God’s children.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> quoted from: [http://www.bennyhinn.org/finances/article\\_desc.cfm?id=986](http://www.bennyhinn.org/finances/article_desc.cfm?id=986)

In Job 36:11, the passage Mr. Hinn quotes, one of Job’s “friends” speaks who held the wrong view that suffering is always caused by disobedience—the very idea the entire book of Job aims to disprove. Surely there are cases when disobedience causes poverty and suffering but the Bible also speaks about disobedience leading to wealth (Jeremiah 5:27) and there are many examples of righteous people who were poor, suffered and were oppressed by the rich:

**For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong ... This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning ... When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies ... Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73)**

**Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? (James 2:5–7)**

Read more examples: Job 21:7–16, Psalm 10, James 5:1–6

Jesus did not come to take away all kinds of sufferings from those who follow him but rather set an example of how to bear them with great endurance, love and humility while looking at the heavenly goal.

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

Although sufferings are not something God actively wants he allows them. If what prosperity teachers claim was true all their followers should actually always be healthy and wealthy. Christianity does not go along with such obvious material advantages since God wants followers who really love Him out of spiritual reasons. Sufferings can lead to endurance and can take us closer to God.

**Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Romans 5:3–5)**

More passages on suffering: 1 Peter 1:6–7, Psalm 119:71, 2 Timothy 3:12

## **Summary**

Unlike the prosperity “gospel” Jesus’ gospel teaches us to turn away from worldly desires in order to be able to serve the Lord freely. (Titus 2:11–12)

**No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. (Matthew 6:24)**

The first Christians set a clear example of how Jesus’ words should be understood:

**And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one**

of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving (C)testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32–35)<sup>5</sup>

Jesus’ wish is that we love each other as he loves us. The sharing attitude of the first Christians is an expression of this divine love. By this love, and not by increasing earthly wealth and success, all men will know that we are his disciples. (John 13:34–35)

Real prosperity is as Paul expresses it in 2 Cor 6:3–6 being

... poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

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<sup>5</sup> taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE