

# THE PROSPERITY “GOSPEL”

## PROPONENTS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

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- The prosperity gospel is one of the many false gospels of our day, promoting the message that those who exercise faith in Christ should expect to receive physical, material, and financial prosperity in this life
- The expectation is that God wants believers to be physically healthy, materially wealthy, and personally happy
- Teachers of the prosperity gospel encourage their followers to pray for and even demand material blessing from God
- “I believe that it is the will of God for all to prosper because I see it in the Word, not because it has worked mightily for someone else. I do not put my eyes on men, but on God who gives me the power to get wealth.”<sup>1</sup>
- Promulgators of this form of false teaching have deceived many around the world, especially in Africa, South America, and Asia where it has become widely embraced
- Although many have promoted perverted forms of the truth for profit (i.e. Balaam – Jude 11; Simon – Acts 8:9-24), the modern prosperity gospel movement began in the 1950s under Oral Roberts
- The movement gain steam in the 1980s with the prominent televangelists Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker
- Today names associated with this movement include Kenneth Copeland, Bishop Eddie Long, Paula White, Benny Hinn, Bill Johnson (Bethel), Joel Osteen, TD Jakes, John Hagee, Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer, Juanita Bynum, Robert Tilton, and Kenneth Hagin
- Much of their false teaching has been promoted through the Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN)
- Many have embraced this false gospel because it promises “your best life now,” a welcome message for those living in extreme poverty and places where disease is rampant

### Jesus’ Atonement Extends to the “Sin” of Material Poverty

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- Proponents of the prosperity Gospel believe that God’s will is always for believers to be healed and live in health
- In their theology, sickness demonstrates that a person is out of God’s will
- They believe that when Christ died on the cross, he died to take away our “sins” of material poverty and physical sickness
- They hold that the atonement of Christ provided physical healing and financial prosperity
- This false teaching comes from a misunderstanding of a few key texts

**Isaiah 53:5** ~ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

**John 10:10** ~ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

**2 Corinthians 8:9** ~ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Tilton, *God’s Word about Prosperity* (Dallas, TX: Word of Faith Publications, 1983), 6.

**1 Peter 2:24** ~ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed

- “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.”<sup>2</sup>

## **The Abrahamic Covenant Promises Material Blessings**

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- The prosperity gospel teaches that, in the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised a vast material and financial inheritance for believers in this life
- They hold that the primary purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant was for God to bless Abraham materially

**Genesis 12:1-3** ~ Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

- Prosperity gospel teachers teach that, since believers are now Abraham’s spiritual children, they have inherited these financial blessings today
- Believing in Christ enables one to inherit great possessions and many tangible and financial blessings as a present-day inheritance
- “Christians are Abraham’s spiritual children and heirs to the blessings of faith... This Abrahamic inheritance is unpacked primarily in terms of material entitlements.”<sup>3</sup>
- “Since God’s Covenant has been established and prosperity is a provision of this covenant, you need to realize that prosperity belongs to you now!”<sup>4</sup>

**Galatians 3:14** ~ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

## **Believers Must Give in Order to Receive Financial Blessings from God**

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- Leaders in this movement teach their followers that the way to gain riches is to give money to the kingdom
- There is a direct correlation...to get more, you must give more
- Central to this idea is the doctrine of seed-faith which posits that financial giving (to ministries that promote prosperity gospel preachers) is like planting a seed that will eventually yield a harvest of blessing
- As you sow a financial “seed” into a ministry as an act of faith, God will, in turn, multiply that seed in the form of various blessings (financial, physical, etc.)
- It essentially represents a transactional relationship between the believer and God, facilitated through a financial gift
- Christians need to give generously to others because when they do, God gives back more in return...this, in turn, leads to a cycle of ever-increasing prosperity

**Mark 10:29-30** ~ Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, 30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Troublemaker* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1996), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Pousson, *Spreading the Flame* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 158.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974), 51.

- “Give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000...in short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal.”<sup>5</sup>
- Oral Roberts articulated the seed-faith concept this way:<sup>6</sup>
  1. Plant a seed: give something valuable (usually money) as your seed to a ministry
  2. Expect a miracle: have faith your act of giving will trigger divine intervention
  3. Harvest the miracle: receive the divine blessings in a manifold manner, often expected to be in material or financial forms

### **Name it and Claim it/Blab it and Grab it**

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- Prosperity gospel teachers hold that words have creative power such that what you say determines everything that happens to you
- This is known as “positive confession”...your confessions, especially the favors you demand of God, must all be stated positively and without wavering
- In such cases, God is required to answer them
- “Positive confession is the practice of saying aloud what you want to happen with the expectation that God will make it a reality. It’s popular among prosperity gospel adherents who claim that words have spiritual power and that, if we speak aloud the right words with the right faith, we can gain riches and health, bind Satan, and accomplish anything we want. To confess positively is to speak words that we believe or want to believe, thus making them reality. This is opposed to negative confession, which is to acknowledge hardships, poverty, and illness and thus (supposedly) accept them and refuse the ease, wealth, and health God has planned for us.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Faith is the Key that Unlocks Prosperity**

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- According to prosperity theology, faith is not a God-granted, God-centered act of the will...rather it is a humanly wrought spiritual force, directed at God that leads to prosperity
- “Faith is a spiritual force, a spiritual energy, a spiritual power. It is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function...There are certain laws governing prosperity revealed in God’s Word. Faith causes them to function.”<sup>8</sup>
- In short, it views faith solely as a means to material gain and, if someone exercises enough faith, he will no longer have to be subject to the crippling effects of sickness and disease
- However, if a person continues to suffer afflictions or poverty, it is due to their lack of personal faith

### **Prayer Moves God’s Hand to Get What We Want**

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- The prosperity gospel treats prayer as a tool to unlock material gain
- Advocates of this doctrine encourage believers to pray for personal success and what will bring them physical blessings in this life
- “When we pray, believing that we have already received what we are praying, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass...It is a key to getting results as a Christian.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Gloria Copeland, *God’s Will is Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1973), 54.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-prosperity-gospel/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/positive-confession.html>

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Creflo Dollar, <http://www.creflodollarministries.org/BibleStudy/Articles.aspx?id=329>

**Matthew 7:7-8** ~ Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

**James 4:2** ~ You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

## AN EVALUATION OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

- When comparing the biblical Gospel with the prosperity gospel, the stark differences become apparent quickly

Prosperity Gospel	Biblical Gospel
Jesus' death and resurrection provide wealth and healing.	Jesus' death and resurrection offer forgiveness of sin and right relationship with God.
Suffering is never in the will of God.	Jesus promised in this world you will have suffering, but our confidence is in the Lord.
Money is a sign of blessing and favor.	The believer has been given every spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ.
Give and you will prosper financially and live your best life now.	It is more blessed to give than receive, trusting that God will give you what you need.
Giving to specific ministries will expedite the return of Christ.	Christians go and preach the Gospel to every nation. Trust that the Lord knows the day and the hour.

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### A Misunderstanding of God's Purposes in Sickness

- As previously noted, proponents of the prosperity gospel hold that physical healing is a part of the atonement
- But in addressing texts that describe our "healing," we must understand that the context is healing from sin not healing from physical ailments

**Isaiah 53:5-6, 8, 11-12** ~ But He was pierced through for our **transgressions**, He was crushed for our **iniquities**; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the **iniquity** of us all To fall on Him...8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the **transgression** of my people, to whom the stroke was due?...11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their **iniquities**...12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the **transgressors**; Yet He Himself bore the **sin** of many, And interceded for the **transgressors**.

**1 Peter 2:24** ~ and He Himself bore our **sins** in His body on the cross, so that we might die to **sin** and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed

- The healing mentioned in those verses is spiritual healing, not physical healing...because the primary disease of the human soul is sin...so the healing in the atonement is spiritual, not physical

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/the-differences-between-the-prosperity-gospel-and-the-biblical-gospel/>

- It is true that the death of Christ indirectly brings about physical healing in that one day we will receive glorified bodies, free from the effects of sin

**Romans 8:23** ~ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

**1 Corinthians 15:51-52** ~ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 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 will be changed.

**1 Corinthians 15:54** ~ But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory.

**Philippians 3:21** ~ [God] will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

- But Christ didn’t die primarily to make us physically healthy, but rather to remove the penalty, power, and presence of sin
- Thus, nowhere does Scripture indicate that physical healing of the body is guaranteed to every believer
- God has not promised complete healing in this life...he promises complete healing for individuals only in the resurrection on the last day
- God may choose to bring healing in this life, but he may desire to use the sickness for his purposes
- In some mysterious way in which we cannot fully comprehend, God uses sickness and diseases for our eternal good and his own glory

## #1 To Demonstrate God’s Glory

- Often, God uses physical sickness as the stage on which he demonstrates his incredible glory and greatness
- Sickness and disease often allow the glory of God to be manifested in a way that never would be possible when we are healthy
- God is glorified when His character is displayed...and his character is often best displayed through the means of sickness, suffering, and even death
- There is such a thing as being sick to the glory of God

**Matthew 9:2-8** ~ And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, “Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven.” 3 And some of the scribes said to themselves, “This fellow blasphemes.” 4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, “Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? 5 “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, and walk’? 6 “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Get up, pick up your bed and go home.” 7 And he got up and went home. 8 But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

**John 9:1-3** ~ As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

## #2 It Teaches Us About God’s Character

- Often sickness and illness provide opportunities to experience the vastness of God’s character in ways you never would have without the sickness
- Sickness and illness are the school where we learn about the great subjects of God’s grace, comfort, sovereignty, kindness, and faithfulness

- Sickness and illness serve as our instructors that tutor us in the curriculum of God’s character
- Job knew physical suffering more than most
  - Job 2:7-8 – he experienced boils from the top of his head to his feet
  - Job 2:13 – he appeared so pitiful his friends didn’t speak to him for a week
  - Job 3:24 – he groaned at the sight of food and cried in pain
  - Job 7:5 – worms and dirt infected his wounds and fluid ran out all over his body
  - Job 13:28 – he was decaying like a rotten thing
  - Job 16:7-8 – he was exhausted and shriveled up
  - Job 19:17 – he had bad breath
  - Job 30:16-17 – he experienced unrelenting pain
  - Job 30:30 – his skin turned black and a fever raged
  - Job 33:21 – he suffered dramatic weight loss
- Despite the physical suffering, Job came to learn much about God’s character

**Job 42:1-6** ~ Then Job answered the Lord and said, “I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ “Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” ‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.’ “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.”

### #3 It Gets Our Attention

- Sometimes sickness and disease are the wake-up call that snaps us out of a spiritual slumber or opens our eyes and ears to important spiritual truths
- “Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”<sup>11</sup>

**Daniel 4:31-33** ~ a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.’ Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws.

### #4 It Can Be What God Uses to Discipline Us

- At times, God uses sickness and even death to discipline believers who are in sin

God disciplined David for his sin with Bathsheba by taking their child in death

**1 Corinthians 11:28-30** ~ But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

**Hebrews 12:5-11** ~ and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.” 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if

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<sup>11</sup> C.S. Lewis

you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

## #5 It Promotes Spiritual Growth

- Like all trials, sickness can be a way that the Lord sanctifies his children, carving sin out of their life and conforming them to the image of Christ

**Romans 5:3-5** ~ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

**James 1:2-4** ~ Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing

## #6 It Causes Us to Anticipate Heaven

- If nothing else, sickness should make us long for heaven when our faith is made sight and we receive our glorified bodies

**2 Corinthians 4:16-18** ~ Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

**Revelation 21:4** ~ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away

- How can we explain the supposed “healings” that take place today?
  1. God has healed them (Gen 21:1; 29:31)
  2. Medical treatment worked (Mark 2:17)
  3. The body healed itself (Psalm 139:14)
  4. Deliberate deceit or sleight of hand
  5. Satanic involvement (2 Cor 11:14)

## A Confusion about Abrahamic Blessings

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- The blessings God promised Abraham in Genesis 12 are spiritual not material
- Believers in Christ are sons and daughters of Abraham and coheirs of the inheritance promised to him
- They receive the blessings of salvation including justification, adoption, the promised Holy Spirit, and the promise of an everlasting inheritance

**Galatians 3:7-9** ~ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

**Galatians 3:29** ~ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.

- Furthermore, although there is a present element to these blessings, we will not fully possess them until the end of the age

**Hebrews 11:39-40** ~ And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

**Hebrews 13:14** ~ For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.

## **A Failure to Give Liberally and Sacrificially**

- At the core of this false gospel lies a greedy desire to get wealthy and store up earthly treasures
- Scripture frequently warns about the dangers of greed

**Luke 12:15** ~ Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”

**Ephesians 5:3, 5** ~ But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints...5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

**Colossians 3:5-6** ~ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,

**1 Timothy 6:3-5, 9-10** ~ If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain...9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

**Hebrews 13:5** ~ Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,”

- “I believe that it is anti-Christian and unholy for any Christian to live with the object of accumulating wealth. You will say, “Are we not to strive all we can to get all the money we can?” You may do so. I cannot doubt but what, in so doing, you may do service to the cause of God. But what I said was that to live with the object of accumulating wealth is anti-Christian.”<sup>12</sup>
- Additionally, Scripture teaches that believers have the duty and privilege of giving generously to the work of God’s kingdom and storing up treasures in heaven
- Jesus essentially taught his disciples to give, hoping for nothing in return

**Matthew 6:19-21** ~ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**Acts 20:35** ~ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’

<sup>12</sup> Charles Spurgeon, in Tom Carter, ed., *2,200 Quotations from the Writings of Charles H. Spurgeon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 216.



**2 Corinthians 9:6-11** ~ Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; 9 as it is written, “HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER.” 10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; 11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

## **An Unwillingness to Acknowledge That We Can Speak Nothing Into Existence**

- There are numerous problems with the idea that saying words out loud will make them a reality
- First is the belief that words have some sort of magical power that we can use to get whatever we want
- This idea comes not from the Bible but from the New Age concept called the “law of attraction” which teaches that like attracts like...positive words will draw a positive reaction
- The assumption is that our words hold the power to force God to give us what we want, a heretical belief that contradicts the clear teaching in Scripture that God answers to no one

**Isaiah 40:13-14** ~ Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? 14 With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge And informed Him of the way of understanding?

- “The second problem is that the prosperity gospel misinterprets the promises of God. ‘Confession is agreeing with what God has said; ‘positive confession’ is demanding human desires. People who push positive confession say that the practice is merely restating God’s promises as given in the Bible. But they don’t differentiate between universal promises God made to all His followers (e.g., Philippians 4:19) and personal promises made to individuals at a certain time for a particular purpose (e.g., Jeremiah 29:11). They also misinterpret the promises God does give us, refusing to accept that God’s plan for our lives may not match up with our own (Isaiah 55:9). A carefree, perfect life is the antithesis of what Jesus said the Christian life would look like—and the lives that His followers lived. Jesus didn’t promise prosperity; He promised hardship (Matthew 8:20). He didn’t promise that our every want would be fulfilled; He promised we’d have what we need (Philippians 4:19). He didn’t promise peace in a family; He promised that families would have problems as some chose to follow Him and some didn’t (Matthew 10:34-36). And He didn’t promise health; He promised to fulfill His plan for us and grace in the trials (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).”<sup>13</sup>
- Third, far from speaking things into existence in the future, we do not even know what tomorrow will bring or even whether we will be alive

**James 4:13-16** ~ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

## **A Wrong Definition of Faith**

- Faith, according to Scripture, is a confident trust in the Lord that leads to salvation and brings comfort in the midst of life’s hardships and difficulties
- Rather than a force that leads to prosperity, faith is the channel which brings us to the grace of God in salvation and the manner in which we walk through this life

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/positive-confession.html>

**Ephesians 2:8** ~ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

**2 Corinthians 5:7** ~ for we walk by faith, not by sight

**Hebrews 11:1** ~ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

- Scripture is clear that our blessings are not dependent on the strength of our faith, but on God's plan and his power

**Psalms 115:3** ~ But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

## **A Faulty View of Prayer**

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- The prosperity gospel's misunderstanding of prayer turns it into a tool believers can use to force God to grant their desires
- "Within prosperity theology, man—not God—becomes the focal point of prayer. Curiously, prosperity preachers often ignore the second half of James' teaching on prayer which reads, 'You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions' (Jas. 4:3). God does not answer selfish requests that do not honor his name. Certainly all our requests should be made known to God (cf. Phil. 4:6), but the prosperity gospel focuses so much upon man's desires that it may lead people to pray selfish, shallow, superficial prayers that do not bring God glory. Furthermore, when coupled with the prosperity doctrine of faith, this teaching may lead people to attempt to manipulate God to get what they want—a futile task. This is far removed from praying that God's will would be done."<sup>14</sup>

## **An Ignorance of the Cessation of the Miraculous Gifts**

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- Reasons the sign gifts have ceased

### #1 The Authenticating Purpose of Miracles

- The primary purpose of the miraculous gifts was to authenticate God's messengers and their message
- The supernatural powers displayed at various times in biblical history through human agency was God's divine confirmation that his messengers were speaking on his behalf
- It was God's way of putting his stamp of approval on those who were the agents of his revelation
- When we look at the periods in biblical history when miracles were done through a miracle worker, we find only 3 periods when that happened:
  - Era #1 – the time of Moses and Joshua
  - Era #2 – the time of Elijah and Elisha
  - Era #3 – the time of Christ and the apostles
- Each of those periods lasted less than 100 years each...about 60-70 years each
- The reason God confined miracles to those three time periods was because they introduced new eras of revelation
  - Moses and Joshua = the Pentateuch
  - Elijah/Elisha = they introduced the prophetic age
  - Christ/Apostles = writers of the NT

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.9marks.org/article/journalerrors-prosperity-gospel/>

- God gave those men miraculous gifts because the miracles authenticated them as messengers from God and the content of their revelation

**Acts 2:22** ~ Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know

**Hebrews 2:3-4** ~ how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

- There is no need for the miraculous gifts today because the age of revelation has passed and the canon is closed
- “Miracles do not appear on the pages of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes. Their abundant display in the Apostolic Church is the mark of the richness of the Apostolic age in revelation; and when this revelation period closed, the period of miracle-working had passed by also.”<sup>15</sup>
- God still does miracles today...but there are no “miracle-workers” today

## #2 The Apparent Loss of Miraculous Abilities

- If the signs gifts were for the purpose of authenticating the message of the apostles, then it would make sense that eventually those gifts would cease once their message had been confirmed
- That’s exactly what we see...miracles were declining in frequency even before the close of the NT

**Philippians 2:25-30** ~ But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; 26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27 For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow...30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

**1 Timothy 5:23** ~ No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments

**2 Timothy 4:20** ~ Erastus remained at Corinth but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus

## #3 The Temporary Gift of Apostleship

- Originally, apostles were gifts given by Christ to the church

**1 Corinthians 12:28** ~ And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues

**Ephesians 4:11** ~ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers

- But the gift of apostleship was a temporary gift...evident from the fact that there were three indispensable requirements of an apostle
- First, they had to have been an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ

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<sup>15</sup> B.B. Warfield

**Acts 1:21-22** ~ Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.

- Second, they had to have been directly appointed by Christ

**Acts 1:24-26** ~ And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen 25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” 26 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

- Third, they had to have the ability to perform miracles

**Matthew 10:1** ~ Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

**2 Corinthians 12:12** ~ The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles

- The conclusion is obvious...no one alive today meets all three of those requirements
- By their very nature, apostles cannot exist beyond the first generation of the church
- The age of the apostles and what they did is forever in the past...the apostolic age has ended
- It was a temporary office accompanied with temporary signs

- Added to that is the fact that the office of apostle was a foundational gift not a perpetual one
- There cannot be apostles today because they occupied a foundational position in the church...and a foundation can only be laid once

**Ephesians 2:19-20** ~ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone

- Also, the apostles laid the foundation of the church by the divine revelation they taught, i.e. through their teaching, preaching, and writings
- That’s why every book of the NT was written by either an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle:
 

○ Matthew (Matthew)	○ Romans to Philemon (Paul)	○ 1, 2 Peter (Peter)
○ Mark (Peter)	○ Hebrews (?)	○ Jude (half-brother of Christ)
○ Luke (Paul)	○ James (half-brother of Christ)	○ 1,2, 3 John/Rev (John)
○ John (John)		
○ Acts (Paul)		

- No new books can be added to the NT because the NT gains its authority from the endorsement of the apostles and their authority
- “Since Christ is the supreme authority over the church, since Christ wrote no book, since only Apostles of Christ can speak for Christ, and since the New Testament claims authority over the church, this authority can only be grounded in apostolic ministry. Thus, apostles had either to write or endorse each book of the New Testament. The fact of the closed character of the canon, therefore, assumes and implies the closed character of the apostolate.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Sam Waldron, *To Be Continued?*, 40-41.