

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL THEOLOGY IN REGARD TO
ITS SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON FINANCIAL PROSPERITY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE
CHURCH IN PAKISTAN

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ERSKINE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS IN THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

MAY 2019



PUBLISHED ONLINE BY FROM HIS FULLNESS MINISTRIES

WWW.FROMHISFULLNESS.COM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIRST SECTION:.....	1
1. Introduction	
2. Defining the Prosperity Gospel	
3. Historical Background of the Prosperity Gospel	
• Global Perspective	
• Local Perspective	
4. Reasons Behind the Prevalence of Prosperity Gospel Theology in Pakistan	
• Secular Illiteracy	
• Theological Illiteracy	
• Poverty	
• Spirit of Greed and Covetousness	
• Last Days Phenomenon	
• Elements of Biblical Truth	
• Rational Structure	
SECOND SECTION:	10
Fundamental Teachings of the Prosperity Gospel Theology	
• Prosperity Gospel and Abrahamic Covenant	
• Prosperity Gospel and Atonement	
• Prosperity Gospel and Prayer	
• Prosperity Gospel and Faith	
• Prosperity Gospel and Giving & Rewards	
THIRD SECTION:	21
Critical Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel’s Special Emphasis on Financial Prosperity	
• Exegetical Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel	
• Biblical Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel	
• Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel	
CONCLUSION.	35
APPENDIX:.....	37
Suggestions for Overcoming the Disease of the Prosperity Gospel	
1. Suggestion for Theological Institutions	
2. Suggestions for the Church Leaders/Moderators/Bishops/Chairmen	
3. Suggestions for Church Members	
BIBLIOGRAPHY:.....	39

Introduction

Christians living in Pakistan, and around the globe have always faced different kinds of challenges for their survival. Today, the most significant external challenge Pakistani Christians are confronting is the issue of persecution or religious discrimination from the religious extremists in the majority community who fire up the ignorant to afflict their Christian neighbors. Consequently, more than ten thousand people have escaped to countries like Thailand,¹ Malaysia² and Sri Lanka³ seeking asylum. Religious tolerance is gradually diminishing from the soil of Pakistan. As far as the internal challenges are concerned, illiteracy, poverty, and denominational conflicts are major concerns, yet beyond all these challenges, the most significant internal challenge is the rapid prevalence of prosperity gospel theology. Sadly, it is becoming the most prevalent phenomenon in the life of the church in Pakistan. This thesis will examine the history and primary claims of the Prosperity Gospel and demonstrate that it is, in the light of the historical gospel, a distortion of Christian truth.

Although it flourished in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, it is rapidly becoming a more dominant reality among other churches, including Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists, and Roman Catholics. Everywhere the Prosperity Gospel is seen. Mega-healing crusades are arranged to proclaim this enticing gospel. Posters, tracks, and TV channels

¹ "Pakistani Christian Asylum Seekers in Thailand Ask for Help," *World Watch Monitor*, December 4, 2018, accessed January 8, 2019, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/12/pakistani-christian-asylum-seekers-in-thailand-ask-for-help/>.

² "Helping the Pakistani Christian Asylum Seekers in Thailand and Malaysia," *Catholic Television*, November 3, 2016, accessed January 9, 2019, <https://www.catholic-television.com/helping-the-pakistani-christian-asylum-seekers-in-thailand-and-malaysia/>.

³ "Pakistani Christian Asylum Seekers in Sri Lanka Fear Deportation," *Ucanews.Com*, accessed January 9, 2019, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistani-christian-asylum-seekers-in-sri-lankafear-deportation/76918>.

often urge people through special advertisements to come and receive a miracle, healing, and financial blessings. Huge investments finance these mega-events. Free transportation service is given to fill big grounds. Their worship services are more anthropocentric than theocentric because they routinely overemphasize the physical well-being of the people. The holistic gospel is not preached from these platforms. While taking the offerings, people are encouraged by saying, “the more you sow, the more you will reap. Now is the time of your blessing, give your tithes and freewill offerings.”

The existing Christian TV channels in Pakistan are adding fuel to the fire because local prosperity gospel preachers mostly own these broadcasting networks. These channels are diligently promoting the teachings of the prosperity gospel around the clock. Some mainline church leaders have also started acknowledging and endorsing the prosperity gospel ministries because they are often invited by these broadcasting networks for interviews and preaching through their platforms. These endorsements create an alarming situation because the centrality of Christ is being robbed and the false hope of health and wealth is being offered.

What is the Prosperity Gospel Theology?

The prosperity gospel is often tagged with several names, such as the “name it and claim it” gospel, the “blab it and grab it” gospel, the “health and wealth” gospel, the “word of faith” movement, the “gospel of success,” the “prosperity gospel,” and “positive confession theology.”⁴ It is a belief that teaches that if someone repents and believes in Jesus Christ, he or she not only receives the gift of salvation but also inherits the right of prosperous health and wealth.

⁴ “The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel: An Exercise in Biblical and Theological Ethics,” *Bible.Org*, accessed January 10, 2019, <https://bible.org/article/bankruptcy-prosperity-gospel-exercise-biblical-and-theological-ethics>.

According to the definition of The Cape Town Commitment,⁵ the prosperity gospel teaches, “Believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the ‘sowing of seeds’ through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings.”⁶ Femi Adeleye, an African scholar explains more specifically and states, “The prosperity gospel focuses primarily on material possessions, physical well-being, and success in this life: this mostly includes abundant financial resources, good health, clothes, housing, cars, promotions at work, success in business and in other endeavors of life.”⁷

Both these statements clearly highlight the fact that the prosperity gospel theology puts enormous emphasis on the physical well-being of human beings. The prosperity gospel theology has been mainly proclaimed and promoted by well-known American preachers and televangelists such as E. W. Kenyon, Oral Roberts, A. A. Allen, Robert Tilton, T. L. Osborn, Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar, Jesse Duplantis, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Reverend Ike, Marilyn Hickey, Joyce Meyer, Benny Hinn, Reinhard Bonnke, T. D. Jakes, and many others who proclaim and promote the theology of the prosperity gospel.

⁵ In October of 2010, over 4,000 Christian leaders from 198 countries met in Cape Town, South Africa, to discuss critical issues of our time as they relate to the Church and evangelization. This was the Third Lausanne Congress, convening nearly 35 years after the original Lausanne Congress in 1974, called by Billy Graham. Written as a roadmap for the Lausanne Movement, The Cape Town Commitment presents a statement of shared Biblical convictions, and calls churches, mission agencies, seminaries and Christians all over the World to action.

⁶ “About Us – Eternal Life Ministries of Pakistan,” n.d., accessed January 10, 2019, <http://elmpakistan.org/about-us/>.

⁷ Daniel Salinas, ed., *Prosperity Theology and the Gospel: Good News or Bad News for the Poor?* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 5.

The Historical Background of the Prosperity Gospel

1. Global Perspective:

The prosperity gospel began to flourish in North American Pentecostal churches after World War II. The historian, Kate Bowler, reveals, “In the 1940s and 1950s, independent Pentecostal healing evangelists began to speak of financial blessings, spiritual laws, and the significance of high-spirited faith.”⁸ However, most scholars believe that it traces its roots to the nineteenth-century New Thought movement.⁹ New Thought philosophy teaches, “God is a force, that the spirit or mind is ultimate reality, that people are divine, that disease originates in the mind, and that thoughts can create or change reality.”¹⁰ At that time, this metaphysical movement heavily influenced the preacher E.W. Kenyon (1867–1948). Russell S. Woodbridge states, “his approach to theology is the basis for one of the prosperity gospel’s most distinctive features—speaking the right words to bring about a new reality; what you confess, you possess. Kenyon served as a link to the popular prosperity preachers that formed the foundation of the modern prosperity gospel movement.”¹¹

Later, prominent men like Oral Roberts and Kenneth Hagin began to follow in the footsteps of Kenyon. Hagin himself has acknowledged the influence of Kenyon on his life and preaching ministry. Moreover, prominent men like Kenneth Copeland, Frederick Price, Robert

⁸ Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 39.

⁹ David W. Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth and Happiness* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹¹ Russell S. Woodbridge, “Prosperity Gospel Born in the USA,” *The Gospel Coalition*, n.d., accessed January 11, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/prosperity-gospel-born-in-the-usa/>.

Tilton, Benny Hinn, Charles Capps, and Jerry Savelle followed Kenyon’s legacy by propagating the prosperity gospel within America and across the globe.

2. Local Perspective:

When did the prosperity gospel begin to germinate in Pakistan and other Asian countries? This question about the prosperity gospel is significant. During the middle of the 20th century, it started to grow in India and South Korea, but later it began to affect the church in Pakistan through the publications of Western prosperity preachers. Joel Tejedo in his article, “Asian Perspectives on Prosperity Gospel Theology, Simplicity and Poverty” gives a quite similar opinion:

It has been said that theology originated in Germany, was corrected in Great Britain, corrupted in the US, and imported and swallowed up by Asians! This Adage has many implications for Asians—not least at the level of the local church. Prosperity theology is one the theologies imported from the West—and it is booming within the megachurches of Asia. Its origins can be traced back to the 1960s when Asian preachers were influenced by prosperity preachers of North America.¹²

Indian preacher Duraisamy Geoffery Samuel Dhinakaran and Korean David Yonggi Cho have been very influential in this regard.¹³ David Yonggi Cho’s book, *Fourth Dimension*, is significant for understanding his adherence to the prosperity gospel.¹⁴ In the book Cho shares his experiences of receiving the numerous blessings of a cycle, chair, and desk. Cho also writes about one of his choir members who desperately wanted to marry a girl whom the choir member loved. Cho mentions how he advised the man to pray. Cho writes that eventually the man’s

¹² Joel Tejedo, “Asian Perspectives on Prosperity Gospel Theology, cited in Daniel Salinas, ed., *Prosperity Theology and the Gospel: Good News or Bad News for the Poor?* 136.

¹³ “Yoido Full Gospel Church,” accessed January 12, 2019, http://english.fgtv.com/a1/a1_03.asp.

¹⁴ “Amazon.Com: *The Fourth Dimension* (8601200425277): David Yonggi Cho: Books,” accessed January 12, 2019, <https://www.amazon.com/Fourth-Dimension-David-Yonggi-Cho/dp/0882703803>.

prayers were answered as he succeeded in getting from God what he desired. This book has been translated into many languages, including Urdu, Pakistan's national language. Undoubtedly, this book has been very influential in flavoring the prosperity gospel as it is found in Pakistan.

However, the real impact on the existing prosperity gospel in Pakistan is mainly attributable to the periodic visits of the foreign prosperity preachers and evangelists like Marilyn Hickey, Peter Youngren, and Morris Cerullo. In addition, Joyce Meyer, Benny Hinn, Reinhard Bonnke, and Joel Osteen have also been very influential through their books, TBN TV shows, and sermons on YouTube. As far as local representation is concerned, the founder of Lamp Fellowship ministries, Professor Alexander Sosheel has been a dominant figure for more than a decade. But nowadays, prominent prosperity preachers such as senior pastor Anwar Fazal, Pastor Salak John Barakat, and Pastor Shehzad are commonly seen propagating prosperity teachings and convening mega-healing crusades across the country.¹⁵

Reasons Behind the Prevalence of Prosperity Gospel Theology in Pakistan

The reasons behind the prevalence of prosperity theology in Pakistan is multidimensional. However, we shall examine a few of the prominent reasons, secular and religious.

1. Secular Illiteracy

The literacy rate is very low in Pakistan as compared to other countries. According to one of the survey reports, the current Pakistan literacy rate has declined from 60 percent to 58

¹⁵ Pastor Anwar Fazal is the most influential preacher having strong ties with Benny Hinn and Marilyn Hickey, "About Us – Eternal Life Ministries of Pakistan," n.d., accessed January 13, 2019, <http://elmpakistan.org/about-us/>.

percent.¹⁶ As far as the Christian literacy rate is concerned, the situation is much worse as compared to the Muslim majority community. Christians comprise 2% of the total population of Pakistan, almost 4.5 million people in number. Sadly, only 0.5 million have acquired some education while the rest of the 4 million Christians are absolutely illiterate or uneducated.¹⁷

The statistics reveal that only 11.5% of the total Christian population is educated in Pakistan. The government of Pakistan can be blamed for the nationalization of missionary schools back in the 1970s because the nationalization of missionary schools resulted in a lower literacy rate for Christians. So, the lack of education or secular illiteracy mainly paved the way for the prosperity gospel to flourish in Pakistan. Undoubtedly, education enlightens the human mind, but illiteracy darkens it. An uneducated person can barely differentiate between the distorted prosperity gospel and the true gospel as they cannot read the Bible.

2. Theological Illiteracy

The second primary reason behind the growth of the prosperity gospel in Pakistan is theological ignorance. The theological situation is dire in both Pentecostal and other churches. Most Pentecostal churches in Pakistan today are independent or nondenominational churches. Theologically illiterate, untrained, and self-appointed pastors and evangelists are the driving force in promoting the prosperity teachings in Pakistan. Another problem lies within the mainstream churches' failure to teach sound theology taught from their pulpits. Most pastors believe that theology has nothing to do with congregational folks. Theological doctrines and

¹⁶ "Literacy Rate in Pakistan," *The Nation*, last modified February 7, 2018, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://nation.com.pk/08-Feb-2018/literacy-rate-in-pakistan>.

¹⁷ "Christians in Pakistan Are the Least Educated Pakistanis," accessed January 14, 2019, <https://www.christiansinpakistan.com/christians-in-pakistan-are-the-least-educated-pakistanis/>.

terms can only be taught and discussed from seminary platforms or in a special seminar. Both of these aspects have created a vacuum for the prosperity gospel to permeate the Christian community in Pakistan. That is why theologically ignorant lay folk are more inclined to accept the phenomenon of the prosperity gospel theology.

3. Poverty

Physical well-being or prosperity has been the greatest dream of everyone living in third world countries like Pakistan. As pointed out earlier, 11.5% of the total Christian population is educated in Pakistan. The other 88.5% are illiterate folks predominately living in poverty and doing menial jobs like cleaning, farming, and working at brick kilns. Therefore, the majority of the Christian community has always had a dream of becoming prosperous in their lives, but it has not yet come true even though they have worked so hard. Their economic situation creates a favorable atmosphere for the prosperity teaching growing in Pakistan. The shortcut approach of the prosperity gospel appeals to poor and destitute persons to rejuvenate their dreams for a better life.

4. Spirit of Greed and Covetousness

Another major cause of the widespread prosperity gospel in Pakistan is the spirit of greed and covetousness. A spiritual person yearns to obey the Word of God, but a carnal person always seeks to satisfy his fleshly desires. Pakistan is filled with such people, who are always looking toward foreign ministries and churches for developing ties with them no matter what they believe and teach. Their task is only to accumulate money. Nowadays, many people in Pakistan own nice houses, cars, bank accounts, and properties mainly because once they established their

connections with the foreign prosperity gospel ministries, they can live a luxurious life. This clearly shows their spirit of greed and covetousness.

5. Last Days Phenomenon

The Bible is filled with several warning passages that clearly state that in the “end times” even the elect will turn away from the truth. The apostle Paul also reminded Timothy saying, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (1 Tim 4:1, ESV). Paul goes on urging him, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths,” (2 Tim 4:3-4, ESV). Every day, more and more folks are leaning toward the prosperity gospel teachings and this is indeed a fulfillment of these “end time” signs.

6. Elements of Biblical Truth

One of the biggest deceptions of the prosperity gospel is that it does contain a grain of biblical truth in it.¹⁸ The prosperity gospel preachers mischievously use biblical truths to market their false gospel. A half-truth is not the complete truth. The proponents of the prosperity gospel seduce their audience with the miracle stories in the Bible. Common people can barely distinguish between the false and true gospel, so they rush to embrace these prosperity teachings. They speak much about health and wealth, totally undermining Christ’s teachings on carrying the cross and suffering.

¹⁸ Jones and Woodbridge, 18.

7. Rational Structure

The rationality or simplicity of the prosperity gospel is another solid reason for its prevalence in Pakistan. It appeals to a common person because most of the prosperity preachers often use very simple vernacular to attract their audience. Their sermons contain enormous illustrations. They avoid dealing with the complex passages of the Bible. The topical sermon technique is mostly utilized. The 88.5% illiterate Christian community of Pakistan feels at home when such simple and rational prosperity teachings are expounded by its proponents. The physical needs of the listener are primarily addressed time and again. Therefore, the prosperity gospel seems more rational, simple, and reality-based rather than a philosophical or spiritual abstraction.

Second Section:

Fundamental Teachings of the Prosperity Gospel Theology

The fundamental teachings of the prosperity gospel theology cannot be ascribed to one individual. It is interestingly a blend of multiple ideas derived from personal interpretations of the Bible. But the essence of the prosperity gospel theology predominantly revolves around one-point: God wants believers to be physically healthy, materially wealthy, and personally happy. In this section, some major doctrines of the prosperity gospel theology will be discussed, namely, the Abrahamic covenant, atonement, faith, prayers, and giving.

1. The Prosperity Gospel and the Abrahamic Covenant

One of the distinctive hallmarks of the prosperity gospel theology is its special emphasis on the significance of the Abrahamic covenant. David Jones and Russel Woodbridge describe this: “Advocates of the Prosperity Gospel, however, teach that the Abrahamic covenant is an

important component of prosperity theology.”¹⁹ In fact, the prosperity teachers derive this doctrine on their comparison of the one New Testament passage from Galatians 3 with one or two Old Testament quotations and abruptly conclude that God made a special promise with Abraham which applies to Christians because they are the spiritual seed of Abraham. This Abrahamic covenant includes both spiritual and physical blessings. Kenneth Copeland writes in his book, *The Laws of Prosperity*, “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.”²⁰ Paula White gives a similar opinion and states, “God’s Word is full of covenants for our lives. All God’s benefits of the blessing, such as healing, deliverance, salvation, financial increase, wholeness, and fulfillment, are available because of covenant. . . . We receive God’s promises by the covenant, and we activate the blessing of God through our faith in covenant”²¹ Joel Osteen follows the same track and describes, “I love Scripture that says, ‘If we belong to Christ, we are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.’ That means we can all experience the blessings of Abraham. If you study Abraham’s record, you’ll discover that he was prosperous, healthy, and lived a long, productive life. Even though he didn’t always make the best choices, he enjoyed God’s blessings and favor.”²²

Critical Evaluation: The above-mentioned statements plainly unmask the faulty hermeneutics of the prosperity gospel teachings on the Abrahamic covenant. They totally adhere to the carnal understanding of the covenant because their emphasis is always on the physical blessings rather

¹⁹ Jones and Woodbridge, 53.

²⁰ Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974), 51.

²¹ Jones and Woodbridge, 54.

²² Ibid.

than on the spiritual. Although they reiterate the first half of Galatians 3:14, they totally ignore the second part of the verse, which reads, “So that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (ESV). Paul’s intention was not to reveal some hidden mystery of physical prosperity to the church in Galatians. Instead, he simply speaks about the spiritual blessing of salvation, not the material blessing of wealth. Bruce Barron suggests, “A look at the context of Galatians 3 suggests that the blessing to which Paul refers is not freedom from poverty or sickness, but the opportunity to be saved through faith and receive the Holy Spirit (see verses 8-9, 14).”²³

The true blessing was in fact the promise through which all the nations of the world would be truly blessed through the seed of Abraham, which only points to Jesus Christ (Rom 4:1-25; Gal 3:1-29; 4:21-30). David W. Jones also raises another significant point and comments,

The prosperity teachers claim that the conduit through which believers receive Abraham’s blessings is faith. This completely ignores the orthodox understanding that the Abrahamic covenant was an unconditional covenant. That is, the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant were not contingent upon one man’s obedience. Therefore, even if the Abrahamic covenant did apply to Christians, all believers would already be experiencing the material blessings regardless of prosperity theology.²⁴

Another drawback of the prosperity gospel’s understanding of the Abrahamic covenant is that it totally ignores the key aspect of the divine covenant, which stresses the fact that it is not a performance-based covenant. If Abraham failed, God would have fulfilled His promise because he cannot lie (see Heb. 6:18).²⁵ However, prosperity gospel proponents totally ignore this key

²³ Bruce Barron, *Health and Wealth Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 91.

²⁴ “The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel: An Exercise in Biblical and Theological Ethics,” *Bible.Org*, accessed January 15, 2019, <https://bible.org/article/bankruptcy-prosperity-gospel-exercise-biblical-and-theological-ethics>.

²⁵ Jones and Woodbridge, 55.

element in the Abrahamic covenant and urge their adherents to follow certain steps and rules to claim their physical blessings, namely, health and wealth.

2. The prosperity Gospel and Atonement

The second major doctrinal flaw of the prosperity gospel theology is their specific focus on the atonement. The prosperity gospel proponents heavily propagate that all the physical blessings have been provided once for all in the sacrificial death of Christ. Christ has paid all the debt of his people on the cross of Calvary. Now, all physical blessings which include health, wealth, and happiness belong to the children of God. Kenneth Copeland believes, “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.”²⁶ Kenneth Hagin, the most influential prosperity teacher, holds a similar view and says, “Don’t ever tell anyone sickness is the will of God for us. It isn’t! Healing and health are the will of God for mankind. If sickness were the will of God, heaven would be filled with sickness and disease.”²⁷ Joyce Meyer takes the same route and claims, “By His stripes I was healed. Healing belongs to me. I was healed two thousand years ago by the stripes Jesus bore. By His stripes I was healed. I’m not trying to get healing; I’ve already got my healing, because by His stripes I was healed!”²⁸

Critical Evaluation: These statements regarding their doctrine of the atonement often use two major passages: Isaiah 53:5, “And with his wounds we are healed,” and 1 Peter 2:24, “By his wounds you have been healed.” David W. Jones argues, “A closer look at the context of Isaiah

²⁶ Kenneth Copeland, *The Troublemaker* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1996), 6.

²⁷ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty, Sickness and Spiritual Death* (Tulsa: Faith Library, 1983), 16.

²⁸ Joyce Meyer, *Healing Scripture* (Fenton: Joyce Meyer Ministries, 2008), 26.

53:5 indicates that the healing cited by the prophet is spiritual in nature—that is, the forgiveness of sin Peter further clarifies the meaning of Isaiah 53:4-5: ‘He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed’ (1 Peter 2:24).”²⁹ These verses communicate a crystal-clear meaning that through His death, Christ atoned for believers’ sins rather than secured their physical health. Gordon Fee, considered to be a one of the greatest New Testament scholars and an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God also describes the Assemblies of God’s stated position on the atonement in the following words:

The “position paper” on divine healing adopted by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God (dated August 20, 1974) makes it quite clear that the historical position does not see healing in the atonement in the same way as salvation. Healing is “provided for” because the “atonement brought release from the . . . consequences of our sin;” nonetheless, since “we have not yet received the redemption of our bodies,” suffering and death are still our lot until the resurrection.³⁰

The Assemblies of God’s stated position on the atonement is clear proof that their view of the atonement differs from the contemporary prosperity gospel theology.

3. Prosperity Gospel and Prayer

The prosperity gospel preachers’ theology of prayer encourages their followers to pray by saying that “we do not have, because we do not ask” (James 4:2). Creflo Dollar believes, “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 We must not

²⁹ Jones and Woodbridge, 51.

³⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 23.

allow religion or tradition to blind us to the truth of what prayer really is.”³¹ Charles Capps, another Word of Faith movement preacher, states, “you have to believe that those things you say—everything you say—will come to pass. That will activate the God kind of faith within you, and those things which you say will come to pass.”³² Kenneth Hagin also believes, “it is unscriptural to pray, ‘if it is the will of God.’ When you put an ‘if’ in your prayer, you are praying in doubt.”³³

Critical Evaluation: The key element of their teaching of prayer plainly depicts their understanding of prayer as being totally anthropocentric. Their prayer theology bluntly compromises the biblical doctrine of God’s sovereignty. God does not always answer prayers according to our fleshly desires. David W. Jones rightly responds:

Prayers for personal blessing aren’t inherently wrong, of course, but the prosperity gospel’s overemphasis on man turns prayer 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’s teaching on prayer: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:3). God does not answer selfish requests that do not honor his name.³⁴

Moreover, the way Christ taught his disciples to pray is a clear message to every believer that “Thy Will be Done” is pivotal to sound biblical understanding of prayer. Jesus Christ himself gave us a practical demonstration of it when he prayed: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39). Kenneth

³¹ Jones and Woodbridge, 59.

³² Charles Capps, *The Tongue, a Creative Force* (Tulsa: Harrison House, 1976), 24.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ David W. Jones, “5 Errors of the Prosperity Gospel,” *The Gospel Coalition*, n.d., accessed January 15, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-errors-of-the-prosperity-gospel/>.

Mbugua asserts, “In his humanity, he wanted release from suffering. But there was something he wanted even more than that—his Father’s will and glory. This is the kind of prayer that God delights to receive. The Bible clearly teaches that God does what he pleases: “Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps” (Ps. 135:6).”³⁵

Another significant feature of the prosperity teaching on prayer is that prosperity proponents exceedingly overemphasize the biblical promises. They urge their adherents saying, ‘name it and claim it,’ ‘blab it and grab it.’ John MacArthur rightly responds, “Teaching that claims we can demand things from God is spiritual justification for self-indulgence. It perverts prayer and takes the Lord’s name in vain. It is unbiblical, ungodly, and is not directed by the Holy Spirit.”³⁶

4. Prosperity Gospel and Faith

The prosperity gospel teachings on faith are also faulty, inadequate, and contrary to the biblical doctrine of faith. The biblical understanding of faith is to trust in the person of Jesus Christ, the truth of His teaching, and the redemptive work He accomplished at Calvary.³⁷ Kenneth Copeland writes about faith, “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.”³⁸

³⁵ Kenneth Mbugua, *Prosperity? Seeking the True Gospel* (Bukuru, Plateau State, Nigeria: ACTS Bookshop, 2015), 23.

³⁶ John MacArthur, *Alone with God* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1995), 51.

³⁷ Jones and Woodbridge, 45.

³⁸ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 14-15.

Copeland continues saying, “If you make up your mind. . . . That you are willing to live in divine prosperity and abundance. . . . Divine prosperity will come to pass in your life. You have exercised your faith.”³⁹ Kenneth Hagin also urges his people concerning faith in the following words, “Did you ever stop to think about having faith in your own faith? Evidently, God had faith in His faith because He spoke words of faith and they came to pass. . . . In other words, *having faith in your words is having faith in your faith*. That’s what you’ve got to learn to do to get things from God: *Have faith in your faith*.”⁴⁰ Joel Osteen writes, “God has already done everything He’s going to do. The ball is now in your court. If you want success, if you want wisdom, if you want to be prosperous and healthy, you’re going to have to do more than meditate and believe; you must boldly declare words of faith and victory over yourself and your family.”⁴¹

Critical Evaluation: A careful analysis of these above-mentioned statements plainly reveals that the prosperity gospel’s understanding of faith is not a theocentric act of the will, or simply a trusting in God; rather it is merely an anthropocentric spiritual force, directed at God. The whole purpose of this position is solely to attract adherents for their own material gain.⁴² The real biblical teachings of the faith lead us to discover and discern the facts of who God is and what He has done throughout redemptive history. However, the prosperity gospel’s major emphasis is always to draw its adherents’ attention toward one key aspect: if you have enough faith in God or

³⁹ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 19.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Hagin, *Having Faith in Your Faith* (Tulsa: Faith Library, 1980), 4-5.

⁴¹ Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (New York: FaithWords, 2015), 132.

⁴² “The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel: An Exercise in Biblical and Theological Ethics,” *Bible.Org*, accessed January 20, 2019, <https://bible.org/article/bankruptcy-prosperity-gospel-exercise-biblical-and-theological-ethics>.

have faith in your own faith, you can achieve anything you want. D. R. McConnell drastically attacks their understanding in the following words:

The Faith theology provides clear, but unacceptable answers to the questions. These answers are objectionable because of the type of god that they reveal. Any god who has to “have faith in his own faith” is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is really no god at all. He (it?) is the impersonal “force” of the metaphysical cults. This force is the slavish puppet of anybody who knows the “formulas” and “spiritual laws” of how to control him. These formulas and laws are called “faith” in the faith movement, but in reality, they are nothing more than recycled New Thought metaphysics.⁴³

This faith theology of the prosperity gospel totally undermines the sovereignty of God and makes the God of the universe merely a puppet whose strings are in the hands of human beings. Man is projected as if he is an “in-control being.” So, it is totally an unscriptural, ungodly, and distorted heap of faulty formulas and spiritual laws, evidently derived from fallacious hermeneutics.

5. Prosperity Gospel’s Emphasis on Giving and Reward

One of the most striking features of the prosperity gospel theology is its emphasis on giving and reward. This key doctrine helps tremendously the prosperity teachers to build their own empires. The biblical truths regarding giving and reward are twisted mischievously, so that a needy and destitute person runs to empty his purse, hoping to receive more than what he gave. This is a money-back guarantee theology.

Gloria Copeland writes in her book *God’s Will Is Prosperity*, “You give \$1 for the Gospel’s sake and \$100 belongs to you; give \$10 and receive \$1000; give \$1000 and receive \$100,000. . . . Give one airplane and receive one hundred times the value of the airplane. Give one car and the return would furnish you a lifetime of cars. In short, Mark 10:30 is a very good

⁴³ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995), 133.

deal.”⁴⁴ Her husband, Kenneth Copeland goes perfectly in line with his partner-in-crime and writes, “Do you want a hundredfold return on your money? Give and let God multiply it back to you. . . . Invest heavily in God; the returns are staggering, 100 to 1 Everyman who invests in the Gospel has a right to expect the staggering return of one hundredfold.”⁴⁵ T. D.

Jakes also urges his listeners:

Remember, no need is too big for your God. Maybe you need a miracle in your marriage. God can put it back together again. You can be facing unbelievable financial challenges; God can provide a supernatural increase. God knows where you need your miracle harvest, and now is the time to sow your Miracle Faith Seed. Even if you’ve already shared a gift, you still have time to increase your blessing during this miracle season of sowing. Take a moment to do two things; first, write your most urgent prayer request on the reply form and send it to me so I may join you in praying for your miracle harvest! Second, take a moment to sow the most generous miracle faith seed you can.”⁴⁶

Critical Evaluation: These teachings clearly reveal the way prosperity preachers seduce their adherents for donations which include tithes and freewill offerings. Undoubtedly, this shallow prosperity gospel is leading people to materialism. Does God really offer the hundredfold? Copelands’ hundredfold return doctrine derived from Mark 10:29-30, is solely based on their private interpretations. David Jones responds with the following words:

Does Jesus promise an investment program with an incredible return? . . . This passage itself answers the question: houses, relatives, and lands with persecutions. In other words, when one leaves his current community to order to follow Jesus, he will become part of a new society comprised of believers wherever he lives. The key to this interpretation is located in Mark 3 where Jesus addresses the question of genuine family. With his family outside the house in which He was preaching, Jesus looks around the group and says, “Here are my mother and brother! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother

⁴⁴ Cited in Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99.

⁴⁵ Copeland, *The Law of Prosperity*, 67, 68.

⁴⁶ Shane Lee, *T. D. Jakes: America’s New Preacher* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 110-11.

and sister and mother” (Mark 3:34-35). The hundredfold clearly refers to the family of believers.⁴⁷

Moreover, this hundredfold doctrine should apply to the rich prosperity preachers and teachers. Why have they always urged others to give and get a hundredfold return? Why do they not start themselves, quitting their brothers, sisters, wives, children, and all material things? David Jones gives the reason why they do not do so because “the prosperity gospel’s doctrine of giving is built upon faulty motives. Whereas Jesus taught his disciples to ‘give, hoping for nothing in return’ (Luke 6:35), prosperity theologians teach their disciples to give because they will get a great return.”⁴⁸

As far as the sowing and reaping principle is concerned, the major drawback of this doctrine is that it promotes a worldly approach rather than a heavenly one. Kenneth Mbugua rightly observes this point and states:

The prosperity gospel’s sowing and reaping principle deviates from the Bible’s teaching in many particular ways. It defies the heavenly perspective that the Bible urges us to have. This heavenly perspective ought to regulate how we sow our time, energy, talents, and money (Matt. 6:19-2) As the writer to the Hebrews testified about his believing readers, “you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one” (Heb. 10:34). That is the sowing and reaping which God offers his people: spiritual sowing and eternal reaping.⁴⁹

David J. Downs also critiques, “if gifts are given or encouraged for the purpose of ‘sowing a seed’ or obtaining some future reward for donors, this seems to many people to introduce a kind of market exchange that is inherently opposed to the practice of Christian charity or gift-

⁴⁷ Jones and Woodbridge, 64-5.

⁴⁸ Jones, “5 Errors of the Prosperity Gospel.”

⁴⁹ Mbugua, 25-6.

giving.”⁵⁰ All of these teachings, whether it is “hundredfold return,” or “faith seed,” or “sowing and reaping” are totally contrary and inconsistent with biblical teachings. Yet the whole purpose of this evaluation is not only to expose the faulty views of the prosperity preachers but also to point out their hidden motives of personal gain.

Third Section:

The Prosperity Gospel’s Special Emphasis on Financial Prosperity

The central theme of the prosperity preaching currently revolves around worldly achievements and material prosperity: houses and cars, success in business, money, health, and happiness. As mentioned before, the major thrust of this thesis is to examine specifically the prosperity gospel doctrine of financial well-being. The core doctrines of the prosperity gospel were analyzed, but now some of the major texts used by the prosperity preachers in support of their emphasis on financial prosperity will be investigated. Prosperity preachers often argue, “God wills the (financial) prosperity of every one of his children, and therefore for a Christian to be in poverty is to be outside God’s intended will; it is to be living a Satan-defeated life. . . . Because we are God’s children (the King’s kids, as some like to put it) we should always go first-class, we should have the biggest and best, a Cadillac instead of a Volkswagen, because this alone brings glory to God.”⁵¹ Two well-known prosperity proponents, Jesse Duplantis and John

⁵⁰ David J. Downs, “Giving for a Return in the Prosperity Gospel and the New Testament,” *Lausanne Movement*, October 3, 2015, accessed January 25, 2019, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/giving-for-a-return-in-the-prosperity-gospel-and-the-new-testament-2>.

⁵¹ Fee, 8-9.

Hagee also teach that “poverty is a curse,”⁵² and that “it is the result of sin.”⁵³ Do these prosperity claims claim hold enough water to maintain consistency with the New Testament teachings on riches and numerous admonitions against the love of money? Is their doctrine of financial prosperity compatible with the historical church faith?

1. Exegetical Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel

John 10:10: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly,” (ESV). The prosperity preachers often use this reference to “abundant life” to support their view of financial prosperity. Does this passage really speak about material blessings? Femi Adeleye uses the Greek text and provides an excellent exposition of this text: “the term used for ‘life’ here is *zoe*, a word indicating ‘life in the spirit and soul’ rather than *bios* which is used to refer to physical, material life. When read as intended, Jesus is saying ‘I want you to have an abundant life in spirit’ not riches, cars, houses, designer clothes and so on, as is often emphasized in the prosperity gospel preaching.”⁵⁴ Gordon Fee also disagrees with the prosperity preachers’ interpretation and comments on this passage, “The Greek word *perrison*, translated ‘more abundantly’ in the KJV, means simply that believers are to enjoy this gift of life to the full (NIV). Material abundance is not implied either in the word ‘life’ or ‘to the full.’ Furthermore, such an idea is totally foreign to the context of John 10, as well as to the whole of the teaching of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁵

⁵² “Jesse Duplantis: Making Your Dreams Come True - CBN.Com - YouTube,” accessed January 25, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlosLSf6RCA>.

⁵³ Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2009), 199.

⁵⁴ Salinas, 14.

⁵⁵ Fee, 11.

3 John 2: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth,” (KJV). This is the most basic Scripture text of the prosperity movement. For example, Oral Roberts, one of the founders of prosperity theology, maintained that instructions from God directed him to read 3 John 2 which he interpreted as “a revelation of the prosperity gospel.”⁵⁶ Kenneth Copeland also says, “John writes that we should prosper and be in health.”⁵⁷ Does this claim really exist in the text? Hardly!

Femi Adeleye again exposes their fallacious hermeneutics and comments, “A careful study would reveal that the word used for ‘prosper’ comes from the Greek word εὐδοῶ (transliterated euodoó) which means ‘good road, route or journey.’ So, the writer is actually saying: ‘I want you to have a good and healthy lifelong journey.’ The words do not necessarily refer to riches or wealth. Why would John, a witness of the life of Christ, say, ‘above everything else, I want you to be rich or wealthy?’”⁵⁸ Gordon Fee also denies the aspect of the financial prosperity here, “To extend John’s wish for Gaius to refer to financial and material prosperity for all Christians of all times is totally foreign to the text. We may rightly learn from the text to pray for our brothers and sisters that ‘all go well with them;’ but to argue from the text that God wills our financial prosperity is to abuse the text, not use it.”⁵⁹

Psalms 2:8: “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (ESV). Anwar Fazal, the most prominent prosperity preacher in Pakistan

⁵⁶ “The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel: An Exercise in Biblical and Theological Ethics,” *Bible.Org*, accessed January 25, 2019, <https://bible.org/article/bankruptcy-prosperity-gospel-exercise-biblical-and-theological-ethics>.

⁵⁷ Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 14.

⁵⁸ Salinas, 14.

⁵⁹ Fee, 10.

often leverages this text to encourage his adherents that God has already made a promise to bless you, you simply need to ask anything you need: new car, new house, job, and visa.⁶⁰ This verse demands a careful analysis. First, Psalm 2 is emphatically a Messianic Psalm, it speaks about the kingship of Christ.⁶¹ It does not apply to every believer in all times. The promise mentioned here is specifically reserved for Christ.

Second, the nature of this promise is noteworthy because it has nothing to do with cars, houses, jobs, and visas, but points toward Christ's redemptive plan for the nations and His sovereign rule over the earth. John Calvin gives an excellent exposition of this verse in the following words: "The Father will deny nothing to his Son, which relates to the extension of his kingdom to the uttermost ends of the earth. But, in this wonderful matter, Christ is introduced as presenting himself before the Father with prayers, in order to illustrate the free liberality of God in conferring upon men the honor of constituting his own Son as governor over the whole world."⁶²

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 by his poverty might become rich" (ESV). The proponents of the prosperity gospel heavily rely upon this text as a pretext to prove

⁶⁰ Isaac tv peter, *Winning Souls Prayer Pastor Anwar Fazal ISAAC TV 02 MAY 2016*, n.d., accessed January 26, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FiPmswEzpk>.

⁶¹ "Messianic Psalm 2: The Current Rebellion and the Coming King!," accessed January 26, 2019, <http://jesusplusnothing.com/studies/online/psalm2.htm>.

⁶² "Psalms 2:8 - ` Ask of Me, and I... - Verse-by-Verse Commentary," *StudyLight.Org*, accessed January 26, 2019, <http://www.studylight.org/commentary/psalms/2-8.html>.

their argument for financial prosperity. But one should remember that a text without a context is a pretext for a proof text.⁶³ David W. Jones writes:

The problem with this interpretation is, of course, that in this verse Paul was in no way teaching that Christ died on the cross for the purpose of increasing anyone's net worth materially. In fact, Paul was actually teaching the exact opposite principle. Contextually, it is clear that Paul was teaching the Corinthians that since Christ accomplished so much for them through the Atonement, then how much more ought they empty themselves of their riches in the service of the Savior. This is why just five short verses later, Paul would urge the Corinthians to give their wealth away to their needy brothers, writing "that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack."⁶⁴

Undoubtedly, 2 Corinthians 8:9 does indicate that the death of Jesus was an intentional act to ensure the wealth of future generations, but the nature of this wealth is different from their understanding of material blessings, a key fact that is deliberately avoided by the prosperity teachers. John Calvin's interpretation is more convincing:

We see, what destitution and penury as to all things awaited him immediately on his coming from his mother's womb. We hear what he says himself, (Luke 9:58). The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests: the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. Hence, he has consecrated poverty in his own person, that believers may no longer regard it with horror. By his poverty, he has enriched us all for this purpose—that we may not feel it hard to take from our abundance what we may lay out upon our brethren.⁶⁵

These are encouraging remarks for poor Christians living particularly in third world countries.

But the contemporary prosperity preachers ignore this aspect and manipulate their own

⁶³ EricW, "Θεοβλογούμενα (Theoblogoumena): 'A Text Without a Context Is a Pretext,'" *Θεοβλογούμενα (Theoblogoumena)*, September 22, 2007, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://theoblogoumena.blogspot.com/2007/09/text-without-context-is-pretext.html>.

⁶⁴ "The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel: An Exercise in Biblical and Theological Ethics," *Bible.Org*, accessed January 28, 2019, <https://bible.org/article/bankruptcy-prosperity-gospel-exercise-biblical-and-theological-ethics>.

⁶⁵ "2 Corinthians 8 Calvin's Commentaries," accessed January 29, 2019, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/2_corinthians/8.htm.

meanings. So, the brief analysis of these verses explicitly states that the prosperity gospel's emphasis on the financial well-being of its adherents stands on faulty hermeneutics.

2. Biblical Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel

The Old Testament Perspective: There are several passages used by the prosperity preachers to support their position concerning financial prosperity, such as Exodus 23:25; Deuteronomy 28:1-14, Psalm 112: 1-3; 128: 1-4; Jeremiah 29:11; Malachi 3:10. All of these significant Old Testament passages definitely speak about material prosperity. However, the New Testament emphasizes spiritual prosperity. This is clear from the New Testament since Jesus and other prominent figures like his disciples were not kings or wealthy aristocrats. They completely lacked the financial prosperity enjoyed by the Old Testament figures like Job and Solomon.⁶⁶ Sometimes it seems incredibly hard to comprehend this paradigm shift, but this complexity can easily be resolved by maintaining the distinction between the old and new covenant. John Frame a well-known Reformed author, makes helpful remarks:

And of course, the relation of God to Israel in the Mosaic covenant was in some ways unique and different from the relation of God to new covenant believers. One of the chief blessings of the old covenant was the blessing of the land of Canaan, to which God gave tittle to Israel. That was the land of milk and honey, of the vine and fig tree, the land in which they were to enjoy their prosperity (Deut. 5:16). Under the new covenant, that has changed. Jesus does not promise NT believers that they will possess a specific piece of real estate, in which their prosperity is tied to their covenant obedience.⁶⁷

Ajith Fernando gives similar opinion, "It is true that the *Old Testament promises prosperity* as one of the blessings of faithfulness to God (e.g., Deut. 28:11). But we must remember that these

⁶⁶ The Real Bible Nerd, "What The Gospel Really Says About Prosperity," *The Real Bible Nerd*, January 17, 2016, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://medium.com/@anthonymays/what-the-gospel-really-says-about-prosperity-5ca084410779>.

⁶⁷ John M. Frame, *John Frame's Selected Shorter Writings* (Vol,1) (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2014), 251.

promises were made to a righteous nation under the Old Covenant.”⁶⁸ The nature of the Old Testament blessings was predominantly a physical one, but the New Testament concept of blessing is more a spiritual one. Gordon Fee was right to quote Sir Francis Bacon, “Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New Testament.”⁶⁹

It is also a significant truth that even in the Old Testament days, not every godly person experienced material prosperity; rather many went through sufferings and trials. Therefore, the writer of the Hebrews praises such people in remarkable words, “. . . some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (11:35b-38, ESV). Even John the Baptist was not blessed material prosperity rather, he was “clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey” (Mark 1:6, ESV).

Moreover, the Old Testament does contain a warning against the love of money and riches, “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep” (Ecclesiastes 5:10–

⁶⁸ Ajith Fernando, “Is It God’s Will for All Christians to Be Wealthy?,” *The Gospel Coalition*, n.d., accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/is-it-gods-will-for-all-christians-to-be-wealthy/>.

⁶⁹ Fee, 40.

12, ESV). It is evident that King Solomon had all sorts of material prosperity, but he ended up disobeying God and began to worship foreign gods. Material prosperity was not the general norm of Old Testament times. Therefore, the prosperity proponents' view of material prosperity is primarily based on their limited understanding of the Old Testament narratives.

The New Testament Perspective: New Testament believers did not experience financial prosperity. Financial prosperity was not promised or taught in the New Testament. The doctrine of financial prosperity is totally inconsistent with the historical Christian faith.

- **Did Jesus, His Disciples, Paul, and the Early Church Experience Financial Prosperity?**

Some prosperity gospel proponents hold highly aberrant views concerning Jesus' financial condition such as John Avanzini and John Hagee. Hagee believes that Jesus had a big house and wore designer clothes.⁷⁰ However, the biblical narratives clearly depict that our Savior Jesus grew up in a poor family as evidenced by His birth in a manger and His parents' poor offering at the temple (Luke 2:22–24; Lev 12:8). His disciples gave up their possessions to follow Him and suffered persecution following their Lord's death and resurrection (Matt 19:27). The Apostle Paul wrote over half of the New Testament, describing his own struggles in spreading the gospel in 2 Corinthians 11:16–33. Moreover, the early church also went through severe financial constraints and even experienced the confiscation of its properties (Heb 10:34). Therefore, these significant examples articulate that the prosperity gospel doctrine of financial prosperity is totally incompatible and irrelevant to the lives of Jesus, his disciples, the apostle Paul, and the early church. Leonard Ravenhill was right to conclude, "The early church was

⁷⁰ John Hagee, *The Seven Secrets: Unlocking Genuine Greatness* (Lake Mary: Chrisma House, 2004), 232.

married to poverty, prisons and persecutions. Today, the church is married to prosperity, personality, and popularity.”⁷¹

- **Jesus’ Teachings on Wealth and Riches**

Jesus has plenty to say about the dangers of wealth. In the Sermon on the Mount, he teaches:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys 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, for 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” (Matt. 6:19–24, ESV).

The young ruler’s encounter with Jesus is also very significant. The young ruler approaches Jesus to know the secret of the eternal life, but he ended up leaving in sorrow. His high hopes were abruptly shattered when Jesus asked him for surrendering his great possessions to follow Him (Matt 19:16–23, ESV). Later, Jesus explicitly stated to His disciples that it is “easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (v. 24, ESV). This statement is cited in all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew: 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25). But how often do prosperity preachers repeat it today?

The dangers of wealth and riches are also found in His parable of the rich farmer who accumulated enormous wealth, but he was called a “fool” at his death. Jesus explains by saying, “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:16-21, ESV). Jesus also warns, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36, ESV). On another occasion, someone in the crowd says, “Teacher, tell my brother to

⁷¹ “A Quote by Leonard Ravenhill,” accessed January 30, 2019
<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/949831-the-early-church-was-married-to-poverty-prisons-and-persecutions>.

divide the inheritance with me” (Luke 12:13, ESV) but Jesus refuses. Conrad Mbewe, a Reformed African scholar comments, “This should surprise not only preachers of the prosperity gospel but also advocates of the social gospel. Jesus warns the one asking for this favor: ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’ (Luke 12:13–15, ESV). Material wealth is not blessedness.”⁷²

- **The Apostle Paul’s Teachings on Wealth**

Paul’s teachings are also significant in this regard. He warns Timothy against people who are “depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain” (1 Tim. 6:5, ESV). He goes on advocating for a modest financial position, “But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” (1 Tim. 6:6–8, ESV). In subsequent verses, Paul warns against the love of riches and wealth: “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things” (1 Tim. 6:9–11, ESV).

All these verses from Paul’s writings forcefully assert that Paul did not encourage material riches; rather he makes a warning against it. Moreover, the author of Hebrews advises, “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I

⁷² Conrad Mbewe, “Bible Verses Prosperity Preachers Wish Didn’t Exist,” *The Gospel Coalition*, n.d., accessed January 30, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/bible-verses-prosperity-preachers-wish-didnt-exist/>.

will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5, ESV). The teachings of Jesus and the Apostle Paul do not support the prosperity gospel doctrine of financial prosperity.

3. Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel

The prosperity gospel is built upon a faulty theology. Their doctrinal teachings of financial prosperity are totally incompatible with the historical teachings of Christian theology. Theology is very important because it gives you the clear blueprint of someone’s understanding about God, His word, and future hope of blessedness. A few doctrines of the prosperity gospel, such as the Abrahamic covenant, atonement, prayer, faith, and giving were preciously evaluated. However, the prosperity gospel’s emphasis on financial prosperity conflicts with the core Christian doctrines of historic faith, such as the sovereignty of God, the grace of God, and the eschatological hope of blessedness.

A. Prosperity Gospel is an Anthropocentric Gospel

The prosperity gospel is totally inconsistent with the historical Christian doctrine which teaches to glorify God alone. The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins with the famous question, “what is the chief end of man?” and the answer, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”⁷³ This historical Christian document teaches what the Bible teaches (1 Corinthians 10:31; Romans 11:36; Psalms 73:24-24; John 17: 22, 24) but the contemporary prosperity gospel glorifies man. The second part of the Shorter Catechism answer also urges for enjoying Him forever. However, the prosperity proponents teach and preach to the enjoyment of

⁷³ “Bible Presbyterian Church Online: WSC Question 1,” accessed January 30, 2019, http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc_001.html.

material things namely, health, wealth, and happiness. This gospel is absolutely anthropocentric rather than theocentric. Gordon Fee contends:

Despite all protests to the contrary, at its base, the cult of prosperity offers a man-centered, rather than a God-centered theology. Even though one is regularly told that it is to God's own glory that we should prosper, the appeal is always made to our own selfishness and sense of well-being. In fact, the only one who could possibly believe this non-biblical nonsense is someone who wants to, and the only reason one would want to is because of its appeal to one's selfishness.⁷⁴

B. Prosperity Gospel Robs the Sovereignty of God

The second major fault of the prosperity gospel proponents is that they rob God's sovereignty. They often teach that "if you have enough faith and pray, God will definitely fulfill the desires of your heart," using passages like Psalms 37:4 and Matthew 7:7-11. Robert Tilton, a well-known prosperity preacher believes, "We make our own promises to do our part. Then we can tell God on the authority of His word what we would like Him to do. That's right! You can actually tell God what you would like His part in the covenant to be."⁷⁵ This statement clearly leads people to believe in their own sovereignty rather than in God's sovereignty. It makes a man sovereign and in control. David Jones and Russell Woodbridge rightly respond,

The Lord is sovereign and does whatever He pleases to accomplish His purposes (Isa. 46:8-11). God directs our steps and works all things for good (Prov. 16:9; Rom. 8:28-30). When you start thinking that God exists in order to serve you and grant your desires, you usurp His place. When you start thinking that you control your own future, when you demote God. Such ideas are at the heart of the Prosperity Gospel.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Fee, 15-6.

⁷⁵ Robert Tilton, *God's Miracle Plan for Man* (Dallas: Robert Tilton ministries, 1987), 36.

⁷⁶ Jones and Woodbridge, 140.

The sovereignty of God always has been the crux of Christian faith, but the prosperity gospel teaches the opposite way. Therefore, it is totally a false gospel because it compromises the sovereignty of God. It opposes God’s sovereignty and the answer to the Westminster Shorter Catechism’s seventh question, “The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.”⁷⁷

C. Prosperity Gospel Insults the Doctrine of God’s Grace

The prosperity gospel preachers often market the blessings of God by urging people to donate money for their ministries. They don’t encourage giving to their local churches and pastors. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is the gift of God by grace (Eph. 2:8). The same truth is mentioned in the book of Isaiah, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (55:1, ESV). The doctrine of grace has become obsolete from the preaching of prosperity teachers. Joel Nederhood grieves over the existing situation, “Today, it is obscured again by ‘bottom-line’ religion—religion that puts a price tag on everything. As in Luther’s day, it has become practically impossible to think of religion apart from money and fundraising. This means that those who continue to celebrate the first Reformation must examine what is happening today and call for a second.”⁷⁸ Nederhood is right to make this inference because this is what the prosperity preachers (Oral Roberts, Creflo Dollar, Kenneth, and Gloria Copeland) are actually

⁷⁷ “Bible Presbyterian Church Online: WSC Question 7,” accessed January 31, 2019, http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc_007.html.

⁷⁸ Michael Horton, ed., *The Agony of Deceit/What Some TV Preachers Are Really Teaching* (Chicago: Moody Pub, 1990), 235.

doing all the time. They are totally insulting the grace of God by selling God to live a luxurious life.

D. Prosperity Gospel Conflicts with the Eschatological Hope of Blessedness

The prosperity preachers primarily emphasize earthly blessings, but they barely teach about future heavenly blessings. They completely ignore the eschatological hope of eternal prosperity. The book of Revelation paints a very beautiful picture of the eschatological blessedness in the following words: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (21:3-4, ESV). What an amazing eschatological hope of eternal blessedness! But the prosperity gospel preachers often overlook this key truth and want everything here on this earth. Suppose for a moment that all believers become prosperous here on earth. What charm and hope will they have for a future heavenly prosperity? The real prosperity will not occur until believers get to heaven to be with the Lord and Savior Jesus.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this research is to make available a critical analysis of the prosperity gospel theology in regard to its special emphasis on the financial prosperity and its impact on the church in Pakistan. We began, therefore, with a concise overview of the Prosperity Gospel's major truth claims. The first section addressed the existing challenges the Christian community faces living in Pakistan. The Prosperity Gospel's acceptance and widespread prevalence in Pakistan is posing a serious threat to conservative churches. The proponents of the prosperity gospel claim that all material blessings like health, wealth, and happiness belong to all those who believe in Jesus. A brief description of the history of the Prosperity Gospel was given, covering both the global and local perspective. The prosperity gospel flourished in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches but is rapidly becoming a prominent phenomenon in other mainstream churches as well. Several significant factors like illiteracy, poverty, and a spirit of greed have provided fertile soil for the prosperity gospel to flourish in the regions of Pakistan.

The second section mainly deals with the fundamentals of the prosperity gospel's theology, namely, the Abrahamic covenant, atonement, prayer, faith, and giving. These prosperity doctrines stand on fractured pillars of their materialistic understanding of the biblical passages. Moreover, these doctrines are contrary to the teaching of the historical Christian faith. Throughout history the church never believed or encouraged her followers to prioritize material prosperity.

The third section investigates the prosperity gospel's claim regarding financial prosperity. Indeed, material prosperity was promised to the people of God in Old Testament times, but it was neither taught or promised in the New Covenant. Wealth or riches were not a benchmark of someone's righteousness even in the Old Testament days. The truth is that godly believers faced

poverty, hunger, persecutions, and even death. The author of Hebrews specifically applauds such poor and desperate heroes of the faith (11:35-38). Jesus and Paul's teachings on riches and wealth are the ultimate authority and neither Jesus nor Paul encouraged believers to seek material prosperity; rather, they taught to aspire for heavenly prosperity (Luke 6:23; Col 3:2). This section also highlights that the prosperity preachers mostly draw their conclusions from biblical passages, but their interpretations totally rest on the sand of faulty hermeneutics, a limited understanding of the Bible, and theological ignorance. The fundamental difference is that true Christianity presents an exclusively God-centered (theocentric) gospel, but the prosperity gospel is primarily a man-centered (anthropocentric) gospel. Christianity glorifies God but the prosperity gospel glorifies man. Therefore, the prosperity gospel is totally false, unbiblical, inconsistent, and a gross distortion of the historic Christian faith.

Appendix

Practical Suggestions for Overcoming the Disease of Prosperity Gospel

1. Suggestions for Theological Institutions

- A special teaching emphasis should be made by the theological institutions to counter the devastating effects of the Prosperity Gospel in Pakistan.
- Students should be encouraged to have debates on this significant issue.
- Some good books and articles on this subject should be distributed among students; they should write reflection papers on these reading assignments. Some recommended books: *Health, Wealth, and Happiness* by David W. Jones and Russel S. Woodbridge; *Health and Wealth Gospel* by Bruce Barron; *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* by Gordon D. Fee; *Blessed: A History of American Prosperity Gospel* by Kate Bowler.
- Theological institutions should seriously consider developing literature exposing, combating, and debunking the Prosperity Gospel.

2. Suggestions for Church Leaders/Moderators/Bishops/Chairpersons

- Church leaders should come forward to firmly stand against the false teachings of the prosperity gospel; in this regard they should develop an official statement describing their church or ministry's position.
- They should organize awareness seminars at national and regional levels.
- They should implement church discipline with pastors and other church leaders.
- They should not allow prosperity preachers to use their church platforms.
- A sermon series should be started to unmask the false teachings of the prosperity gospel.

3. Suggestions for Church Members

- People should make a comparison between the New Testament teachings of Jesus and the apostles' teachings on sufferings.
- People should read the Bible carefully.
- People should read some good books on this subject before they listen to the prosperity gospel proponents.

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