

Prosperity Teaching; Right Or Wrong?

There is an unfortunate teaching in modern Christian churches, that tells us every Christian should be prosperous and wealthy, and if you're not, then there must be something wrong in your life, or something wrong with your walk with God. That teaching is contrary to scripture and this text will show you why. First of all, it needs to be pointed out that the love of money is the root of all evils. We can see that in 1 Timothy 6:10. Money is not the problem, but the love of it. Many Christians in our modern society have vast amounts of wealth and would rather pamper themselves than give it to the poor and needy.

In both the Old and New Testaments, in at least 174 different places, we are told to help the poor. But if you do, chances are other religious people (mainly church leadership) will scoff at you like they scoffed at Jesus in Luke 16:13 & 14; "No servant is able to serve two masters because he will hate one and love the other. You cannot serve God and money." 'Now the Pharisees, who were covetous and lovers of money, heard these things and they began to scoff at Him'. Who were the Pharisees? The leaders of Jesus' day; the equivalent of the priests, pastors and ministers in our modern-day churches – our own covetous, lovers of money. (Read 2 Timothy 3:5 & 6). (We did touch on the subject of wealth and hoarding in our text entitled, "Living and Giving at a Higher Level" on our website, but we did not, however, discuss the incorrect, modern-day prosperity teaching).

Jesus said we are to guard ourselves from greed, and trust Him for our needs because He will supply them, and we are not to hoard. Hoarding is sin because you love what you have accumulated. Hoarders or 'collectors' find it very hard to give away what they have amassed, because their heart is in their possessions. It is better to give away what you do not need, so you will be storing up your treasures in heaven. If you are a hoarder or a 'collector', God calls you a fool.

Hoarding can also stop you from being 'rich' in your relationship with God. Notice the man's greed in the parable we find in Luke 12:15 to 34; 'And Jesus said to them, "Guard yourselves and keep free from all covetousness (the immoderate desire for wealth, the greedy longing to have more), for a man's life does not consist in having more, and is not derived from possessing overflowing abundance, or that which is over and above his needs." (V 18) And the man said, "I will do this... I will pull down all my storehouses and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul; 'Soul you have many good things laid up; enough for many years. Take ease: eat, drink and be merry.'" (V 20) But God said to him, "You fool! This very night the messengers of God will demand your soul of you, and all the things that you have accumulated, whose will they be?" "So it is with the one who continues to hoard possessions for himself and is not rich in his relationship to God." And Jesus told His disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious or troubled about your life, as to what you will have to eat or about what you will have to wear, for life is more than food and the body more than clothes." (V 29) "And do not seek what you are to eat, nor be of anxious mind, for the pagan world is greedily seeking these things, and your Father knows you need them. Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be given to you." (V 33) "Sell what you possess and give to the poor. Provide yourselves with things that do not grow old. Store up your treasure in heaven, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'."

It is quite clear by reading these scriptures that financial prosperity - to the point of greed - is wrong; so is hoarding. If you are a 'collector', do you like being called a fool by God Himself? 'Sell what you have and give to the poor', the scriptures say. Wealth can actually stop people entering the Kingdom of God as we read in Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25 and Luke 18:25, but this text is not about those who need to be saved; this text is about Christians who are being wrongly taught that 'prosperity' or in other words, greed, is okay. It is not okay and it can cause you to lose your salvation. Read in 1 Timothy 6:9; 'Those who crave to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish (or godless) desires that plunge men into destruction'. Destruction in the Bible means everlasting damnation.

The scripture in 1 John 1:2 that says; 'Beloved, I pray that you prosper in every way, and that you may be well, even as your soul prospers', does not necessarily mean material wealth. There are

other ways of prospering 'in every way'. John said he wanted them to be 'well' or in good health, and he wanted their souls to prosper. A prosperous soul is one that is growing in the Lord, not a greedy person, which is the opposite of spiritual maturity.

There are other scriptures that speak of prosperity, but in different contexts. Genesis 24:21 to 56 says; 'The man stood gazing at her in silence, waiting to know if the Lord had made his trip prosperous'. 'The man' was Abraham's servant, Eliezer of Damascus, and he was waiting to see if the woman (Rebekah) would agree to become Isaac's wife. The story continues to verse 67 when Isaac and Rebekah married. The Lord made Eliezer's trip prosperous, but there was no finance involved.

Joseph prospered while living as a slave in prison, but it was not possible for him to be wealthy at that time. Genesis 39:23 says; 'The Lord was with him and made whatever he did to prosper'. It was thirteen years later, before Joseph was made Pharaoh's deputy, and then he became financially successful. Prosperity in this context did not mean wealthy, but meant that Joseph did well in all that he did, while in prison.

Deuteronomy 29:9 says; 'Keep the words of the covenant and do them; that you may prosper in all that you do'. That context does not mean finance. In 2 Samuel 11:7, David asked how the people fared and how the war prospered. Obviously the war wasn't wealthy, but David wanted to know how it was going. We can see that prosperity sometimes means financial, and other times it means simply doing well in life, in general terms.

We can read the opposite in Job 9:4; 'God is wise in heart and mighty in strength; who has ever hardened himself against God and prospered?' There are hundreds of extremely wealthy people in the world, who do not love the Lord and who have hardened their hearts towards Him, and they have obviously prospered financially; yet in this scripture we can see that the Lord says they have not prospered. In God's eyes, they are very poor and will be destroyed by God's vengeance and then will go down to hell. See Job 15:21 & 22; Job 20:20 & 21 and Job 21:13.

In Romans 1:10, Apostle Paul wanted only to be prospered by the will of God so he could visit the church in Rome. Psalm 49 tells us what God really thinks of the wealthy, greedy people on earth. They 'are appointed for hell, and death will be their shepherd; their form will be consumed; he will carry nothing away and will go to the generation of their fathers, who will nevermore see the light'. This is not exactly the teaching of the modern-day preachers! How erroneous they are to say there is something wrong with Christians who are not wealthy!

In Mark 12:42 and again in Luke 21:2, we read about an elderly woman who was poverty stricken. She came and put two mites into the treasury. The mite would have been today's equivalent of a quarter of a cent. It was all the money she had to live on. Did the fact she put her money into the treasury make her wealthy as the modern-day preachers would have you believe? No it didn't. The woman remained poverty stricken, but the Lord noticed what she gave and her treasures would have been stored up in heaven. See what Jesus said in these two verses. "Truly I tell you, this widow, who is poverty stricken, has put in more than all those contributing to the treasury. For they threw in out of their abundance; but she has contributed out of her lack, out of her want and out of her deep poverty, and has put in everything that she had – all she had on which to live."

Proverbs 30:8 & 9 say; 'Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me; lest I be full and deny You and say, Who is the Lord?' This scripture indicates to us, that God knows that wealth can make us deny Him, and if we deny Him, we are lost.

Part of the scripture in 2 Timothy 3:2 has strong words for those greedy Christians. 'For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money and aroused by an inordinate greedy desire for wealth'. Paul was writing about Christians in this passage – not the unsaved. Read further on in verses 5, 6 & 7, 'For though they hold a form of Godliness, they deny the power of it. Avoid all such people and turn away from them'.

Hebrews 13:5 tells us to let our character be free from the love of money, including greed, avarice, lust and craving for earthly possessions and we are to be satisfied with what we have; for God said He would never leave us without support. We need to trust our heavenly Father to meet our needs. Ananias and Sapphira loved their possessions a little too much in Acts 5 and both fell down dead.

There is also nothing wrong with being financially well off if God chooses to allow it, but we must give credit to God for it. Deuteronomy 8:17 & 18 says God gives us the power to gain wealth, but we must earnestly remember it is from Him.

There is a scripture in Malachi chapter 3 that says to bring all the tithes into the storehouse and God will pour out a blessing. Taken in its complete context, - that is the whole chapter - that particular scripture was speaking to the ancient Jews and does not apply to Christians today. It is a chapter of rebuke, along with verses to encourage. To take a piece of that chapter and apply it to Christians, then you would have to also apply verse 9 which says, 'you are cursed with a curse'. Since we are no longer under the curse - we are under grace - it doesn't apply to us. The preachers of the prosperity teaching, use pieces of that chapter to 'prove' their point, leaving verse 9 and other unenjoyable verses out. Verses like 'you have turned aside from My ordinances' and 'now we consider the proud and arrogant to be happy'. The verse 'then will the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in ancient years' tells us clearly, that whole chapter is speaking to Jews. The last verse says, "Then shall you return....etc.'" We know that it is only the Jews who will return to the Lord. If you are a Christian, then you have already turned to the Lord, so there is no need for you to return. Again, that shows that chapter does not apply to us, therefore we can't take bits of it out of the whole context to suit ourselves. As we wrote earlier, the modern-day leadership are the ministers, priests and pastors who continually ask for money and insist your money be put into their church. They are the covetous, lovers of money as were the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

Jesus said to give your abundance to the poor and needy - He did not say to give it to the church. However, He did not say we are not to give to the church either. In the story of the woman and the two mites, Jesus said the people were contributing to the treasury (of the synagogue); but He did not say they were tithing - they were only contributing. But ... Jesus said many more times to give to the poor. Where you give your own money is up to you. Church leadership will tell you, you must only tithe into the church you attend, and you must trust them to distribute your money. They say that is God's way. The leadership use (or misuse) Malachi 3; 'bring your tithes into the storehouse etc', meaning you must give your tithes to them. After all, they'll tell you they know best where to spend your money! According to Luke 12:18, the storehouse was actually a place where food and goods were stored, so if we gave our tithes to a modern-day storehouse - or the place where our food and goods are stored - we would be giving it to our local supermarket and department store. We can't use bits of this scripture, modernise it and squeeze it into our lives to suit the modern-day teaching. That is a misuse of scripture to profit the greedy.

There is more to prosperity than finance and sadly, this new prosperity teaching only fuels the love of money in the hearts of Christians. If you are young and healthy enough to work, save, increase and manage your income, and it is God's will for you to be wealthy, then you will be - whether you tithe or not. If it is not God's will for you to be wealthy, then you won't be, but the Lord has promised to meet your needs. We need not worry about what we will eat or wear, because He will always provide.

The church leadership will tell you, if you give them your money, you will have abundant life; implying, you will have a financially cash-strapped life if you don't put your money into their church. That teaching is also wrong. An abundant life - as written in John 10:10 - does not mean wealthy. Jesus was talking about being our Shepherd, and if we follow Him, we will have a full and overflowing life. He was not in any way speaking of money.

If you are poor - perhaps on a disability or an aged pension, and know that will be your fixed income for life - don't come under the disheartening prosperity teaching delusion. It is a trap. You will probably be told God won't bless you unless you tithe. That is wrong too. There are many Christians

who don't tithe and who are well off financially, simply because they are able to work and earn more than they need. If you love the Lord, then you are prospering, because your soul is prospering.

Let us see some logic here: If you are on a pension, you will probably never be wealthy and no amount of tithing will change that unless your circumstances change dramatically. There is nothing wrong with your walk with the Lord if you are poor. There is no shame in being poor. The prosperity teaching has brought many, many Christians to the point of despair and condemnation, because they are told that they are at fault. The churches continue to have mini sermons every week to ask for more money from their flock. The leadership trust more in the people to give, than in the Lord's provision. If you are having trouble making ends meet, praise the Lord for your salvation and trust Him for your needs.

Being poor could be a time of learning for you and perhaps the Lord is trying to teach you something; like to trust Him for His provision, or to increase your faith. Maybe you do need to learn to be wiser with your finances, or maybe there is just not enough. What ever the reason, there is nothing shameful about being poor. There is, however, something very wrong with wealthy Christians who don't do all they can to help the poor – and most don't. Once they become wealthy, they forget the poor, or they hand out meagre amounts solely to appease their consciences.

One of the best churches we have ever attended, almost never take an offering. They have a locked box at the back of the church for people to place their offerings and only the Lord sees how much and how often people give. No one else knows. It is a church of about 200 people, yet that church is one of the wealthiest and most stable churches in their area. They own so much land, they have built a community for those believers who desire to live close by. The church is very active, in financially supporting international missions; and they help the poor. If they rarely take up offerings, why are they so wealthy? Because they trust in the Lord to provide their needs, and do not continually beg for money. To repeatedly ask the flock for money, is not trusting God to provide.

Jesus said we would always have the poor amongst us, which is also opposite to the prosperity teaching. He said we are to give all we have to the poor and we would have treasures in heaven. If you are poor, God bless you because you will know His provision for you. If you are wealthy, we hope you are giving more of your abundance to the poor, and not merely pampering yourself. If you have enough money to tithe, by all means do so. We all need to help the poor in any way we can, and most churches do give some to the poor – after they have paid their own wages.

It was Abraham who gave the first tithe to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20), and later Jacob offered a tithe to God in return for giving him enough food, clothes and increase of possessions (Genesis 28:20 to 22). Both times it was a choice made by the giver and not instigated by God. Tithing was later accepted into the Law of Moses, but it was stressed that only those who could afford to, had to tithe. If they couldn't afford to tithe, they were allowed to give any offering they could. It was never meant to be a law to bind people. It is the prosperity teachers who are the ones putting people under bondage to tithe, not the Lord.

Jesus said in Matthew 23:23, it is right to tithe, as long as you don't leave other things undone. He was only using the concept of tithing to show an important message; you won't be blessed no matter how much you give, if there is sin in your life like hypocrisy. That was the only time Jesus mentioned tithing, and it was only to rebuke the scribes and Pharisees! The passage of scripture (Matthew 17:24 to 27) where Jesus paid a denarius, was not for a tithe, but to pay temple tax for Caesar's government. Since Jesus said so little about the subject of money, why do modern pastors talk about money so much, and have a mini sermon on the subject every week? Because they are greedy. It is up to the individual how much and how often they give – not up to the leadership.

Tithes and offerings should be a gift from the heart; a desire to give something back to God for His provision. It should not be given out of a sense of duty or to gain. There are people who are struggling financially, who feel duty bound to give tithes, yet their children go without. That type of giving is wrong. Scripturally, you only need to tithe what you can, when you can and if you can. It is

better to buy good food and clothes for your children and not give to the church, if you don't have a lot of money to go round. The Lord is filled with wisdom, and He would rather you fed your children, than give tithes. He won't go without! He owns all the money in the world. The Lord is too gracious and too wonderful to be bought off anyway. He said He would rather we listen to Him and obey Him, than give a sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22).

We can see from scripture that the modern prosperity teaching is wrong, so don't be bound by it, don't come under condemnation or feelings of guilt if you can't afford to tithe. Your relationship with the Lord is far more important to Him than any amount of money. On the other hand, if you have money to spare, give all you can to the needy and don't be selfish with it; share it with others.

The modern-day church leadership should not be the sole receivers of your money – especially if they ask for money every week, because they are driven by greed – not need. Television evangelists are the worst. They live in mansions, fly around the world, drive very expensive cars, and still beg for more money. They will tell you they need it to spread the Gospel. It's more likely they need it so they can continue to go on television asking for ever more money. The Gospel is a free gift to mankind – and it should be spread freely. Giving to TV evangelists is not a wise place to send your hard earned cash.

There are many and varied ways to give your money to the poor and needy. The early church supported the evangelists and the poor. The well-travelled Apostle Paul was sometimes a beneficiary of giving; other times he worked. If you want some ideas on how you can help the poor, here is a few: You could support missionaries who are not connected to your church; you could support a local Christian school; you could pay for clothes, food, rent, electricity or medical expenses for a poor widow or a sole parent; you could pay for a much needed operation for someone who can't afford health insurance; you could give a job to a fellow Christian who is unemployed; you could help support Israel; you could support a local Christian charity; you could invite lonely people for meals; you could buy some shoes for a poor family; you could sponsor a family so they can send their children to a Christian school; you could take in the homeless and help them get back on their feet; you could help someone to move furniture; you could take care of a baby so the mother can enjoy church uninterrupted. Most importantly, you may have family members who are struggling. We are not to neglect our own flesh and blood, in favour of someone who is not family. There are endless needs all around us, so why give solely to the church, just because the pastor demands it? He doesn't need your extra cash, but a poor family down the street might.

If you love the Lord with all your heart, you will be blessed and He will meet all your needs, no matter how much or how little you give to your church. Being blessed is not always financial. Sitting in the powerful, awe-inspiring presence of God the Father, drinking in the Holy Spirit, while adoring the Son, Jesus, is far more satisfying than any amount of money. Money can't buy the love and the beautiful, sweet presence of God. If you have extra, give happily and cheerfully. The Lord says in Romans 12:8; 'He who gives, let him give liberally'. And in 2 Corinthians 9:7; 'The Lord loves a cheerful giver'. Whoever we help out, God wants us to give liberally and with a cheerful heart; genuinely and not out of a sense of duty or begrudgingly.

Amen and God bless you.

<http://www.bibleabookoftruth.com/>