

Prosperity Teaching; Right Or Wrong?

'A widow who was poverty-stricken came and put in two copper mites (about ½ a cent). And Jesus called His disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you; this widow who is poverty-stricken has put in more than all those contributing to the treasury, for they all threw in out of their abundance; but she, out of her poverty, has put in everything that she had to live on"' (Mark 12:42 to 44).

'For we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world. If we have food and clothing we shall be content, but those who crave to be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish (or godless) and hurtful desires that plunge men into destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It is through this craving that some have been led astray and have wandered from the faith' (1 Timothy 6:7 to 10).

There is an unfortunate teaching in modern Christian churches, that tells us every Christian should be prosperous and wealthy, and if we're not, then there must be something wrong in our life, or something wrong with our walk with God. That teaching is contrary to scripture and this sermon will show you why. First of all, it needs to be pointed out that it is the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil. 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 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 we do, chances are other religious people (mainly church leadership) will scoff at us like they scoffed at Jesus. "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 all these things and they began to scoff at Him' (Luke 16:13 & 14). 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.

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 or amass. Hoarding is sin because we love what we have accumulated. Hoarders or 'collectors' find it very hard to give away what they have amassed because their heart is in their possessions. Jesus said, 'Where your treasure is; there will your heart be also'; 'Don't store up treasure on earth'. To store up really means to accumulate, amass or to hoard. We must not hoard nor have material things just for the purpose of having them, or possessing 'things'. People hoard for no other reason than just to have them, whether they want to use them or not. Look at so-called 'collectors'. That is nothing but greed. We must not cling to things we don't need and we must not hoard or stockpile. We should not keep things we don't use, but give them to someone who can use them.

It is better to give to the poor what we do not need, so we will be storing up our treasures in heaven. If you are a hoarder or a 'collector', God calls you a fool. Hoarding can also stop us from being 'rich' in our relationship with God. Notice the man's greed and selfishness in the following parable. 'And Jesus said to them, "Guard yourselves and keep free from all covetousness (the 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." ... 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.'" ... 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." ... "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." ... "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” (Luke 12:15 to 34). ‘Do not gather and store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth, rust and worm destroy and where thieves break through and steal; but gather up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth nor rust nor worm can destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is; there will your heart be also ... No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money (that is deceitful riches, money, possessions or whatever else is trusted in). Therefore I tell you, stop being anxious about your life ... Do not worry about what you will eat or drink or wear ... Your heavenly Father knows well that you need them all, but seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then all these things will be given to you’ (Matthew 6:19 to 33).

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. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25). For the Lord to record this three times, He must mean what He says, but this sermon is not about those who need to be saved; this sermon 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. ‘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. In the Old Testament, God gave the people what they craved, but sent them ‘leanness of soul’. ‘God gave them their request, but sent them leanness of soul and disease and death (Psalm 106:15). Do Christians ever consider that disease, sickness and death may possibly be caused by their greed? In the New Testament we see how Judas became angry when Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume because he perceived it to be a waste of money, then in spite, sold Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15, Mark 14:3; John 12:3).

Most modern-day preachers concentrate far too much on money and prosperity, rather than on holiness, obedience and total submission to God in every circumstance. Preachers are saying everything is alright, God will bless and prosper you. We all need to understand that prosperity is not what many people believe it is. It is not the latest car, or the biggest house in the suburb with a swimming pool. The scripture that says; ‘Beloved, I pray that you prosper in every way, and that you may be well, even as your soul prospers’ (3 John 1:2), does not 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 successfully serving the Lord, not a greedy person. Prosperity is not having everything we want. Prosperity and success is accomplishing the will of God. ‘The man stood gazing at her in silence, waiting to know if the Lord had made his trip prosperous’ (Genesis 24:21 to 67). ‘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. Isaac and Rebekah married because 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. ‘The Lord was with him and made whatever he did to prosper’ (Genesis 39:23). 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. King David wanted to know how the people fared and how the war prospered (2 Samuel 11:7). Obviously the war wasn’t wealthy, but David wanted to know how it was going. God told Joshua if he would do what God told him, he would have good success and make his way prosperous, and God would be with Joshua everywhere he went. What did Joshua get? War; sleeping in the open desert; he was continually engaged in conflict during that time of history (Joshua 1:8 to 5:1), but Joshua was prosperous because they won the war. Paul prayed the Lord might prosper his way to visit the saints in Rome (Romans 1:10) yet we see what happened to Paul. He was a prisoner in chains; he was in a terrifying storm that lasted two weeks; he was shipwrecked on an island; and he was bitten by a snake. How many of us would call that a prosperous journey? But it was, because the will of God was accomplished. We have to adjust our way of thinking to what God’s

real prosperity is. It is not having an easy life with plenty of money and no difficulties. Prosperity is successfully accomplishing the purposes of God in the face of intense opposition.

We cannot prosper if we harden our hearts. 'God is wise in heart and mighty in strength; who has ever hardened himself against God and prospered?' (Job 9:4). 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 suddenly go down to hell. 'In prosperity, the destroyer shall come ... and destruction is already close upon him' (Job 15:21 & 22). 'Because his desire and greed knew no quietness (peace) within him, he will not keep anything ... there was nothing left ... therefore his prosperity will not endure' (Job 20:20 & 21). 'They spend their days in prosperity and go down to hell in a moment' (Job 21:13). 'The rich man died and was buried, and in hell, being in torment ... he cried out ... "I am in anguish". Abraham said to him, "Remember that in your lifetime you received comforts and delights" (Luke 16:19 to 31). What does God really think 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' (Psalm 49:16 to 19). 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 we read about the elderly woman who was poverty-stricken. She put two mites into the treasury. One mite would have been today's equivalent of a quarter of a cent but 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. '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?' (Proverbs 30:8 & 9). This scripture indicates to us, that God knows that wealth can make us deny Him, and if we deny Him, we are lost. It is right to give some money to the 'treasury' or church leadership (Deuteronomy 12:17), but the church has taken that concept and turned it into greed.

Paul has strong words for greedy Christians. 'For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money and aroused by a greedy desire for wealth' (2 Timothy 3:2). Paul was writing about Christians in this passage – not the unsaved. We can see that by a following verse; 'For although they hold a form of Godliness, they deny the power of it' (2 Timothy 3:5). We must 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 (Hebrews 13:5). We need to trust our heavenly Father to meet our needs. Ananias and Sapphira loved their possessions a little too much and they both fell down dead (Acts 5:1 to 10). There is nothing wrong with being financially well off if the Lord chooses to allow it, but we must not be filled with greed and we must give credit to God for our finances, for it is God gives us the power to gain wealth, and we must earnestly remember it is from Him (Deuteronomy 8:17 & 18).

There is a verse in Malachi 3:10 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 the 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 our money be put into their church. They are the covetous, lovers of money as were the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

Almost all Christian churches in the modern world revolve around money. Many churches have a 'mini-sermon' about money every Sunday and make people feel dreadful if they don't give, give, give. That is pure wickedness that can bring judgement down upon a church. In ancient times, the Lord poured out His indignation and wrath upon the people for this very reason. When we read this whole text (Ezekiel 22:21 to 31), we need to see who God holds responsible for wickedness in a nation. He blames the false prophets (verse 25), the priests (verse 26), the princes (verse 27) and lastly the people (verse 29). If we look at those titles in the modern world, we see that the Lord puts the blame for wickedness of a nation at the door of the prophets (false prophets who teach lies from the pulpit), priests (spiritual leaders like pastors and elders), princes (secular leaders; governments) and to a lesser degree, the people. Notice in this scripture, the prophets had covered up the sin (daubed them with whitewash). The general guilt of all of these people was the pursuit of selfish gains or greed and that brought down the judgement of God upon the people.

Jesus said to give our 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 we give our own money is between our Lord and us. Church leadership will tell us, we must only tithe into the church we attend, and we must trust them to distribute our money. They say that is God's way. The leadership use (or misuse) Malachi 3:10; 'bring your tithes into the storehouse etc', meaning we must give our tithes to them. After all, they'll tell you they know best where to spend our 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.

In the western world, success is measured by what we have in the way of material possessions, but if we travel to a poor nation we would get a very different perspective on things. Those people survive without refrigeration or televisions, and in some cases, with barely sufficient food or water. We, in the western nations are extremely wealthy in comparison. There is more to prosperity than finance and sadly, this new prosperity teaching only fuels the love of money in the hearts of Christians. They are being taught to give only to receive. If we are young and healthy enough to work, save, increase and manage our income, and it is God's will for us to be wealthy, then we will be – whether we tithe or not. If it is not God's will for us to be wealthy, then we won't be, whether we tithe or not, but the Lord has promised to meet our needs. We need not worry about what we will eat or wear, because He will always provide. The church leadership will tell us, if we give them our money, we will have abundant life; implying, we will have a financially cash-strapped life if we don't put our 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 we are poor – perhaps on a pension, and know that will be our fixed income for life – we must not come under the disheartening prosperity teaching delusion. It is a trap. We will be told God won't bless us unless we 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 we love the Lord and are serving Him faithfully, then we are prospering, because our soul is prospering.

Let us see some logic here: If we are on a pension, we will probably never be wealthy and no amount of tithing will change that unless our circumstances change dramatically. There is nothing wrong with our walk with the Lord if we 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, even though Jesus strongly said to seek the Kingdom of God first, and then all these things will be added or given to us. If we are having trouble making ends meet, praise the Lord for our salvation and trust Him for our needs. Being poor could be a time of learning and perhaps the Lord is trying to teach us something; like to trust Him for His provision, or to increase our faith. Maybe we do need to learn to be wiser with our finances, or maybe there is just not enough. Whatever 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. 'As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be proud, arrogant and contemptuous of others – nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches, but on God – Who richly provides us with everything. Charge them to do good; to be rich in good works; to be liberal and generous of heart. In this way, laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may grasp that which is life indeed' (1 Timothy 6:17 to 19). 'Happy (blessed and fortunate) is he who is kind and merciful to the poor' (Proverbs 14:21).

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. They are literally seeking God first, then trusting Him to provide. 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 could not 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 it is right to tithe, as long as we don't leave other things undone (Matthew 23:23). He was only using the concept of tithing to show an important message; we won't be blessed no matter how much we give, if there is sin in our 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 church 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, we only need to tithe what we can, when we can and if we can. It is better to buy good food and clothes for our children and not give to the church, if we don't have a lot of money to go round. The Lord is filled with wisdom, and He would rather we fed our 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 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, or they are not trusting in God to provide. They need to learn to trust in the Lord just like we all do. 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 – and it should be given freely. Giving to TV evangelists is not a wise place to send your 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; 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; or you could send some to a disaster relief fund. Earthquake victims, flood victims, bushfire victims all need help. You may have family members who are struggling and who could do with some help. 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 we love the Lord with all our heart, we will be blessed and He will meet all our needs, no matter how much or how little we give to the church. It is the concept of giving that the Lord loves – not just giving to a church. Jesus said, "Give and gifts will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will they pour into your purse. For with the measure you give out, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38). Jesus did not say, if you give to your church you will be blessed, He just said give. 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. 'He who gives, let him give liberally' (Romans 12:8). 'The Lord loves; takes pleasure in a cheerful giver' (2 Corinthians 9:7). 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 or to gain from our giving. Give to those who cannot repay (Luke 14:12 to 14).

Amen and God bless you.

www.bibleabookoftruth.com