

What is the Prosperity Gospel

The prosperity gospel has become the nickname of a certain set of beliefs which although they have been around for some time, have become recently very popular among certain branches of Christianity. It is a belief system that emphasises that financial and physical well-being are always God's will for believers. It is a doctrine which teaches suggests that faith -if you have enough of it - , and what is called positive confession – that is speaking things into existence, accompanied with a generous giving and giving to religious causes of the church can in turn increase one's material wealth and health. In essence, it equates material success with divine favour. It ties material gain to divine endorsement. If you have good health, and plenty of money, that God is pleased with you – but if you are suffering, and are struggling financially then maybe you do not have enough faith!

The prosperity gospel is also sometimes called the health and wealth gospel, the gospel of success, seed-faith gospel and so on.

Why the Subject

Why have we picked this subject to talk about this afternoon. Three reasons. Partly because Dartford is the location for the European Headquarters of one of the biggest churches which promotes this teaching. Secondly Our members in Africa are also having to deal with a great number of churches around them, where this doctrine has become wildly popular, and thirdly and most importantly, these false doctrines have a nasty habit of creeping into the psyche or way of thinking of the people around us, and we need to be alert to this, and able to counter such claims with the Truth of what the Bible says, and ensure that we ourselves do not fall under its spell.

A closer look at what the churches teach

Churches, especially those such as the Winner's Chapel, and the Redeemed Church of God are particularly busy converting members in around Dartford, especially those from African and North American Pentecostal backgrounds. Others in Dartford who preach themes of the prosperity gospel are the Net Church, the Gateway Church Dartford, Kent Foursquare Gospel, and so on. The Winner's Chapel a well-known Pentecostal church in Kenya and Uganda as well, had a website, and on the Home Page About Us described what the church stood for. 80% of the content was about the personality of the so-called Bishop in charge, and just 281 words described what they called the 12 pillars of their faith, likening them to 12 stones which Joshua built into an altar. It is noteworthy that the top three pillars were 1) Faith, 2) Prosperity & 3) Success. Immediately moving on to actually find out what they teach, navigating to the Sermons Page, the sermon repeated three times to a 1500 capacity hall just last Sunday was the Covenant Day of Business and Career Breakthroughs , and in small writing underneath and special anointing service. Another one on 11th May entitled Understanding The Mystery of Financial Fortune. Moving through the site, the extensive bookstore, and the highly organised giving page, try as I might, there was nowhere on the site I could find the doctrines or statement of faith. It is genuinely difficult to find what they believe. Their media instead focuses on various events they hold, and how to donate. As well as agreeing to tithing, paying a tenth of what they earn, members are also strongly encouraged to attend covenant days, whereby they donate additional funds, in exchange for special prayers and entering in a covenant of blessing. Additional to this they have what is known as Seed Faith Giving, an opportunity whereby members can demonstrate their faith by donating a sum of money which is likened to a seed that God will multiply. Of course, one might ask where does all this money flow, it is interesting that the Head Quarters of the Winners Chapel back in Nigeria has enough money to build the worlds largest

capacity stadium, able to seat 109000 people. Some of the pastors have managed to amass quite a personal fortune.

The real reason behind the prosperity gospel

Various investigations have taken place over the years, because of high publicity scandals, which have shed light on the dishonesty and ethical issues associated with the prosperity gospel. For example in 2007, U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley launched an investigation into the finances of six prominent megachurch leaders associated with the prosperity gospel to determine if these pastors were using their ministries for personal financial gain. Kenneth Copeland who has shared platforms with leaders of the Winners Chapel was reported to have used ministry funds for personal luxuries, including multiple private jets and multimillion-dollar homes.

One of the most controversial moments in Copeland's career came in 2020, when he made headlines for continuing to promote the prosperity gospel during the COVID-19 pandemic. He claimed that God had told him that the pandemic would end quickly and that people could overcome it by giving money to his ministry. This type of messaging, often tied to financial contributions, reinforced the idea that prosperity gospel preachers were more interested in wealth accumulation than in genuinely helping their congregants.

Of course local leaders of churches here in Dartford would be horrified to be associated with such scandals and accusations. But their doctrine stands for a testimony against them, and gives True Christianity a bad name. The Bishop of Winners Chapel Dartford is none other than no. 2 in this chart.

So what do they teach?

And as well as the standard Pentecostal beliefs in the devil, in the trinity, and faith healing, the congregation are taught that by giving financially to the religious ministry, it is an act of planting a seed that will yield a greater harvest of wealth for the giver. The more they give, the more they will receive, and if they believe hard enough, then they will be rewarded. They believe that God wants his followers to be prosperous in all areas of life, including finances and physical health. The Winners Chapel use the following random verses on their website to prove it... – 3 John 2, *Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers.* Palms. 35:27, *Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause: yea, let them say continually, Let the Lord be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant.* And lastly Zech. 1:17 *Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.* Basically, just verses with the word prosperity in it, with no reference to context at all! The practice has been criticized as a form of spiritual manipulation, even spiritual blackmail. Many followers have reported that they felt pressured into giving, even when they were financially struggling. The promise of miraculous returns is often tied to unrealistic expectations, making it harder for individuals to challenge the system without feeling guilty or ashamed. If you are seen as suffering, or struggling financially, it follows you must be weak in faith.

They have this strange idea about faith. That faith can be seen as a spiritual power that can be used to attract blessings, including wealth and health, through positive thoughts and declarations. If you believe enough, that blessings will come, then they certainly will. "Name it and Claim it, or blab it and grab it, are common phrases used by preachers televangelists, faith healers in these megachurches to describe the practice of declaring desired outcomes through faith and expecting them to manifest, or be fulfilled. On the other hand speaking negatively or expressing doubt is seen

as a way to attract negative consequences and block blessings. One of the main passages used is Romans 10:13, *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*. This is taken literally, that anything the flock are in need of, not just salvation, can be earned simply by claiming it in the name of the Lord. They have little appreciation that faith involves believing in a future Kingdom, on the websites, it is very hard to find any mention at all about the Kingdom of God in the future. The here and the now, and what can be achieved in this life, seems to far overshadow any future promises.

Obviously Wrong

The presentation of these churches on their own media sites, without even having to dig too deep shows obvious warning signs, and alarm, of how these are at worst fraudulent organisations preying on the vulnerabilities of the needy, and at best where pastors and preachers have been as sincerely deluded as their flocks. Either way, the potential for exploitation is enormous, which is why these churches have attracted so many investigations. The church meetings themselves are characterised by loud music, pastors and helpers on microphones, with the congregation being whipped up by dancing and emotional manipulation, for a feel-good factor, where people are anointed after giving donations and encouraged to come forward and give testimonies of how their life has improved after giving their seed donations and so on.

The fact that such churches exist and are growing fast in our neighbourhoods, is something we need to be aware of, when perhaps we have an opportunity to speak to people involved in these churches. But what is important is to realise that the misinterpretation of scripture has permeated the wider beliefs of people in general. Often it has been said – even to members sitting here this afternoon, after suffering many traumatic events in life, some who should know better have said, that it is direct result of lack of faith, or because God is telling you to change direction and so on. Indeed, with these churches, there seems to be a complete lack of explanation for suffering. The prosperity gospel doesn't adequately address the reality of suffering, sickness, and poverty in the lives of many, and can lead to feelings of guilt or inadequacy when these things occur, and lead people to blame God, when they do not get the riches the churches promise them. This drives people away from God, and creates a wrong impression of the character of God. The constant preaching about material wealth detracts from the true message of the gospel, which is about spiritual transformation and love for God and others. The Bible is twisted and random passages take out of context, to teach a perverted gospel, one which all about self. What can I get out of God, not what can I do for God. The prosperity Gospel is all about how to use God, the True Gospel of Christ is about how God can use people.

The prosperity Gospel is about self-first, the Gospel of Christ is about self-last. The prosperity Gospel is about riches now in this life, but the Gospel of Christ preaches this life is a time of probation, Glory and honour and life eternal is promised in time to come.

Let us look at the great contrast between the teachings of some of these fastest growing churches with what the Bible actually teaches.

Regarding prosperity as a blessing from God is implying that poverty is a curse. Poverty can be seen as a blessing and riches a curse. The Proverbs explains: Proverbs 30:8-9 *Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain*. The prosperity gospel shows its complete shallow and materialistic approach designed to tempt people, to get large congregations, to enrich just a few.

Gain is not Godliness

The Apostle Paul specifically warned against those who place importance on riches and prosperity and material things in this life: 1Timothy 6: 5-8 *Perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.* This passage certainly puts the modern pastors into a collision course with the teachings of the Apostle Paul, who is preaching completely the opposite. He condemns these greedy bishops saying they are men of corrupt minds. He expects people to be able to recognise their behaviour and see through it. Of course, if people do not read the Bible and think that going along for a social afternoon, listening to a bit of music and razzmatazz, then they will be blinded by their smooth talking. Paul says that these men say that gain is godliness, but the gospel of Christ says that godliness with contentment is great gain. Being content, is trusting that God knows what is best for us. Being content is being satisfied with what we have, it is being thankful and grateful for what we have been given – this says Paul is the gain, the state of mind that is best looked for. He uses extreme language in his letter to the Philippians 3:8: *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.* This is the very opposite of what is being preached here in Dartford, and thousands of other churches. Such an attitude is very contagious, as it is just so convenient to the way we as human beings think. Having stuff, fancy cars, holidays and nice clothes are all the markers of success, whereby as humans we get affirmation, that we are doing well, compared to others, and therefore we must be better than other people is the psychology that accompanies such shallow thinking. But the Bible warns of the slippery slope: Proverbs 15:27: *He that is greedy of gain troubles his own house; but he that hates gifts shall live.* Talking about greed for gain being contagious and troubling your own house, the example of a man by the name of Achan comes to mind. Despite strict instructions to not take of the spoil of Jericho, not to help themselves to the riches which lay all over the place after the soldiers of Israel had set fire to the town, after the Almighty God collapsed the walls, Achan decided the rules didn't apply to him, and being greedy of gain, he sneaked home some pagan priests clothes, and a big chunk of gold, as well as other stuff. He hid them under the floor of his family's tent, and they all agreed with him to keep quiet about it. They all knew it was wrong, but to them the benefits of being rich were many, they would have a head-start over their neighbours, and anyway they felt they deserved it, and maybe it was a blessing of the Lord, that Achan had stumbled across it in the city. Such is the tortured thinking of the human mind. Achan's greed, and lust for prosperity overcame common sense, instead of a winner he was a sinner. He got found out. He had plenty of opportunity to repent, own up and change his mind, every member of his family could have done the same, but they chose not to, and corrupted the whole nation.

Joshua's words to him on discovering the buried loot *Why have you troubled us? the Lord shall trouble you this day.* The whole family perished because of their greed. One thing they failed to set stock by was common sense, was obedience, was understanding. Proverbs describes it as Wisdom. And in Proverbs 3:14 *For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.* This is what is to be gained – knowledge, wisdom, understanding these are the riches described here, but sadly given no prominence these days, as we said looking on these websites, there are virtually no Bible passages, or any real descriptions of even the doctrines these churches claim to follow. It is all about what you can get what you can gain. The doctrine of Christ says godliness with contentment is great gain.

Love of Money the Root of all evil

Returning to the letter to Timothy Paul warned Timothy about the dangers of prioritizing financial success and possessions, which is so promoted by these churches, and seems to be their marker for the blessings of God: in 1 Timothy 9-11. *But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* Here the Divinely inspired Apostle shows the wisdom of God, the pursuit of prosperity in this life, is not only shallow but dangerous, it turns people into being mean spirited, selfish, jealousy and envious. Dissatisfied with what they have got. Measuring the faith of their neighbour by how big his car is in effect. It is just puerile. Look at the contrast here - the poverty of the prosperity gospel with the riches to be sought for by the Gospel of Christ: *But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.* He doesn't say do not be influenced by prosperity, be careful if you get rich. He doesn't say that – also doesn't say to avoid but to flee... in fact to go in the opposite direction! If you are getting rich, then beware, danger looms on every hand. In the end, the pursuit of prosperity will bring just ruin and destruction, and take you far away from God. Money in itself is not a problem. Just a means to an end. Paul here talks about the love of money which is the root of all evil. The leaders of these local churches sadly have this love of money, and they are leading their congregations into evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. Of course they will. To appear as full of faith as the next man in the church, they will borrow money to get as good a car, big house, but as everyone knows, riches have a habit of falling through the fingers. Proverbs 23:5 *Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.* Instead of stressing the importance of wealth, the Bible warns against pursuing it. Believers, especially leaders in the church, including those who like to call themselves bishops and pastors Paul the Apostle writes to 1 Timothy 3:3 *not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;*

The example of Jesus

In opposition to the prosperity Gospel, the Lord Jesus showed that riches are certainly not a reward or a goal for the godly. The Lord Jesus himself did not pursue it. Yes, he was tempted by power, - he was tempted by the worship of men, he could have been very rich, since he had the power to heal. But he never pursued prosperity in the life, he actually despised it: Matthew 8:20 *Jesus said unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.* Jesus, the Son of God, lived a life of poverty and was not wealthy. If material wealth were a sign of God's favour, Jesus' life would contradict that idea. His ministry focused on spiritual wealth, not financial prosperity. Matthew 19:24 - *“Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”* It should be remembered that the only disciple who followed Jesus who showed concerned with wealth, with money and prosperity, and what this life offers, was the one who had the bag - Judas Iscariot.

It really is incredible that this prosperity so called gospel exists at all, it is amazing how the truth is utterly corrupted and turned on its end, and people will flock through the doors to hear it. But stick to what the Bible says, and no one wants to listen. Jesus said in Luke 12:15 *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.* This is the polar opposite of what these people are being told. In sharp contrast to the prosperity gospel emphasis on gaining money and possessions in this life, Jesus said, *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroys, and where thieves break in and steal.* Matthew 6:19. The irreconcilable contradictions between prosperity teaching and the

gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is best summed up in the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:24, “You cannot serve both God and money.”

The Apostles Experiences

Did they receive prosperity in their lives? Did they pray for blessings and riches? Did they even want them? Paul recounts his lifestyle after choosing to follow Jesus: 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 *I have been in more abundant labours, in stripes [or beatings] above measure, in prisons more frequent, often in danger of death. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been adrift in the open sea; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in dangers of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and nakedness.* The Apostle Paul, who was one of the most faithful servants of Christ, endured extreme hardship and suffering. If wealth and comfort were the rewards of faith, Paul’s life would certainly seem to contradict that teaching. But it seemed that he was quite cheerful about it, and positive, and full of energy, and he defiantly was not complaining. In fact he said this in his letter Philippians 4:11-13 - *I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*

Covetousness is Idolatry

Noting the example of Jesus and his disciples, and the Apostles too, we who call ourselves the Apostolic Ecclesia, claim to follow this, the Apostolic example. To follow the Gospel of Christ, in contrast to the so-called Gospel of Prosperity. Of course, being prosperous and assuming we are blessed is subjective. The only way to consider ourselves prosperous and financially blessed, is by comparing with what other people have got. Paul said this in his letter to Corinth: *but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.* It is only by comparing and contrasting our own situation and possessions with others that maybe we think we don’t have enough, or need more or it is a case of seeing goods and material items, and wanting it even if we don’t need it. As Paul pointed out he had learned to be happy with a simple life, and be content with such things as he had, and the letter to the Hebrews recommends the same Hebrews 13:5: *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.* Yes, seeing things belonging to others and wanting it for ourselves, and getting the feeling of being discontented is described as covetousness. This dissatisfaction is what fuels the prosperity gospel, but actually it is a very dangerous mood, and leads to the sin of covetousness. Furthermore, having this obsession is described as idolatry; Ephesians 5:5 *For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Yes.* Covetousness is the worship of self. And selfishness is the driver, the engine behind the gospel of prosperity, completely opposite to Biblical teaching.

Positive confession or trust in God?

There is another aspect of the Prosperity Gospel which is opposed to the Truth. It is something called “positive confession” or “Word of Faith” This refers to the teaching that words themselves have creative power. What you say, prosperity teachers claim, determines everything that happens to you. Your confessions, especially the favours you demand of God, must all be stated positively and

without wavering. Thus, God's ability to bless us supposedly hangs on our faith. James 4:13-16 clearly contradicts this teaching: *Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.* But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Far from speaking things into existence in the future, we do not even know what tomorrow will bring or even whether we will be alive. As the name "Word of Faith" implies, this movement teaches that faith is a matter of what we say more than whom we trust or what truths we embrace and affirm in our hearts.

This is quite a modern fashion, another fad, called manifestation, that if you think positively enough, and completely focus on your dream, it will eventually come to you. But this self-centred approach, which overlaps with what these modern Pentecostal churches teach, makes no allowance of a Greater Power, the Almighty God, and what is His will in our matter, and the sincere Christian, is one who truly believes that it is God who is in fact in control of our lives.

What about Suffering?

There is an interesting passage which explains that actually when things go wrong in our lives, and we go through difficult experiences, that this is can be in fact a blessing. Again completely opposite of what these modern churches teach. Hebrews 12:6,11 *For whom the Lord loveth he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives... 11 Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.* There can often be the tendency to think that when people have calamity after calamity, that they are being punished or being cursed. This is how shallow human nature can judge, and is certainly a feature of these prosperity gospel champions. In opposition to the Prosperity Gospel preachers who teach that good things happening in this life is a sign of your faith, Jesus said *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.* Following the teachings of Jesus involves going against the current and tide of public opinion, of standing up for what the Bible actually teaches. Making such a stand is not popular, and certainly doesn't make you friends. Health and wealth and plenty of friends are not markers of the love of God. To the contrary Jesus warned: Matthew 5:11-12: *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* There are many examples in the Bible of how righteous people suffered despite their great faith, and lost all their prosperity. Job is one such example. He was a wealthy man who lost everything—his possessions, health, and family—but he did not lose his faith in God. His story demonstrates that prosperity is not necessarily linked to godliness, and suffering is not a sign of God's disfavour. Job 1:21 - *Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.* His humility in accepting the will of God, his faith was not based on the riches of this world, but on the reward of the Kingdom of God to come.

The Gospel of Christ is simple, straightforward and the point. He that believes and is baptised shall be saved. The belief is explained in the New Testament – belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ. It called elsewhere the Hope of Israel, it is faith and hope in a Kingdom to come, which will be established here on earth, with its capital in Jerusalem, central nation as Israel, and the whole world to be ruled by Jesus Christ. He will be assisted in this glorious time of peace and equity by men and women who have been given eternal life at the judgement. These will be those who have been resurrected from the dead and judged worthy. Believing in the name of

Jesus Christ, is how we can be considered worthy to be raised to life again. Believing in His name, means trying to be like him, and when we are not, it is repenting from our sins, and seeking forgiveness. Trying to maintain that high standard is far from easy, but we are helped if we read the Bible everyday in some form, and also helped by the grace and mercy of God. This is the riches and prosperity that is promised... Grace Mercy and love in this life and in the life to come, eternal life, to serve with Christ Jesus. What we own, what we achieve, what we possess in this life is of no account, and simply does not matter. Paul said in his letter to the Romans 8:18: *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* This is the correct perspective. The focus is on the future. Smug holier than thou attitudes get caught out, and have no place in the Gospel of Jesus. Material benefits and worries and concerns, can loom too large in our minds. Present trials, including financial hardship or physical suffering, pale in comparison to the eternal glory that awaits believers. 2 Corinthians 4:17,18: *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*