

# Introducing The Prosperity Gospel Debate

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Since the 1980s, the Prosperity Gospel has become one of the doctrinal emphases of contemporary Christianity. Although it is found widely in some continents and countries, however, is often associated with leaders and preachers associated with the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. The newness of this emphasis stems from the fact that biblical metaphors of success and material prosperity have taken on new meanings within the competitive modern market economy. Besides, this emphasis shows how Pentecostalism has responded to popular demand of Christianity for economic relevance in the modern world. Using proof-text reading of the Scriptures as a method, Pentecostals and Charismatics have taken certain passages (e.g. III John 1:2; Joshua 1:8; and Deut 8: 6-9) as support for the prosperity Gospel.

As we begin our reflection on the Prosperity Gospel, it is necessary to recapitulate the content of this teaching. There are different refinements about prosperity among Pentecostal preachers, but generally the following represents the consensus within the constituency.

Some prosperity preachers insist that the emphasis flows from the concept of salvation, while others argue that prosperity is part of the blessings available to believers as part of God's covenant with Abraham. Generally, preachers of the Prosperity Gospel insist that Christians ought to have access to material wealth and live life on a big scale, and not experience any financial hardship nor contemplate poverty. Consequently, many preach and teach that failure, poverty, unhappiness, and all forms of difficulties are considered as curses which should not be the lot of Christians. They equally insist that God created men and women for a better life than many are experiencing, hence God's abundant goodness is supposed to be enjoyed by Christians who "discipline themselves, become decisive, bold, adventurous, believing, daring, risking and determined." In practical terms, prosperity connotes material prosperity or financial prosperity, defined as having enough resources, which can be money, houses, cars, children, promotion, jobs, etc.

Prosperity preachers also insist that Christians enter into the realm of prosperity based on individual understanding of the God's promises because God has given humans access to the Abrahamic covenant. Hence, one's salvation launches one into the realm of God's abundance. However, Christians who are not prospering could be harbouring unbelief or are unaware of God's promises and the laws of success or have accepted the lies of the Devil or are bogged down by sin.

Most preachers of Prosperity Gospel often encourage their members to give testimonies of how they have been materially blessed or have their finances transformed as evidence of the genuineness of this doctrinal emphasis.

As we begin our discussion on this issue, preparatory to the Lausanne Congress, we need to reflect deeply on the questions listed below and many more that will be raised later. What are roots of the Prosperity Gospel in the West as well as in the Third World? What type of works ethics does this emphasis promote? If material prosperity is guaranteed for all Christians, why are there provisions for the poor in the Scriptures? What are the connections between health and wealth from the perspectives of the prosperity preachers? What are the implications of the Prosperity Gospel for Christian integrity in the context of unbridled materialism in the contemporary world? How does the Prosperity Gospel address sin and its consequences? How true it is to affirm that true spirituality is evidenced by material prosperity?