

The Prosperity Gospel

A Scriptural Response to Popular but Flawed Teachings





What is The Prosperity Gospel?

- The **Prosperity Gospel**—also known as the **Word of Faith Movement** or **Health and Wealth Gospel**—is a controversial teaching within certain segments of Christianity that asserts that faith in God can lead to financial prosperity, physical health, and personal success.
- This movement emphasizes that God desires believers to live lives of material abundance and well-being. It is characterized by the belief that **faith, positive confessions, and financial giving** (such as tithing) can unlock God's blessings, including wealth, health, and happiness.

Key Teachings

- **Faith as a Force:** Faith is a tool that believers can use to claim wealth, health, and success. “Positive Confession.”
 - *Proverbs 18:21 - "The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit."*
- **Positive Confession:** The belief that speaking positively will lead to positive outcomes. “Name it Claim it.”
 - *Mark 11:23-24: - "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."*
- **God's Will is Prosperity:** God wants all believers to be healthy, wealthy, and successful.
 - *Jeremiah 29:11 - "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."*
- **The Power of Tithing:** Tithing is taught as a way to unlock God's blessings, especially financial prosperity. “Seed of Faith Offering.”
 - *Malachi 3:10 - "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."*

What does the Bible say about wealth?



Wealth in itself is not sinful.

Scriptures to consider:

- **Proverbs 10:22** – "The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, without painful toil for it."
- **Ecclesiastes 5:19** – "Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them...this is a gift of God."
- **1 Timothy 6:17** – "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God..."

Wealth and the Kingdom of God

Jesus teaches us to be wary of placing our hope in material wealth.



Matthew 6:19-21 – "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven."



Luke 12:15 – "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

Wealth and Suffering in the Bible

The Bible doesn't promise prosperity but rather calls us to live with faith amid trials.

- **John 16:33** – "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
- **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** – Paul's "thorn in the flesh" reminds us that suffering is part of the Christian life.



The History of The Prosperity Gospel

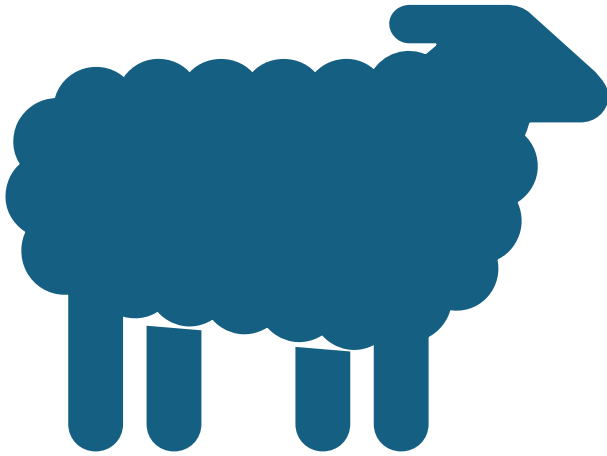
The Prosperity Gospel is a relatively modern movement, with roots in 20th-century American evangelicalism.

Early Foundations:

- **19th Century:** The roots of the Prosperity Gospel can be traced back to the **Word of Faith movement** in the late 1800s and early 1900s, influenced by Christian Science and the "health and wealth" ideas promoted by figures like **E.W. Kenyon**.
- **Early 20th Century:** The **New Thought Movement**, which combined metaphysical beliefs with Christianity, also played a significant role in shaping Prosperity Gospel ideas.
- **Post-WWII:** The movement truly began to take shape with **Oral Roberts** in the 1940s-50s, who emphasized faith healing and divine provision.
 - Oral Roberts is often credited as one of the first prominent figures to bring the idea of prosperity and healing into the mainstream evangelical church.

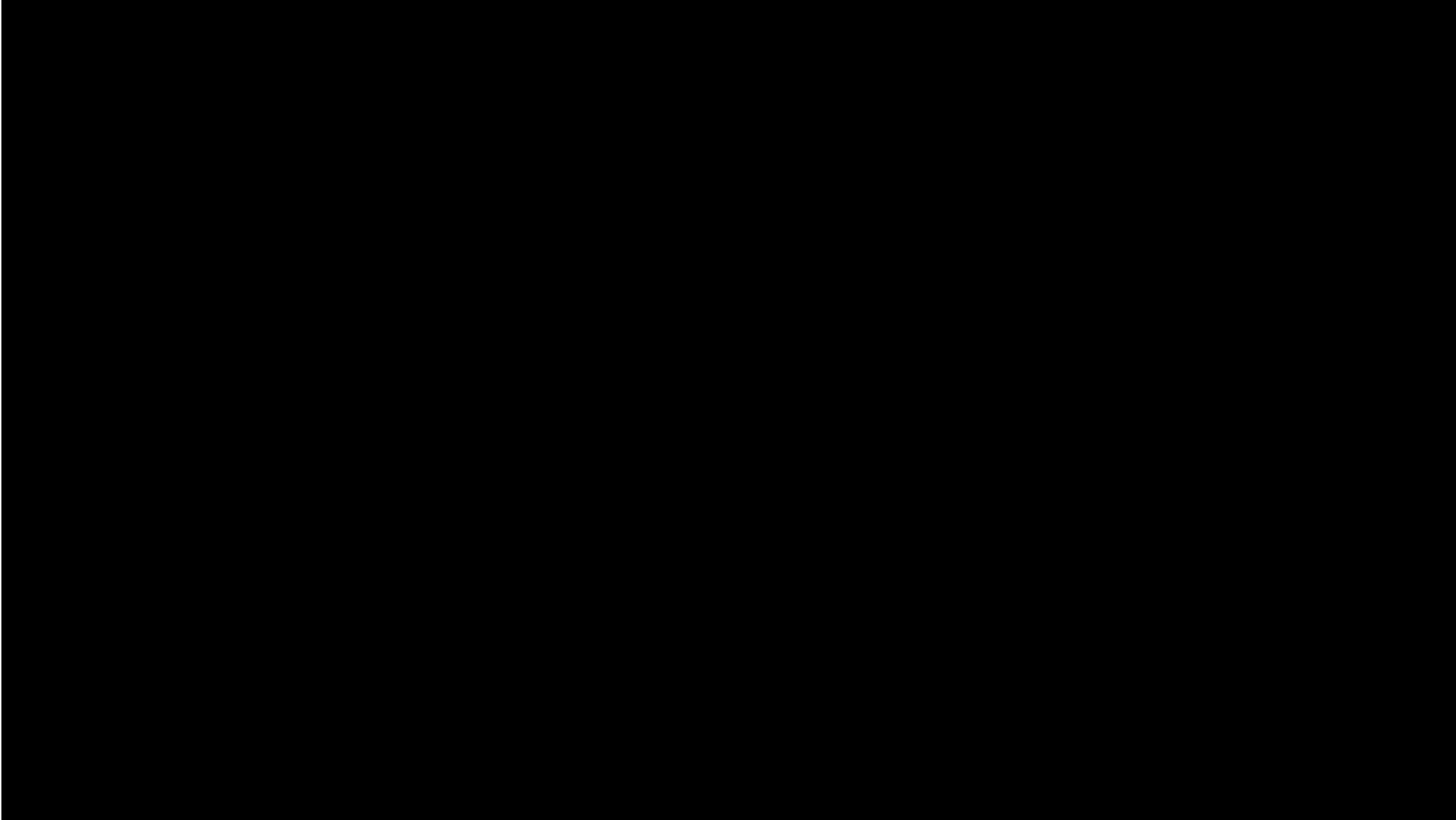
Key Figures

Several key figures have been instrumental in popularizing the Prosperity Gospel.



- **Oral Roberts:** Founder of Oral Roberts University and a pioneer in the health and wealth teaching, linking faith with financial blessings and divine healing.
- **Kenneth Hagin:** Founder of the **Rhema Bible Training Center**, Hagin's teachings on "**positive confession**" and faith as a tool to claim health and wealth were foundational to the movement.
- **Kenneth Copeland:** A prominent televangelist who greatly expanded the Prosperity Gospel's influence through television broadcasts and large-scale crusades.
- **Joel Osteen:** Perhaps the most well-known modern face of the Prosperity Gospel, Osteen's messages of personal success and abundance are central to his ministry, particularly through his megachurch, **Lakewood Church**.

John Piper – Reformed Baptist Minister – Founder, Desiring God





Scriptural Concerns of The Prosperity Gospel

1. Misinterpretation of the blessings promised in Scripture
 - The Prosperity Gospel takes promises given to Israel (or specific individuals) and applies them to all Christians.
2. Exaltation of materialism
 - The Prosperity Gospel focuses on material wealth as the evidence of God's favor.
3. Neglect of the Bible's teachings on suffering

Misinterpretation of Blessings



The Prosperity Gospel takes promises given to Israel (or specific individuals) and applies them to all Christians.

Genesis 12:2-3

Abraham's Blessing

*"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."* (NIV)

Prosperity Gospel Misapplication:

- **Claim:** Prosperity preachers often claim that the blessings promised to Abraham in Genesis 12 apply directly to all Christians. They argue that since believers are "children of Abraham" (through faith, according to Galatians 3:29), these blessings (particularly financial prosperity) are also ours today.
- **Example:** Some preachers will say things like, *"God wants to make you prosperous just like He did for Abraham. When you walk in faith, you too can expect wealth, success, and a blessed life because of this promise"*

Biblical Correction

Context: Genesis 12:2-3 is a **specific promise** made to **Abraham** and tied to God's covenant with the nation of Israel.

This promise involves Abraham's descendants becoming a great nation and being a source of blessing to the world (ultimately fulfilled through Jesus Christ, the "seed" of Abraham).

Theological Consideration: While Christians are "spiritual descendants" of Abraham through faith (Galatians 3:29), this doesn't mean that every individual Christian is guaranteed the same material wealth or national prominence promised to Abraham. The blessings to Abraham were not primarily about financial wealth, but about God's plan for salvation through his lineage.

Key Verse: *Galatians 3:14* - "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."

The blessing to Abraham is spiritual, not financial, and is fulfilled through Jesus.

Malachi 3:10

The Tithing Promise

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it." (NIV)

Prosperity Gospel Misapplication:

- **Claim:** Prosperity preachers often quote Malachi 3:10 as a way to encourage people to give **more money to the church** in the expectation that God will bless them with **financial prosperity** in return. This verse is used to suggest that if you tithe (or give generously), God will open the "floodgates" and pour out material blessings upon you.
- **Example:** A popular claim might be, *"If you want God's blessings, you need to give more to the church. Malachi 3:10 says that if you bring your tithes, God will open the heavens and bless you abundantly."*

Biblical Correction

- **Context:** Malachi 3:10 was given to **Israel** under the Old Covenant, and it is about the physical needs of the Israelites at a time when they were **failing to give** tithes as commanded by the Mosaic law. The promise of overflowing blessings in Malachi 3 is **not primarily about wealth**, but about God's faithfulness to provide for the needs of God's people.
- **New Covenant:** In the New Testament, the emphasis shifts from an obligation of tithing to the **principle of generous, cheerful giving** (2 Corinthians 9:7). Tithing is not a requirement for Christians; we are encouraged to give **freely** and **cheerfully** (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).
- **Key Verse:** *2 Corinthians 9:6-7* – "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Matthew 7:7-11

Ask and You Shall Receive

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7, NIV)

Prosperity Gospel Misapplication:

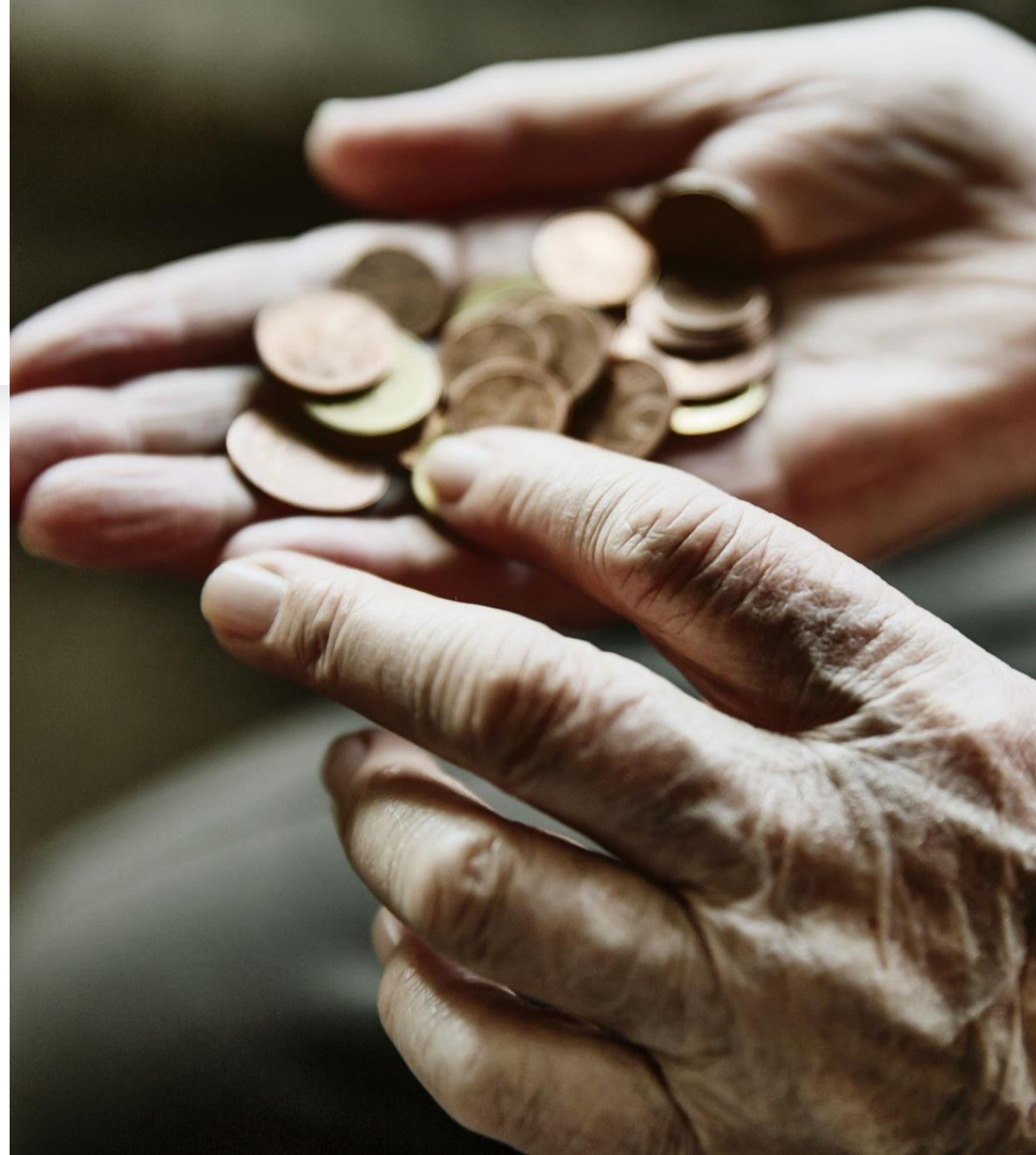
- Some preachers use this verse to teach that if you **ask God** for wealth or success with enough faith, you will receive it. The idea is that God is like a **genie** waiting to fulfill your material desires.

Biblical Correction:

- **Context:** While Jesus teaches that God is generous and wants to bless His children, the ultimate “good gifts” He gives are **spiritual**, not necessarily material. The passage is about God’s willingness to answer prayers and give good gifts, but not necessarily about fulfilling every material wish.
- **Key Verse:** *James 4:3* – “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”
 - The key here is that God answers prayer according to His will, not necessarily according to our desires for wealth or comfort.

Exaltation of Materialism

- The Prosperity Gospel is often criticized for **exalting materialism**, meaning it places an emphasis on **material wealth** as a primary sign of **God's favor** and blessing.
- This view directly contradicts Biblical teaching, which warns against making material wealth the focus of our faith or the basis for measuring God's approval.



Televangelists and Wealth as a Sign of Faith

Many popular **televangelists** (e.g., **Joel Osteen**, **Kenneth Copeland**, **Creflo Dollar**) teach that material success and wealth are clear evidence that one is living in God's favor. They often use phrases like:

- *"God wants you to be rich!"*
- *"Your breakthrough is just around the corner!"*
- *"Give to the ministry, and God will bless you abundantly!"*

These messages place an overwhelming focus on **material wealth**, leading followers to equate **financial prosperity** with **spiritual prosperity**. The more you give (especially money to the ministry), the more **financial blessings** you will receive in return.



Biblical Problem:

The Bible never equates wealth with spiritual maturity or God's favor.

In fact, many of the **apostles** and **early Christians** were **poor** and even **persecuted** for their faith (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

Jesus Himself, though the Son of God, was born into humble circumstances and lived a life of poverty and service, not of wealth and luxury.

Key Verse: *James 2:5* – "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?"

"Positive Confession" and Wealth

- A key teaching within the Prosperity Gospel is the idea of **positive confession**, which states that your words have power to create reality. The idea is that if you **speak wealth and success into existence**, God will make it happen for you. If you **confess your poverty**, you are seen as **lacking faith**.
- **Kenneth Copeland**, for instance, has said, *"You cannot be poor and be in the will of God."* This places immense pressure on Christians to equate **material wealth** with **spiritual maturity**, even though Scripture teaches that poverty does not disqualify someone from God's love or blessings.

Biblical Correction:

Jesus spoke about the dangers of **money** in multiple passages, warning that **wealth** can become a spiritual hindrance.

- For example, **Mark 10:25**: "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."
- The **rich young ruler** in **Luke 18:18-25** serves as an example of how wealth can interfere with spiritual growth. Jesus told him to sell everything and give it to the poor, showing that **wealth** is not a sign of **spiritual blessing** but a **potential hindrance**.



The True Focus of the Gospel: Spiritual Riches

While the Prosperity Gospel elevates **material wealth**, the **true gospel** emphasizes **spiritual riches**:

- **Ephesians 1:3** – *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."*
 - Our **true wealth** is **spiritual**: peace with God, righteousness, salvation, and the promise of eternal life.
- **Matthew 6:33** – *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*
 - Jesus redirects our focus from material wealth to **spiritual priorities**. When we seek God's kingdom first, God will provide for our needs, but we are not to make wealth our pursuit.

Neglect of the Bible's Teachings on Suffering

- The Prosperity Gospel **neglects or misinterprets the Bible's teachings on suffering** by promoting an unrealistic expectation that Christians will always experience health, wealth, and success in this life.
- According to this teaching, **God's will for believers** is to be prosperous and free from hardship.
- **Suffering**, on the other hand, is often seen as a sign of **weak faith, spiritual failure, or lack of obedience**.
- In stark contrast to the Prosperity Gospel's emphasis on material blessings, the **Bible** presents suffering as a key part of the Christian journey.
- It teaches that suffering is not only **inevitable** but also **beneficial**, producing character, perseverance, and hope, and helping believers to share in the sufferings of Christ, which is a crucial part of the Christian faith.



Romans 5:3-4 – Suffering Produces Perseverance, Character, and Hope

"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Romans 5:3-4, NIV)

Prosperity Gospel Misapplication:

- The Prosperity Gospel tends to **downplay or ignore suffering**, often portraying it as something to be avoided or a sign of a lack of faith. It teaches that Christians can **claim victory** over suffering by simply confessing their desires (like health or wealth) into existence.
- Suffering is often **demonized**, and if a Christian is experiencing hardship, it is often attributed to **sin** or a **lack of faith**. Preachers might say, *"If you are suffering, it's because you haven't claimed your blessings from God yet."*

Biblical Correction:

- In **Romans 5:3-4**, Paul teaches that **suffering is not something to fear or avoid**, but something that, through God's power, **produces spiritual growth**. Suffering **produces perseverance**, which builds **character**, and ultimately leads to **hope**.
 - The passage is clear that suffering is a **necessary part of the Christian journey**, and **God uses suffering to shape our character**. This is a radically different view from the Prosperity Gospel, which tends to focus only on the **immediate alleviation** of suffering and material gain.
 - **Key Verse:** *James 1:2-4* – "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."
 - Here, James teaches that trials are **opportunities for growth**, not signs of failure. Perseverance through suffering leads to **maturity** and **wholeness** in the Christian life.
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Philippians 3:10 – Participation in the Sufferings of Christ

"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." (Philippians 3:10, NIV)

Prosperity Gospel Misapplication:

- The Prosperity Gospel focuses heavily on the **resurrection power of Christ** but often neglects or minimizes the importance of **sharing in Christ's sufferings**.
- It might teach that believers should expect **material blessings** as part of following Christ, but it rarely emphasizes that true discipleship includes **identifying with Christ's suffering**

Biblical Correction:

- In **Philippians 3:10**, Paul's desire is to **know Christ more deeply**, and this involves **participating in Christ's sufferings**.
- For Paul, knowing Christ is not just about experiencing **the power of the resurrection** but also **embracing the fellowship of His sufferings**.
- The Prosperity Gospel's focus on **health, wealth, and success** contrasts sharply with the New Testament's **teaching on suffering as a part of Christian discipleship**.
- Jesus Himself said, *"If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me"* (Luke 9:23).
- The cross is a symbol of **suffering and sacrifice**, and following Jesus means being willing to endure hardship for the sake of the gospel.

The Danger of the Prosperity Gospel's Neglect of Suffering

The **Prosperity Gospel's neglect** of the Bible's teaching on suffering can have **harmful consequences** for believers, including:

- **False Expectations:** Followers may believe that suffering is always a sign of sin or lack of faith, which can lead to feelings of **guilt** or **shame** when they face difficult circumstances.
- **Spiritual Disillusionment:** When believers face suffering, they may feel that God has abandoned them or that they are doing something wrong.
- **Weak Faith:** If suffering is seen as something to avoid at all costs, Christians may **lack spiritual resilience**. They may not understand that **endurance in suffering** is a mark of **mature faith**.
- **Missed Opportunities for Growth:** The Prosperity Gospel often promotes the idea that material blessings are the **primary sign of God's favor**, but it fails to recognize that **suffering** and **perseverance** are key tools God uses to shape and refine the character of His people.

The Biblical View of Suffering: A Source of Blessing

The Bible does not teach that Christians are exempt from suffering. Instead, it teaches that suffering can be **used by God** for good, both in the believer's life and for God's glory.

Christians are called to follow the example of Christ, who **suffered for our sins** and calls us to share in His suffering as part of our discipleship.

2 Timothy 3:12 – "Everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted"

- Paul warns Timothy that suffering for the sake of righteousness is **inevitable**. This verse makes it clear that being a follower of Christ involves **suffering**, not just blessing.

Hebrews 12:6-11 - *"The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?"*(Hebrews 12:6-7, NIV)

- **Suffering** can be **discipline** from God, used to train us for holiness and righteousness. This is a different view from the Prosperity Gospel

Theological Concerns of The Prosperity Gospel

- The Prosperity Gospel presents significant **theological concerns**, particularly around the **nature of faith** and its role in the believer's life.
- In the Prosperity Gospel, faith is often distorted and treated as a **tool to manipulate God** into granting material blessings.
- Rather than faith being a free gift of God's grace and a trust in God's will, it becomes a **mechanism** to achieve **personal desires**—whether that's financial success, physical health, or other material benefits.
- This distortion has profound implications for how Christians understand faith, God's will, and the nature of God's blessings.

Faith as a Tool to Manipulate God

In the Prosperity Gospel, faith is often treated as if it were a **force** or **principle** that Christians can use to compel God to act in their favor. This view is sometimes described as "faith as a force" or "positive confession." Here's how it works:

Faith is seen as a tool to make declarations or affirmations that God is obligated to honor. If a believer has enough faith and confesses God's promises (usually related to wealth, health, or success), they will **receive** the desired outcomes.

"**Name it and claim it**" or "**Speak it into existence**" are common slogans used by Prosperity preachers, implying that **faith** can create reality by speaking things into existence.

This view of faith contradicts the biblical understanding of faith as a trust in God's will, rather than a way to manipulate God's actions. True faith submits to God's plan and relies on God's timing and sovereignty, rather than forcing God to comply with human desires.

Example from Prosperity Gospel Teaching:

- **Kenneth Copeland** has taught that Christians can **speak their desires into existence**: "*If you believe it, you can receive it.*" This suggests that **faith** is about **personal desires** rather than **God's will** or **God's glory**.
- **Creflo Dollar** has also taught that believers should **command blessings** to come into their lives, which distorts the biblical notion of faith as submission to God's will.

Faith and Self-Centered Desires

The Prosperity Gospel places the focus of faith squarely on **self-centered desires**—health, wealth, success, and personal fulfillment. The idea is that if you just have **enough faith**, God will grant you these desires.

This distorts the **Biblical role of faith**, which is not primarily about receiving material blessings, but about trusting in God and God's purposes for our lives.

In the Prosperity Gospel's version of faith, the ultimate goal is **self-exaltation** through personal success and material wealth, which is the opposite of the Biblical call to **deny ourselves** and take up our **cross** (Luke 9:23).

Faith in the Prosperity Gospel is about **serving personal ambitions**, while in the Bible, **faith is about submitting to God's will** and seeking God's glory.



Why Is The Prosperity Gospel So Popular?

- **Desire for a Better Life:** In many parts of the world, particularly in impoverished or developing regions, the promise of wealth and success is an attractive hope.
- **Televangelism and Media:** The accessibility of television, internet, and social media allows Prosperity Gospel preachers to reach millions globally, especially in developing nations.
- **The Promise of Control:** The idea that individuals can control their destiny through faith, positive confession, and giving resonates with many who feel powerless.



Current Popularity

- **Televangelism:** Television ministries (e.g., Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer, Benny Hinn) continue to promote the Prosperity Gospel worldwide.
- **Social Media:** Platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram are used to broadcast Prosperity Gospel messages to a global audience.
- **Megachurch Movement:** Many large churches across the U.S. and internationally continue to spread Prosperity Gospel teachings, drawing in vast numbers of attendees.
- **Statistical Growth:**
 - It's estimated that tens of millions of Christians worldwide subscribe to the Prosperity Gospel.
 - In **sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America**, the Prosperity Gospel is growing rapidly, with some reports indicating as much as 50-70% of evangelicals in these regions embrace it.

