

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

1 Timothy 6:3-11

[Phil Johnson](#)

I would love for my sermons always to be full of pure encouragement and positive edification. Like most of you, I prefer listening to preaching that is affirmative and uplifting. Like you, I love to be encouraged and edified by God's Word. I'd rather talk about the truth than concentrate on error. I love doctrine and instruction. But Scripture is profitable not only for "teaching . . . and for training in righteousness"; but also "for reproof [and] correction" and reproof and correction are just as necessary as encouragement and reassurance. All of us need words of challenge and caution; not always words of blessing and benediction. The faithful preacher is obliged to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort" especially when false teaching is as common as it is in our generation. I would go so far as to say the desperate need for critical thinking and careful discernment has never been more urgent.

Discernment, you know, is not a special spiritual gift delegated to a select few believers. Every Christian has a duty to differentiate between truth and error to proclaim truth and refute error. We are commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 to "test everything; hold fast what is good[, and] abstain from every form of evil."

I do *wish* it were possible always to be rosy and constructive. I wish all we needed to hear was doctrine and instruction, rather than reproof and correction. But there's a reason we're told Scripture is "profitable for" both positive and negative instruction. Contrary to the way most people today like to think and act, we desperately need clear

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

boundaries and careful watchmen who are willing to speak plainly and wield the sword of God's Word wisely for the protection of the flock and the preservation and proclamation of sound gospel truth. We *especially* need people skilled in discernment now.

Lots of people in these postmodern times seem to think it's *wrong* for Christians to criticize anyone else's religious beliefs up to and including some of the most outlandish false doctrines and superstitions. They think it is somehow unspiritual or uncharitable to test the truth-claims made by anyone who comes in the name of Christ, or who claims to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

That, I think, is one of the toxic legacies of the charismatic movement. The movement promotes the notion that the Holy Spirit *always* works in bizarre ways, outside the realm of doctrinal precision or even in opposition to orthodox confessions of faith. As the charismatic movement has spread, Pentecostal doctrine has fostered a blithe acceptance of Bible twisting, bad teaching, and outlandish private revelations that have nothing to do with the truth of Scripture. At the same time, charismatics actively *discourage* critical analysis of anyone who claims to be Spirit-filled. It's a carefully-cultivated gullibility that has seriously undermined both the testimony and the health of the church. It's a profane way to handle the Word of God. It's criminally careless, and it's intellectually sloppy. It is gross disobedience to what the Bible itself says about how to handle doctrine. And it has led to the rise of a twisted false gospel—a message of prosperity rather than penitence; promising earthly riches instead of heavenly blessing. And that's what I want to consider with you this morning.

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

(I don't want anyone to think the concerns we raised last year in the context of the Strange Fire Conference have been relegated to the back of the shelf. This is still perhaps now more than ever a matter of urgent concern, and the worse it gets, the more we need clarity on the issues.)

Unless you live in total isolation and never read any news about the church and our testimony to the wider world, you must be aware that the evangelical movement worldwide is currently undergoing a doctrinal and philosophical meltdown of catastrophic proportions. By any measure you could possibly employ, the evangelical movement right now is more backslidden and more spiritually bankrupt than medieval Catholicism was just before the dawn of the Protestant Reformation. The evangelical movement of our generation has become a monstrosity. Doctrinal, moral, and political corruption are the rule rather than the exception and some of the largest and most visible evangelical and charismatic churches today are populated with people who absolutely love to have it that way. They don't want to hear any criticism or complaint about worldliness or bad doctrine. Their religion is all about self-aggrandizement, and they will not tolerate anyone who points that out.

Churches worldwide are full of people who aren't the least bit interested in scripture, or doctrine, or truthfulness. They just want to have a good experience and feel good about themselves. More than that, they want to hear that *God* feels good about *them*, and that He exists to do their bidding. And when someone comes along with any kind of critique that questions what they are doing or what they are

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

teaching, that interrupts the illusion of well-being they have cultivated so carefully. So the average evangelical nowadays is tolerant of just about everything that happens in the church. The only thing evangelicals cannot abide is someone who keeps calling the church back to biblical faithfulness. *Discernment* is the one spiritual gift no one seems to want to practice or even hear about.

But the New Testament is full of warnings about false teachers and corrupt doctrines that come into the church to confuse the saints and mislead the lost. Paul's parting words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 were, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert."

And in 2 Corinthians 11, Paul says that "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness." In other words, we are told by Scripture to expect that the most dangerous threats to the peace and well-being of the church will come not from pagans and atheists and other hard-core haters of Christ, but the greater danger by far will come from people within the church who profess faith in Christ; who wear angelic smiles and decorate themselves with all the emblems of religiosity. They talk and act as if they are enlightened apostles and anointed, Spirit-filled emissaries of some deeper truth or better message. Jesus Himself said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

The church is full of people like that. They "are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

apostles of Christ." Again: those aren't my words. That's what Scripture says in 2 Corinthians 11:13. Today the religious airwaves are full of people like that—wolves in sheep's clothing; false teachers; lying prophets; greed-mongering charlatans whose only purpose is to gratify their own flesh and pad their own pocketbooks.

But the typical evangelical believer today does not want to think or hear about that. We'll hear gladly about heretics in church history and the controversies they caused, but we don't want anyone to suggest that any of today's celebrity church leaders may also be heretics. It's almost as if we think the threat of false teachers applies to every generation but our own. *Sure, that was a problem in the early church, but we don't have to worry about that now, do we? It's time to move past all that.*

And people seem to think it is their duty to assume the best about anyone who comes in the name of Christ—even if that person prophesies falsely, and corrupts the truth of Scripture, and turns people away from the truth in the process. This is a worldwide threat, especially in some of the poorest, neediest cultures, where the very worst strains of false Christianity have taken root and flourished at an amazing rate of growth. Ironically, some people seem to think the big numbers being swept into prosperity-oriented megachurches in Asia and Africa are proof that the charismatic movement is being blessed by God—despite all the news stories coming out of Africa about charismatic leaders who are committing criminal acts and engaging in every conceivable form of doctrinal, spiritual, and even sexual abuse.

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

Someone recently made this argument in a conversation I was having. He said, *"Look at the number of people worldwide they are reaching. How could a movement that is bearing so much fruit be bad?"*

Now, Jesus did instruct us to judge teachers by their fruit. Here's the text: Matthew 7:15. (Turn with me and let's look at it in context. Matthew 7:15-16): "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." Next phrase: "You will recognize them by their fruits." Sometimes the false prophets themselves will point to that verse and say, *"Look how many followers we have. Look at the large throngs of people who flock to our churches. That's our fruit. We're reaching so many people! How can you say that's bad fruit? and why aren't you able to get so many followers?"*

But Jesus wasn't suggesting that the person who can gain the most followers is the most reliable teacher. Truth isn't a popularity contest. In fact, Jesus himself chased away large crowds of half-hearted, worldly-minded followers in John 6. That's what all of John 6 is about. But while you have Matthew 7 open, look at the verse immediately preceding the wolves-in-sheep's-clothing warning. Verse 14: "The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Large crowds prove nothing. The larger the crowd, the more carefully we ought to examine what is being taught. And look at verse 16 again (this time the *whole* verse): "You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" He is not talking about big numbers and speedy growth; he is talking about the quality and the nature of the fruit that is borne.

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

If you do any gardening, you know that weeds always grow faster and multiply more easily than healthy crops. Rapid numerical growth is no proof that any religious movement is sound. When Jesus said, "You will recognize [false teachers and wolves in sheep's clothing] by their fruits" he was admonishing us to examine their *teaching*, not the number of followers they accumulate. We're supposed to be like the Bereans, who constantly, daily, compared the apostles' teaching with Scripture, "to see if these things were so."

Bad doctrine is precisely the kind of diseased fruit Jesus said *proves* the whole tree is bad. When a man (or a woman) has a greedy obsession with money, makes countless false prophecies, performs phony miracles, and lives a lifestyle that has more in common with Ahab and Jezebel than with Christ and the disciples—that is a seriously corrupt tree.

Spurgeon referred to greed as a "mongrel religion." And speaking of people who saw religion as a means of gaining material wealth, he said this:

[Their *real*] god is Mammon, who is as degraded a deity as [the vilest pagan idol. These people who] turn religion into a means of gain . . . would sell Jesus himself for silver.

Indeed, this is the sin of Judas. Spurgeon continues:

[Consider] Judas[. He] is an apostle, he listens to the Master's words, he preaches at the Master's command, and he works miracles in the Master's name; he also keeps the bag and manages the finance for Christ's little company, and he does it so carefully and economically that what he filches for himself is not missed, and he remains in good repute. Judas professes to serve Jesus,

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

but all the while he is really serving himself, for secretly he abstracts from the treasury somewhat for his own pocket. "He had the bag and kept that which was put therein."

There are such still in the churches of God: they do not actually steal, but they follow Jesus for what they can make or get out of him and his disciples. The symbols of their worship are the loaf and the fish. Now, this is as degrading a form of worship as the adoration of graven images. Gain is the god of many in all congregations: they seek Jesus, not because they care for his words, but because they eat of the loaves. They fear the Lord, but they serve other gods.

Spurgeon died long before the prosperity gospel gained the kind of dominance it enjoys today, But that is a dead-on description of today's prosperity preachers.

Although this doctrine was virtually unknown in Spurgeon's era, the gospel of health and wealth has become a massive worldwide movement today, and the prosperity preachers have become hands down the most influential voices in the charismatic movement. You see them every day on religious broadcasting (I'm talking about Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, and a constant parade of teachers with big hair and a similar message). Some of them sit at the helm of the world's largest and best-known megachurches. (I'm thinking of men like Joel Osteen, Yonggi Cho, and Joseph Prince.) It would be hard to think of a more completely distorted perversion of the gospel than the prosperity gospel all of those men preach.

It is a perverse lie to teach that God guarantees healing, perpetual health, material wealth, and financial affluence to

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

anyone who will give money to some anointed miracle-merchant (but only if you have enough faith to believe that you God will give you whatever you claim). The trick, of course, is that you must always believe without any kind of doubt or question, so if you don't get the thing you claimed by faith, the fault is always your own. It never seems to reflect poorly on the guy who promised you would receive health and wealth. You just need to plant a new seed by sending another donation to the wealthy preacher who was promising you your miracle in the first place.

That is not the gospel. Those are false promises that don't pertain to the gospel in any way. The gospel Jesus preached was a message about the forgiveness of sins and the kingdom of God—eternal and spiritual matters, not worldly wealth. Earthly wealth or poverty has nothing whatsoever to do with anything Jesus ever said about the gospel—except for one place (Matthew 19:24), Where He said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God." Why? because to be obsessed with earthly riches is the very antithesis of faith. To have faith is to have your heart set on heavenly things. Colossians 3:1-2: "[If] you have been raised with Christ, [you should] set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." If your whole idea of faith is wrapped up in the notion of gaining material wealth in this life, you're not truly trusting the God of Scripture.

The strongest biblical warnings about false teachers are found in Jude and 2 Peter 2. Both passages tell us that one of the key signs of a false teacher is greed—an obsession with

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

money and material things; a craving for worldly fame; a thirst for earthly power and popularity; and a relentless covetousness for things that serve only to gratify the flesh.

By the way, this is a good way to understand the prosperity preachers' error: *What they are doing is portraying the sin of covetousness as a sacrament—a means of grace.*

They are suggesting to people that their worldly cravings are the whole basis of faith. They teach people that faith is nothing more or less than believing God will give us what we want. They *use* the name of Christ in order to borrow legitimacy for a false religion of pure greed—but Christ has no real or essential place in the religion they proclaim.

John MacArthur compares the prosperity gospel to the pagan cargo cults that arose among some of the South Pacific islanders after World War II. Tribesmen saw planes fly over and drop supplies to troops, and when the troops moved on and the war ended, the natives developed an entire religion about the second coming of John Frum, an imaginary deity who drops cargo from the sky. That's what the prosperity preachers have done with the God of Scripture: they have turned Him into a minor deity whose only function is to drop earthly merchandise from heaven.

The apostle Peter says the greed of false teachers is a fleshly lust tantamount to an appetite for fornication (which also is common among false teachers of all kinds). Peter says such an uncontrollable craving for material gain is one of the key ways to identify a false teacher. Second Peter 2:14 says, "They have hearts trained in greed" and then Peter quickly adds that they are accursed. He doesn't view this as a minor character flaw that needs to be toned down or managed carefully. He says it's a damnable sin.

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

Second Peter 2 and Jude are parallel passages, very similar in content. What amazes me when I read those passages is that it's as if Peter and Jude were giving a precise description of today's charismatic religious celebrities.

For example, the prosperity preachers often tell fantastic tales that most rational people know are simply fabricated stories and unvarnished lies. Benny Hinn claims that people in his meetings have often been raised from the dead. But all his public performances are videotaped for television, and he cannot show even one example of a medically-verifiable, clear-cut healing of a congenital disability (where he heals the truly lame, deaf, or blind). Much less can he document the resurrection of any dead people.

At Bethel Church in Redding, California (where Bill Johnson is lead pastor) there is a group of young people who claim they have walked on water. Even though they are teenagers with cell phones who videotape everything they do, they don't have any actual videos of anyone in their group walking on water. The same church has a group of young people who call themselves "The dead-raising team." They admit they haven't ever really raised anyone from the dead, but they promise people that they *can*. They claim to have that power.

If you ever watch the big charismatic networks that feature nonstop prosperity doctrine [you should stop. But if you *do* watch this stuff] you know it's common to hear prosperity preachers and their followers berating and commanding the devil in their prayer-times [speaking directly to Satan, supposedly rebuking him and giving him orders as if they were his master. Listen to what Scripture

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

says about that kind of activity: In 2 Peter 2:3, Peter writes, "In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories." verse 10: "Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings." But Peter says (2 Peter 2:11-12), "Even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish." Back in verse 3, He says, "Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep."

In other words, such people damn themselves. They are candidates for hell. Peter goes on to suggest that their punishment is as certain as the destruction of the demons themselves "angels [who] sinned, [and were cast] into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment." He also says the judgment of these false teachers will be worse than the judgment of people who perished in the time of Noah, and worse also than the punishment dealt to the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Those are harsh words, but that is the Word of God and it shows how absolutely vital it is to scrutinize what people teach. We have a solemn duty to reject false doctrine, even when it comes from within the community of professing believers.

Peter was talking about the prosperity preachers of his time—men who were already *in the church*. He was not talking about priests in the pagan temples that were everywhere in the Roman empire. He was describing men who professed

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

the name of Christ, who claimed to be Christians, who pretended to speak with apostolic authority, who traveled from city to city speaking in Christian gatherings. These were the first-century equivalent of Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland, and the whole TBN television network. The apostle Paul describes them this way (1 Timothy 6:5): He says they are "people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain."

"Godliness [as] a means of gain." That is a perfect summary of the prosperity gospel. Scripture clearly says it is a *false* doctrine. And here is the heart of the error: it sets aside the true gospel of Jesus Christ and replaces the true message of God's saving grace with an entirely different message. The *true* gospel is an announcement that Christ lived and died and rose again to make a perfect, once-for-all atonement for sin, and thereby to purchase full justification (a right standing before God) for all who trust Him as Savior. Believing in Christ does not mean using Him like a genie to get whatever you say. It means surrender to His lordship and trust in Him for the remission of sins.

Listen to the prosperity preachers and you will see that they rarely even *mention* sin and redemption. Theirs is a message of positive confession. To confess your sins would by definition be a negative confession, and there's simply no convenient place for that in their system. Their message is not about heaven or spiritual prosperity; it's all about worldly wealth and material prosperity here and now. Joel Osteen's best-selling book was even titled, *Your Best Life Now*. John MacArthur pointed out that the only way you could possibly be living your best life now is if you are going to hell.

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

And the relentless theme of prosperity preachers is money—material wealth, filthy lucre. It is nothing more than blatant fleshly self-indulgence masquerading as religion in the name of Christ. According to the prosperity gospel, God is not a consuming fire and the righteous judge of all the universe. He is not a glorious and holy Being to be feared. Prosperity doctrine portrays Him as a utilitarian idol to be plied and manipulated into doing whatever *we* say.

That is a false god and a false gospel of the very worst kind. It is a lie and a gross blasphemy against the true God of Scripture, who "will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."

Furthermore, the apostle Paul was very clear in Galatians 1 about how we should respond to a different gospel. In Galatians 1:6, he says, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ." How should the Galatians respond to people who were distorting the gospel? The apostle does not mince words: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed." In fact (Galatians 1:8-9), Paul repeats those same instructions twice in the span of two verses.

Obviously, it would be wrong to say of any true brother or sister in Christ, "Let him be accursed." So think through the implications of this: What Paul is saying is that anyone who corrupts the gospel badly enough to turn it into a completely different message is not a true Christian. If you examine a man's fruit and what you find is that he preaches

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

a totally different message; he promises people financial prosperity and physical healing rather than redemption from sin; he wears all the badges of wealth and celebrity; he preaches himself, not Christ Jesus as Lord; and he himself values symbols of material wealth more than he cares about sanctification—that's rotten fruit, and it is positively sinful to embrace someone like that as a true Christian brother.

When something like that is going on and supposedly Bible-believing Christians are afraid or reluctant to sound any warning against it, what would it take to conclude that anyone is actually a wolf who has crept in to abuse the flock?

People love to quote Matthew 7:1: "Judge not, that you be not judged." Paul Washer responds to that by saying, "*Twist not Scripture, lest you be like the devil.*" He's right. That verse is telling us not to judge unfairly or unrighteously. The very next verse acknowledges that we are required at times to judge, and it tells us to temper our judgments with mercy, and precede our judgments with self-examination: "With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." There are many places in Scripture where we are commanded to judge. John 7:24: "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." In other words, judge carefully. Don't be haphazard or biased or hypocritical in your judgments, but judge righteously. First Corinthians 2:15 says, "The spiritual person judges all things." That verse uses a verb that speaks of careful appraisal, close scrutiny, investigation with a view to a verdict. It's healthy and beneficial (even *essential*) to examine doctrine critically like that.

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

The "judge not" command is about judging people's *hearts* and drawing conclusions about their motives, or their attitude, or their thoughts and intentions. We cannot righteously judge what we cannot possibly examine or understand. But it is absolutely essential to make judgments about the quality and orthodoxy of what we are being taught especially when someone seems to veer away or go beyond from the teaching we find in Scripture. How could we be on the lookout for wolves in sheep's clothing if it were unrighteous to make any judgments at all?

Now we must not condemn people as false teachers over every theological disagreement. Baptists and Presbyterians disagree on who should be baptized and how baptism should be administered. But they agree on the gospel. Many evangelicals have differing views on how to interpret the prophecies concerning the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the age. But if they are true evangelicals in the historic sense, they agree on the gospel.

The reason we consider Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and other pseudo-Christian cults sub-Christian (outside the true brotherhood of faith) is because they all want to redefine the gospel. They have replaced the most essential truths of Christianity with false doctrines, with some plan of salvation or some idea of what the Christian message is about that is different from the gospel revealed in Scripture. They nullify the grace of God. That's what Paul said about the Judaizers' error in Galatians 2:21: They "nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."

And it would be hard to think of a worse and more subtle perversion of gospel truth than the prosperity gospel.

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

Prosperity preachers fit the profile of secret wolves precisely. They don't overtly deny the authority or accuracy of Scripture; they simply ignore the parts that don't fit their theology. They don't usually disavow the deity of Christ or His death and resurrection. They don't necessarily attack any of the vital truths of the gospel. They just load their teaching with false promises, misdirection, tortured interpretations of Scripture, and fanciful doctrines they receive through dreams and inventions. I'm convinced some of them just make up stuff while they are talking, with no design other than to regale their audiences with the idea that they have a private connection with God.

Their movement is laden with unorthodox ideas. T. D. Jakes is a modalist; he denies the doctrine of the Trinity. Benny Hinn once taught that each Person in the Trinity is also a trinity, so that there are nine Persons in the Godhead. I'm told he has recanted that teaching, but I can't find anyplace where he has actually clarified the point by explaining a more biblical view. In short, the movement is full of unorthodox doctrines. In the final chapter of *Charismatic Chaos*, John MacArthur gave a good, brief overview of the many heresies that have been intertwined with the prosperity gospel from the very beginning of the movement.

And if the fundamental sin and the material error of the prosperity doctrine is *greed*, the formal error of prosperity teachers is their reliance on dreams, visions, words of prophecy, and the gnostic claim that the real meaning of Scripture is a secret only one of these enlightened gurus can unlock for you.

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

That's not Christianity. True religion and undefiled is not about earthly comforts and worldly well-being. Godliness is not about material gain. That, again, is precisely what the apostle Paul is dealing with in 1 Timothy 6. Turn there with me and let's look at that passage 1 Timothy 6, starting in verse 3:

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness,
4 he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions,
5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

Those are harsh words. None of that would be politically correct in today's evangelical movement. Paul would be shamed and rebuked and relegated to the corner for saying something like that today. *If anyone departs from the apostolic doctrine the received truth of the church's confession of faith he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.* Not very tolerant! That's hardly "gentle" language. Can't we embrace these people as true brothers in sisters even if they don't believe just exactly like we do? Where's the love?

But it's clear (isn't it?) that the apostle Paul does not regard false teachers of this type as true brethren. He utterly loathes and abominates the sin of "imagining that godliness is a means of gain." He condemns those who peddle this doctrine. He doesn't embrace them as brethren; and he

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

doesn't do what most evangelicals nowadays try to do: he doesn't politely ignore them and hope no one notices. Here's how he answers their lie (verses 6-11):

6 Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment,

7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.

8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

11 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

Paul is echoing the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:31-33

31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?"

32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

The apostle Paul himself gave this testimony about what true faithfulness and blessedness looks like. This is from

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

Philippians 4:11-12: "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."

All of those texts agree, and this is the consistent teaching of Scripture from beginning to end: God's blessing is not measurable by a person's material prosperity. True biblical prosperity is about spiritual health, joy in the Lord, rewards in heaven, and grace in the midst of earthly sufferings. True prosperity has nothing to do with material wealth or an abundance of worldly riches. In fact, those things can be *hindrances* to spiritual blessings.

The wicked often prosper materially, while truly godly people suffer. "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." (That's 2 Timothy 3:12-13.) Christ himself suffered, "leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

All of that flatly contradicts the message of the prosperity gospel.

Let me sum up and we'll close:

Prosperity teachers insist that worldly wealth, physical health, and material prosperity are the ultimate gauge of how blessed you are by God. Furthermore, they say, you yourself are the one who ultimately determines how much or how little of God's blessings you enjoy. You can manipulate God with your words; you have it within the power of your own heart to summon enough faith to claim whatever

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

blessing you want. And if you are not materially prosperous; if you are sick; if you suffer in any way, *YOU* are the one to blame because you didn't crank up enough "faith" and create a better reality with a positive confession. You didn't claim your own dream by faith.

That is a lie from the pit of hell. In John MacArthur's words, the prosperity gospel *"is no different from the lowest human religions—a form of voodoo where God can be coerced, cajoled, manipulated, controlled, and exploited for the Christian's own ends."* It is rooted in greed. It glorifies the sinner at the expense of Christ. It fosters unbelief and spiritual defeat rather than genuine trust in God and triumph in Christ. It makes faith into a formula for manipulating God, rather than a humble, repentant trust in him.

In fact, the prosperity doctrine flatly contradicts everything Scripture says about faith and the promises of God; about suffering and glory; about contentment and covetousness; about the work of Christ and the depravity of fallen humanity. This is the religion of mammon-worship; it is not the way of the cross. In short it is a false gospel, meaning it is no gospel at all. It is a damning and damnable lie, and those who follow such a false and materialistic religion are on the broad road that leads to destruction.

Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate. . . . The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." The narrow way is the way of the cross. It begins with repentance from our sins and faith in Christ alone who by His death on the cross purchases our forgiveness, and by His obedient life obtained a perfect

Did God Promise Health and Wealth?

righteousness, with which he clothes us like a garment. That is true and eternal prosperity.

That doesn't guarantee freedom from suffering in this life. "The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life." That's Matthew 7:14, and Jesus' very next words were, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." That is the very description of these prosperity teachers: "ravenous wolves"; people driven by greed, lust, and self-indulgence. They are not true ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their teaching is deadly to your spiritual well-being. In the words of the apostle Paul (Romans 6:18): "[They] do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive." "Watch out for [them. They] cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them."