

Anatomy of the **Prosperity Gospel**

A Biblical Scrutiny of the Prosperity Theology



Abiodun Jemilohun

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Dedication

Dedicated to all lovers of the truth of the Gospel worldwide

Acknowledgment

Thanks be to the Almighty God, the author of wisdom and understanding. Special thanks to Paul D. Rapoza and Stephen Dayo who persistently encouraged me to publish this work. I acknowledge every person who in one way or the other contributed to the success of the work. You are all treasured.

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Forward

From the time that our dear brother in the Lord, Abiodun Jemilohun, began his series of posts on Facebook on the errors of the so called "Prosperity Gospel," I was struck by the awareness that he was entering into an important work of needed corrections regarding the subject material to the Body of Christ. After the 3rd post, I could almost see, in my mind, a book in the making to accomplish that in a more enduring way. Facebook has become an integral facet of communications between believers world-wide, but often important posts soon get buried and difficult to find. Because of that, at that time, I purposed in my heart to start an index of all the post titles and their links so there would be a way of keeping them all together. All along though, in the back of my mind, I could see a book forming.

Why a book? There are probably hundreds of thousands of Christian books out there today. Why another one? The answer to that is that situation is the very problem. There are many, many books promoting these errors and they have gone out to literally tens of millions of believers in the Lord around the world - who swallowed these errors hook, line and sinker like hungry unsuspecting fish for decades. That being said, it will take permanent books and writings, well distributed, and likely many, to correct those same well propagated errors.

I am grateful to God for our brother for his willingness to be used by God to write this book. This is not just a cheap criticism of those errors. It is not an effort to get on the New York Times best seller list by some ambitious author. It is a well-researched "treatise" filled with scriptural references that took no small work to accomplish. I can safely say that is a thorough work.

May we all be forever grateful to God for allowing this work and other works of correction to come to pass that will have enabled us as a generation of believers to see and embrace the day we are called to. The day when these errors will become nothing more than an unpleasant sordid memory in history - fading away over the horizon - as we behold in ever greater intensity the face of Jesus. I pray it will be so in Jesus name.

Paul D. Rapoza
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Introduction

This work is an attempt to determine the veracity of the prosperity gospel. First and foremost, I would like to clarify that this is not an effort to refute the fact that God can and does endow His people and humanity in general with financial and physical blessings. If we begin on the premise that God is a good God, as the Bible declares Him to be, we shouldn't find it difficult to believe that God would have no trouble blessing the people who are called by His name with the good things of life.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." (James 1:17)

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! " (Mat 7:11)

The main objective of this treatise is to conduct a thorough examination of the "prosperity theology" as it currently exists in the light of the Bible, the written Word of God, which is the only authentic canon by which the veracity or otherwise of all Christian doctrines and practices can be established.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (2Tim 3:16)

Someone may ask, Why this effort?" To such a person I answer, "If not for any other reason, the numerous controversies surrounding this theology are enough to prompt a sincere inquirer to diligently seek the true position of the Bible on it."

It is inevitable that names of a few prominent men who pioneered this theology would be mentioned in the course of this discourse. This is by no means an attempt to cast aspersions on their persons but an attempt to give an accurate and honest account of the evolution of this theology as much as possible.

Again, it is important to state clearly that this work is not an attempt to judge any man but an effort to subject a theological thought that has become mainstream to the scrutiny of the Holy Word of God.

"Test all things; hold fast what is good." (1Thess 5:21)

Bearing in mind that the first rule of Christian apologetics is FIDELITY to the letter and spirit of the Scripture, I shall maintain strict adherence to the principles of Protestant biblical hermeneutics (interpretation) throughout this discourse.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2Tim 2:15)

Although this may be fairly voluminous for an average reader, I was convinced before embarking on it that it is a work that must be done for the defense of the Gospel. I believe it is an idea whose time has come.

I am quite aware that some people may not be so comfortable with the frankness of the language used in the work but if we must make progress, we have to be willing to speak the truth as openly as possible. This, to my mind, is the only way we can establish the truth and correct our mistakes.

"Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." (2Tim 4:2)

I encourage the reader to be open minded so as to allow the Spirit of God to use this material to speak to him.

Be blessed as you read.

Part I

Origin of the prosperity Gospel

Chapter 1

Definition and Origin of the Prosperity Gospel

The prosperity gospel, also known as the prosperity theology, is difficult to define precisely because it is not a systematized theological thought. However, it is often defined by many theologians as the "gospel of wealth and health" because of its disproportionate emphasis on material wealth and physical health as opposed to the traditional Gospel that emphasizes deliverance from sin through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

The prosperity theology is a relatively new concept because it was birthed less than 70 years ago [1]. It is an offspring of the Pentecostal Movement which broke out of the Methodist-Holiness Movement. The Pentecostal Movement began on the Azusa Street of Los Angeles, California, United States of America (USA), through the Azusa Street Revival that began in 1906 and lasted for about three and a half years [2]. The revival was led by William Joseph Seymour (May 2, 1870 - September 28, 1922), a holiness preacher of the African American extraction. From the street of Azusa, many participants of the revival went to different parts of the USA and the world at large with the Pentecostal Revival message that spread like a wildfire thereafter.

Prior to this, Charles Fox Parham (June 4, 1873 - January 29, 1929), also an American holiness preacher and evangelist, started conducting a Bible study series in early 1800 with his students in the Bethel Bible College at Topeka, USA, where it was discovered that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was usually accompanied by the evidence of speaking in other tongues in the Bible [2]. On the evening of 1st January 1901, Agnes Ozman, a female student at Bethel Bible College, requested to be prayed for to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which she received. She was the first person among this group to speak in tongues, even before Parham. William Seymour was a student of another Bible college which Parham established in Houston, Texas in 1905 before he left to start the Azusa Street Revival [2].

Although several individuals have tried to label the Pentecostal

experience as false or demonic because of certain character defects noted in Charles Parham, I am of the opinion that Scriptural evidence ought to take precedence over human frailty since God often uses imperfect people to accomplish His work.

Classical Pentecostalism emphasizes four cardinal doctrines: salvation by faith in Christ alone, baptism with the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in new tongues, divine healing and the second coming of Christ, in addition to the other classical Protestant beliefs. This continued until after the World War II (WW2) when the American healing revival broke out. Several healing evangelists began to emphasize divine healing in their messages in addition to salvation and prayed openly for people to be healed. Some of these healing evangelists in the early 1950s then began to emphasize that God blesses His people financially and materially in addition to salvation from sin and healing from sicknesses [1]. We shall call this the “Abundant Life theology”.

In the 1960s, the abundant life message became the primary focus of the healing revivals. During the decade several of the evangelists used high pressure tactics to raise funds from the seekers [3].

We need to at this point understand the state of the Church prior to this time. Due to overemphasis on the sovereignty of God, it was a general belief that sicknesses and poverty in the life of the Christian were acts of God. Whoever was afflicted with any of them thought they were suffering for Christ. It was the will of God as far as they were concerned. Some actually thought that poverty was synonymous with piety. They had a limited understanding of the scriptures in regard to the origins of these twin afflictions, the efficacy of prayer and the application of practical wisdom in overcoming them. Hence, the general belief in the Church then tended towards fatalism.

It would have been alright if these teachings were limited to exactly what the Bible says about these subjects. Alas, this was not to be. Just like all other restoration movements that went beyond what is written in the scriptures, the healing revival and the Abundant Life gospel went awry in their emphases.

Several healing evangelists such as Asa Alonso Allen (A. A. Allen), Gordon Lindsay, Tommy Lee Osborn (T. L. Osborn), Oral Roberts etc. championed this movement at inception. Gordon Lindsay and A. A.

Allen, among others, published literature that outlined the basic contents of the Abundant Life message [4], [5]. However, Oral Roberts is believed to be the one who laid a grand foundation for the Abundant Life Theology. He published a book in 1970 entitled “Miracle of the Seed-Faith” in which many, if not all, of the principles and methods of the Abundant Life theology were outlined. A revised edition of this book entitled “Seed-Faith 2000” was published in 1999.

Classical Pentecostalism ab initio maintained that the believer's healing is in the atonement of Christ based on Isaiah 53:5.

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isa 53:5)

Two basic questions come to mind in regard to this belief. Is divine healing truly in the atonement? If divine healing is indeed in the atonement, is it meant to be manifest exactly like salvation from sin in this present dispensation for all believers in Christ at all times? We shall leave these questions unanswered in this work for a later work for the sake of brevity.

About fifty years after the beginning of Pentecostalism, the Abundant Life theology declared that the believer's material prosperity is also guaranteed by the atonement of Christ. This time around, there was no explicit scriptural reference that could be cited to establish the assertion. Though paid for by the atonement as taught by the theology, the believer can only access these blessings through the seed-faith that comes in form of tithe, first-fruits, seed offering, special offering, prophet offering, sacrificial offering, vows, pledges etc. Some adherents of this theology call these media of access or covenant practices.

In addition to the Abundant Life Movement, the Word of Faith Movement also began among the Pentecostals in the 1970s and became very popular thereafter. The Word of Faith emphasizes divine healing and material prosperity like the Abundant Life message but it teaches that positive confession (Word of Faith) is the means by which these blessings are obtained. In other words, the Abundant Life theology teaches that the seed-faith is the key to these temporal blessings while the Word of Faith teaches that positive confession is the key. Although the Word of Faith theology was popularized by Kenneth Erwin Hagin

(August 20, 1917 – September 19, 2003), Essek William Kenyon (April 25, 1867 – March 19, 1948) who died about two decades and a half before the theology became popular laid down the principles in his writings [1]. We shall also leave the Word of Faith for work to be published later for the sake of clarity and brevity.

Therefore, the prosperity gospel, as we know it today, is an admixture of the Abundant Life theology and the Word of Faith theology.

Chapter 2

The Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria

Though it is common for people to label Pentecostal denominations generally as Prosperity-Pentecostal, it is important to note that not all Pentecostals agree with the tenets and practices of the prosperity theology. For example, the General Council of the Assemblies of God in 1980 criticized some of the key elements of the prosperity theology as unbalanced interpretation of the scriptures [6].

Nevertheless, the prosperity gospel has had a tremendous global spread since inception. It has spread near and far to several traditional non-Pentecostal Christian denominations and across all the continents of the world. It has found a very fertile ground in the sub-Saharan region of Africa and Nigeria in particular. Nigeria, as a country, now has some of the largest Prosperity-Pentecostal denominations in the world.

How did the prosperity gospel enter Nigeria? We know that the flame of Pentecostalism began to burn in Nigeria as far back as in the 1910s when an Anglican deacon launched an indigenous prophetic movement that later became the Christ Army Church [7]. Another Anglican man formed a prayer group called the Precious Stone (Diamond) Society to heal influenza victims around 1918. This group left the Anglican Church in the early 1920s and partnered with the Faith Tabernacle, a church based in Philadelphia, USA.

Indigenous churches with elements of Pentecostalism like the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim Society and The Apostolic Church/Christ Apostolic Church were established in the 1920s and 1930s respectively. Joseph Ayo Babalola, the founder of The Apostolic Church/Christ Apostolic Church, was also an Anglican who initially associated himself with the Faith Tabernacle.

Foreign Pentecostal denominations like the Welsh Apostolic Church, the Assemblies of God and the Foursquare Gospel Church were introduced to the country from the 1930s to 1950s. A former member of the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, Pa Josiah Akindayomi,

established the Redeemed Christian Church of God in 1952 which subsequently tilted towards Pentecostalism [7].

Beginning from the 1960s to the 1970s, the flame of Pentecostalism was ignited among the young people in the educational institutions, manifested initially as the Scripture Union in the secondary schools and later as the Christian Unions in the tertiary institutions. These young people went back to their various traditional orthodox denominations to cause revival but they were stiffly opposed. This led to a mass exodus of the young people out of the orthodox churches to form their own Pentecostal denominations.

New indigenous Pentecostal denominations like the Church of God Mission, founded by Benson Idahosa who was initially a member of the Assemblies of God Church, and the Deeper Life Church, founded by Willian Folorunso Kumuyi, sprang up in the 1970s. Benson Idahosa became one of Africa's most influential Pentecostal preachers of his time who influenced the movement in Nigeria, Africa and globally in no small way. Several other Pentecostal denominations like The Redeem Evangelical Mission, Living Faith Church, Christ Life Church etc. followed after in the 1980s [7].

Initially, the message in the Nigerian Pentecostal Movement was essentially the classical Pentecostal message with some local contents depending on the setting. The prosperity theology entered Nigeria and Africa, in general, by two major ways. First, by the several visiting American prosperity gospel preachers through their messages, and publications. Second, by Benson Idahosa [8].

Benson Idahosa probably learnt the prosperity theology through his association with some of the key figures of the movement in the United States. He attended a prosperity gospel-based Bible school named Christ for the Nations Institute at Dallas, Texas, USA, in 1971. He was said to have received a special message from God in 1973 after which he began to articulate the prosperity gospel [8]. It was initially a one-man show but by the mid-1990s it had become the dominant message in the Nigerian Pentecostal circle. This came about because a reasonable number of the current frontline Nigerian Pentecostal leaders such as Ayo Oritsejafor, Mike Okwonko, David Oyedepo, Francis Wale Oke, Chris Oyakhilome etc. were Benson Idahosa's mentees. Several other Pentecostal ministers who were not his direct mentees were also influenced through his leadership of the Pentecostal

Fellowship of Nigeria as the founding president. Hence, Benson Idahosa is unarguably the pioneer of the prosperity theology in Nigeria and Africa by extension [8].

Throughout this work, major elements of the prosperity theology were subjected to rigorous biblical exegeses and empiricism as occasion demanded in order to lay the truth bear for all to see. The discussion has been restricted to the material/financial blessings the theology promises to its adherents. Subsequent volumes shall examine the other aspects of the theology.

Part II

Elements of the Abundant Life Theology

Chapter 3

Material Prosperity is in the Atonement

As we earlier mentioned, the prosperity theology teaches that the believer's material prosperity is guaranteed by the atonement of Christ just like salvation from sin. This is probably from a misapplication of the Greek word "*Soteria*" translated "Salvation" in the New Testament that could generically mean deliverance, preservation, safety, health, and salvation.

However, the world salvation as used in the New Testament in relation to the atonement of Christ strictly implies salvation from sin. Though there are several scriptural references that attest to the fact that salvation from sin is guaranteed by the atonement, we find no explicit Bible passage to substantiate the assertion that the atonement guarantees material prosperity for the believer in Christ.

In order to address this subject properly, we have to first understand the meaning of the atonement. What is atonement? Etymologically speaking, the word "Atonement" is derived from *at+one+ment*, which could mean "unity", "be in agreement", "be at one with" or "reconciliation". Biblically speaking, the word connotes the reconciliation of God and mankind through the sacrificial death of Christ.

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph to intimate him with the destiny of the child in the womb of his espoused wife, Mary, he categorically stated that the child was to save his people from their sins.

"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." (Mat 1:21)

How was he to save them from sin? The Bible states that it is by the atonement. It is by the atonement that Christ became our propitiation, i.e. the means by which the righteous judgment (indignation) of God against sinners was adequately satisfied. God is a righteous Judge; He could not overlook sin. Sin has to be adequately punished. However, God is also a loving God who does not desire the death of a sinner. In

fact, God is love.

Therefore, the only way God could demonstrate His love for man and at the same time satisfy His righteous indignation against sin is by the atonement (the sacrificial death of a sinless person who is Christ). Without the atonement, we would have remained in our sins, waiting for the eternal consequences of our sins at the end of our lives. But thanks be to God, we would no longer have to face the eternal consequences of our sins since we have put our faith in Christ who died for our sins.

In biblical interpretation, there is a principle which I will call the law of proportionate emphasis for the sake of this discussion. This law states that the degree to which a subject is important, the degree to which the Scripture emphasizes it. In other words, subjects that are of cardinal importance to life and faith are always given appropriate degree of emphasis in the Bible, whereas issues that are of little or no importance are given little or no emphasis. How does the Bible achieve this? By the use of explicit language (clarity), repetition and warning as occasion may require.

Consistently from the Old to the New Testament, the Scripture speaks that Christ's primary mission to the earth was to be a sacrifice for sin. There are scores of Bible verses that speak explicitly about the atonement apart from the numerous ones that speak figuratively about it. None of them talks about the inclusion of material prosperity.

All the animal sacrifices in the Mosaic Law one way or the other point to one fact: the sacrificial suffering and death of Christ for humanity. This is why Jesus is called the Lamb of God.

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

Below are ten scriptural references that explicitly speak about the atonement:

1. **“4 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” (Isa 53:4-5)**

2. **“26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Mat 26:26)**
3. **“14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. 17 “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” (Joh 10:14-18)**
4. **“6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:6-8)**
5. **“14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2Cor 5:14-15)**
6. **“And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.” (1John 3:5)**
7. **“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” (1John2:2)**
8. **“Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” (1Pet 2:24)**
9. **“Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” (Heb 9:12)**
10. **“And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take**

the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” (Rev 5:9)

There are many more references but I believe these ten suffice. It should not be difficult for an objective reader to see that the atonement is primarily about the sin question.

We know that until the atonement of Christ sin could not be removed. The best that animal sacrifice could do for the saints in the Old Testament was to cover their sins until Jesus offered himself for the removal of their sins. By the atonement, the sin question was once and for all settled forever.

“14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” (Heb 9:14-15)

“4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: 5“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. 6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. 7 Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come- In the volume of the book it is written of Me-To do Your will, O God.’” (Heb 10:4-7)

“24 Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (Rom 3:24-26)

There are, however, abundant scriptural evidence that people got materially rich before the advent of Christ. Examples include Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon etc.

We also know that there are many contemporary individuals who do

not know Christ but are stupendously wealthy. Many of them do not even believe in the God of the Bible. It is not uncommon for some Christians to say that these people got their wealth either through corruption or diabolical means. I am of the opinion that such thinking is borne out of intellectual indolence because the principles many of these unbelieving wealthy individuals applied to get their wealth are available for anyone who is interested to use.

Since there are no direct scriptural references to prove that material prosperity is in the atonement, the prosperity preachers often result to subjective interpretation of unrelated Bible passages to support their position in regard to the atonement. Most often than not, a single or few Bible verses are taken out of context to teach what the writer never intended.

Here are some of the Bible references they often use to support the notion that material prosperity is in the atonement:

3 John 1:2

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”

This was a wish of an elder (John the beloved) for Gaius, his son in the faith, for his generous hospitality towards the brethren in general and for some itinerant ministers who came from him (3John 3-8). He wished that Gaius may prosper materially and be in health as he prospered spiritually. It may be safe to infer that this is God’s wish for His children in general because the apostle John wrote this statement by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit but it is totally mischievous and untrue to conclude by it that material prosperity is in the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

Philippians 4:19

"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:19)

It is necessary to start from verse 10 to be able to understand Paul's message here.

" 10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your

care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. 14 Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. 15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. 19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Philip 4:10-19)

Internal evidence from the book of Philippians suggests that Paul was incarcerated at the time the letter was written but no one is truly sure where he was imprisoned then. It could have been in Caesarea or Rome. It is also very likely he was in a house arrest.

Paul was in dire financial need at this time probably because he could not work. By whatever means, the Philippian church heard of his predicament and decided to contribute money for him. This, they sent through Epaphroditus.

Upon receiving the money, Paul was joyous that the Philippians demonstrated genuine love towards him and commended them for this. But as his practice of not allowing money to stand in the way of the Gospel was, he reminded them that he wasn't rejoicing because of the gift but because of the reward they would get for their giving (Philip 4:10-13, 17-18).

In verse 14, Paul specifically mentioned that the Philippian church did well for partaking in his affliction i.e. for helping him out with money when he suffered lack in prison. He commended them further in verses 15 and 16 for their past generosity towards him, stating that no other church in the region of Macedonia gave him money apart from them during his gospel campaigns in that region.

In verse 19, which is our primary interest, he prayed for the Philippians that God would supply all their need as a consequence of their benevolence towards him. In today's parlance, it's like saying "My God would bless you" or "My God would reward you."

This scripture is not a promise of wealth to Christians like the prosperity preachers would have us believe. It was simply a prayer for the Philippians for the good they did to Paul. Meeting of need is not the same as accumulation of earthly riches.

Galatians 3:13-14

“13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

The prosperity theology teaches that the believer's material prosperity is in the atonement because poverty and human miseries, in general, are in the curse of the Law, according to Deuteronomy 28, from which Christ has redeemed us.

This line of thinking is flawed on two grounds. First, God made the Mosaic Covenant with all its blessings and curses between Himself and the Jews. The Gentiles were never a party to it. The only way the covenant affected the Gentiles was that it prevented them from having access to God. This is why the Bible calls it the “Middle wall of partition”. Hence, the Gentiles have no part in either of the blessing or the curse of the Mosaic Law.

“12 That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.” (Eph 2:12-15)

Second, contextually speaking, the deliverance from the curse of the Law is not a deliverance from poverty or life's adversity in general but a deliverance from the adverse consequences of disobedience to the Mosaic Law. Since the Bible states clearly that the Mosaic Law has been abolished, it implies that both the blessing of obedience and the curse of disobedience have been abrogated. The Christian does not need to live by the dictates of the Mosaic Law because he lives under the New Covenant with better promises. So, we see that it is incorrect to interpret this scriptural passage to mean that the believer's material prosperity is guaranteed by the atonement of Christ.

“6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. 8 Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — 9 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. 12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” 13 In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” (Heb 8:6-13)

Despite their assertion that material prosperity is in the atonement, prosperity preachers are in the habit of saying poverty is a curse. Available evidence, however, shows that majority of the world's people are either poor or not wealthy. If majority of the world's people are poor or not wealthy, it is a given that majority of Christians worldwide are poor or not wealthy. By implication, prosperity preachers are saying majority of Christians who have been redeemed by Christ are cursed. If

material prosperity is in the atonement like forgiveness of sin, all genuinely converted people ought to have automatically become rich but we know this is not true. This obvious contradiction is an evidence that the formulators of the theology didn't put much thinking into it.

Though poverty is an evil that should by no means be tolerated, it is not a curse. A curse is a spell that is supernaturally placed on people. Poverty is not a spell. It is a temporary economic condition in most cases that can be changed if one knows what to do and is willing. Despite the curse on the ground as stated in Genesis 3, numerous people who do not know God have prospered economically. As at today, majority of the richest people on earth are not born again. This simply implies that faith in Christ is not a prerequisite for earthly riches.

Again, all indications from the scriptures show that Jesus and the apostles were poor or at least were not wealthy. If we have to believe the prosperity preachers, we will have to conclude that Jesus and His apostles were cursed.

The truth of the matter is God put enough resources in the belly of the earth to satisfy everyone. He is a good God. Poverty is mostly a product of man's inhumanity to man or laziness. Money and the unequal economic system of the world are inventions of man. So, poverty is not a curse. It is a socioeconomic problem that requires socioeconomic solution.

For the majority of people, poverty is as a result of bad governance. It has been abundantly demonstrated that improved governance brings majority of people out of the poverty zone. We see a classical example of this in China that lifted over 800 million people out of extreme poverty within the space of 40 years, though the country is officially atheist. The stories of other countries that developed after the Second World War like Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia, the Gulf Arab countries that are mostly non-Christian majority populations further corroborates this observation.

Christ could not have died to give money or material resources to anyone. He died to save man from sin and reconcile him to God. It is evil to call those God has blessed cursed. We have to do everything possible under God to dismantle the mountain of lie.

2Peter 1:3

"According as his divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who has called us to glory and virtue." (2Peter 1:3)

This scripture has been misinterpreted and greatly abused in the recent history of Christianity.

There are two issues that are wrong with the way this Bible verse is being interpreted in the Prosperity-Pentecostal circle. First, the verse is usually isolated from the other verses around it. This makes it almost impossible to get the true intent of the author. Since the original manuscripts of Bible books were not divided into verses and chapters, it is required to read the preceding and/or the succeeding verses of the Bible to get the true intent of the author concerning a verse or portion of the Bible. This is usually not done when people use this scripture.

Second, majority of the people who quote the scripture often mistake the word LIFE in it for temporal (earthly or natural) life. The reality is that Peter wasn't writing about temporal life here. He was talking about the new life or eternal life which Christ gives to those who believe in Him. This becomes clearer if we juxtapose the cited scripture with John 3:16 - **"16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have EVERLASTING LIFE."**

Therefore, the phrase "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" is essentially another coinage for the content of whole body of knowledge called the Gospel of Christ. This is so because it is by the Gospel we have access to divine enablement.

If we go by the prosperity gospel's interpretation of this scripture, that God promised the believer abundance of wealth, God must have defaulted on His promise to the early believers and majority of believers in the third world countries because many of them were/are poor.

It follows that the LIFE in that scripture can't be temporal. It is THE NEW LIFE. It is the life of holiness and Christ-likeness which the newness of life in Christ brings Peter was talking about. This is why he ended the statement with "who has called us to glory and virtue."

The thought being espoused here becomes further reinforced if we examine closely the verses that succeed our main text. The author stated in verse 4 that we have been given exceeding great and precious promises to partake of the divine nature for us to escape worldly corruption.

"By which are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2Peter 1:4)

Having said that, Peter went further to admonish that we should use this divine enablement to add knowledge and the fruit of the Spirit (godly character) to our faith.

"5 And for this reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6 And to knowledge self-control; and to self-control patience; and to patience godliness;

7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love." (2Peter 1:5-7)

The reader would observe that there is no single mention of material wealth in the explanation Peter gave. Rather, he emphasized the need for the Christian to possess a wealth of godly character. Where then did we get the current popular interpretation of this scripture that emphasizes the mundane?

To wrap it up, the apostle concluded this line of thought by stating the benefits of compliance and the consequences of noncompliance with this inspired instruction in verse 8-11.

"8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. 10 Therefore rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall: 11 For so an entrance shall be provided unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2Peter 1:8-11)

What is it then? 2 Peter 1:3 is not a promise of abundance of wealth to the believer in Christ. Ministers of the gospel need to stop promising people what God did not promise them. Enough psychological damage has been done to the people of God. The Gospel of Christ is sufficient to save and preserve in its simplicity. It needs no embellishment or hyping. Being materially rich or poor is not the main issue, possession of a wealth of godly character is. We can all live the new life in Christ by the divine grace which the Gospel supplies.

2 Corinthians 8:9

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

This seems to be the grand scriptural reference prosperity gospel preachers use to defend this idea. In order for us to understand the true meaning of this scripture, we must first understand the contextual usage of the keywords- rich and poor. Do they have physical or spiritual connotation? Although the prosperity gospel teaches that these words connote physical wealth and poverty, we have no scriptural evidence to suggest this. We know from Philippians 2:5-8 that the riches of Christ in this Bible reference is spiritual and not physical. It was a deliberate relinquishment of His rights and privileges as God to take up the appearance of man in order to procure salvation for mankind.

“5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil 2:5-8)

In essence, Christ is so rich in mercy that He denied Himself of the rights and privileges of divinity and took up the form of sinful mortal man for man's redemption.

We also know that the Macedonian Christians whom the apostle Paul cited as an example to the Corinthians in the earlier part of 2Corinthians 8 were severely afflicted and extremely poor. Yet, the

Bible says the grace of God was given to them!

“1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.” (2Cor 8:1)

Therefore, this Bible reference could not have meant material riches. What then was Paul saying? He was simply citing the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of man and the sacrificial giving of the Macedonian Christians as examples that the Corinthian Christians should follow in their giving. Again, we see that this Bible reference should never have been interpreted to mean that the Christian's material prosperity is in the atonement.

We know that money is a creation of man. We also know that the imperfect economic system of this world is a creation of man. There was a time in human history when there was no money and the means of economic or value exchange was trade by barter. How could Jesus have died for money, a creation of man?

It may be right to teach that the imperfection of the human nature, a by-product of the fall of man, that led to the creation of this present faulty world order has been taken care of by the atonement. However, the Bible explicitly teaches that the full manifestation of this will not occur till the consummation of our redemption, that is, the redemption of our bodies at the second appearance of Christ.

"18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. 23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. 24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?

25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance." (Rom 8:18-25)

From the foregoing, isn't it ridiculous that anyone would teach that the Son of God left his throne in heaven to this sinful world to die for economic reasons? I believe it is safe at this juncture to conclude that this assertion is baseless, unbiblical and false

Chapter 4

Material Prosperity is our Covenant Right

The prosperity theology teaches that material wealth is the covenant right of the Christian. It asserts that any Christian who is not financially prosperous is not working in the fulness of his Covenant rights.

This thought finds expression in two ways: 1) the assertion that Abraham's blessings belong to the Christian and 2) The belief that the material inheritance of the nation of Israel as contained in the Torah (the Law of Moses) belongs to the Christian. Are these assertions really true?

The Abrahamic Covenant Blessings and the Christian

There are two different ways this concept is defined by prosperity preachers. Some say "the blessings of Abraham are ours", meaning that the material blessings of Abraham belong to them by virtue of their faith in Christ. Others call it "the blessing", which they define as the spiritual element that engenders material prosperity in the life of the Christian.

What are we to believe? Are these assertions true?

In order to answer these questions, we need to first understand what the Abrahamic Covenant is all about.

In Genesis 12:1-3, God showed up and gave certain promises to Abraham on the condition that he would depart from his native land and move to the land He (God) would show him, that is, the land of Canaan.

"1 Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth

shall be blessed.” (Gen 12:1-3)

Abraham obeyed the instruction and God reiterated these promises to him in Genesis 12:7; 13:15-17.

In Genesis 15:1-21, God made a covenant with Abraham by animal sacrifice and reiterated these promises again.

“8 And he said, “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?” 9 So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. 14 And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” 17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. 18 On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— 19 the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.” (Gen 15:8-21)

In Genesis 17:1-14 God reiterated the promises again and gave Abraham circumcision as a token (sign) of the covenant.

“This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; 11 and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the

covenant between Me and you. 12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. 13 He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” (Gen 17:10-14)

In Genesis 22:15-18, God confirmed the word of promise through an angel with an oath after Abraham passed a test God gave him, indicating that the promise cannot be changed.

“Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 16 and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son— 17 blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (Gen 22:15-18)

The promises made to Abraham in the cited scriptural references can be broadly divided into two types: temporal blessings and spiritual blessings.

The temporal blessings include the possession of a land for habitation, material blessings, the numerical growth of Abraham’s natural descendants, and protection from enemies which were necessary to preserve the nation for the coming Messiah, the spiritual seed of Abraham.

The spiritual blessings, on the other hand, include making Abraham a great name and a blessing to the whole world through the seed that was to come, and justification by faith. This justification by faith was received in Genesis 15:5-6.

“5 Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” 6 And he

believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for RIGHTEOUSNESS (JUSTIFICATION).” (Gen 15:5-6)

It is true that God blessed Abraham materially as He promised but there is evidence to suggest that he was already a rich man in paganism before God called him from Genesis 12:5.

“Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.” (Gen 12:5)

“14 Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! 15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Josh 24:14-15)

In Genesis 13:1-2, the Bible states explicitly that Abraham was a very rich man when he was departing from Egypt after Pharaoh chased him out of the land because he lied concerning his wife.

“1 Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. 2 Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.” (Gen 13:1-2)

It couldn’t have been the gifts Pharaoh gave Abraham as a dowry for giving Sarai his wife to him (Pharaoh) in marriage that made Abraham very rich. He must have had substantial wealth before he left his native land as suggested by Genesis 12:5. Therefore, it is incorrect to reduce the blessing of Abraham to material riches. More so, that this blessing is often written in the singular form in the New Testament.

It is not uncommon for prosperity preachers to harp on “Abraham was very rich in cattle, silver, and gold” to assert that Christians must be materially wealthy to prove their covenant right. But what exactly is the blessing of Abraham?

Throughout the New Testament, the blessing of Abraham is always interpreted as Justification by faith! Not for once can we find a place

where it is interpreted to mean material blessings as the prosperity teachers often teach.

The Bible says by the mouth of two or three witnesses a word shall be established. We shall supply four New Testament scriptures to establish this matter and put it to rest.

“10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Gal 3:10-14)

Notice that the word "blessing" in the above Bible passage is singular and not plural. This implies that the blessing of Abraham is one, as far as the New Testament is concerned.

“6 Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.” (Gal 3:6-9)

“1 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.” (Rom 4:1-3)

““Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; 8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”9 Does this blessedness then come upon

**the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.”
(Rom 4:7-9)**

Notice again that the word "blessing" in the last Bible verse is singular.

How is this blessing (justification) supposed to be received? Through faith in the promised seed which is Jesus Christ.

So, we see that Abraham's blessing for the believer in Christ is simply Justification by faith and not material possession.

It is important to state at this juncture that the believer in Christ is not under the Abrahamic Covenant which was ratified by the blood of animals, otherwise, circumcision would have been a requirement for faith in Christ. That covenant got fulfilled in Christ just as the Mosaic Covenant. Someone greater than Abraham is around! The Christian is under no other Covenant apart from the New Covenant, with better promises, which was procured by the blood of Christ.

The Mosaic Covenant Inheritance and the Christian

The prosperity theology teaches that material prosperity belongs to the Christian by reason of the inheritance of the Israelites in the Torah. It argues that since we are the new Israel of God, we ought to prosper materially as God promised the children of Israel of old.

What exactly is this inheritance that was given to the children of Israel? God gave the inheritance of the land of Canaan to the children of Israel. He described it as a land that flows with milk and honey.

Geographically, Palestine is part of a crescent-shaped strip of land called the fertile crescent. This land runs along the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in Mesopotamia, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Nile river. It was this fertile crescent that became the cradle of civilization- Mesopotamia and Egypt. Palestine is particularly blessed because it has inland bodies of water- the Sea of Galilee, River Jordan and the Dead Sea, in addition to the Mediterranean Sea. It also has hills and valleys that allow for proper drainage of the land thereby reducing the need for artificial irrigation for farming to a reasonable extent. God said this land, apart from being fertile and well-watered, also has precious stones. So, it is correct to call Palestine a land that flows with

milk and honey in comparison to the arid lands around it.

“8 “Therefore you shall keep every commandment which I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land which you cross over to possess, 9 and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord swore to give your fathers, to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ 10 For the land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot, as a vegetable garden; 11 but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, 12 a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.” (Deu. 11:8-12)

“7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; 9 a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper.” (Deu 8:7-9)

In Canaan, God said the Israelites were to inherit great and good cities which they did not build, houses full of every good thing which they did not fill, wells of water which they did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which they did not plant.

“10 “So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, 11 houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full.” (Deu 6:10-11)

Now, this was the beautiful inheritance God gave to the children of Israel by virtue of the Abrahamic Covenant and was later ratified by the Mosaic Covenant. Notice that this is essentially a physical inheritance in form of material prosperity. We know that the children of Israel

didn't enjoy these blessings consistently because they continually backslid into idolatry. There were times they suffered severely even unto famine, poverty, defeat before the enemy, death, and captivity because of their disobedience.

Is it correct to say that God will give the physical inheritance of the Old Covenant to believers under the New Covenant?

This theological thought is flawed on two grounds. First, we have stated in earlier that the Mosaic Covenant has been abrogated through the sacrificial death of Christ as confirmed by several scriptural passages. The Bible states that the Law makes nothing perfect. Hence, a Christian cannot live by the promises of an imperfect Law since he was saved by the New Covenant which has better promises. Second, the Bible says the Old Covenant is a shadow of the New Covenant. Whereas the elements of the Old Covenant inheritance were essentially physical, those of the New Covenant are spiritual. Therefore, our inheritance in Christ is spiritual and not physical as commonly taught by the prosperity teachers.

Again, we will cite relevant scriptural references to establish this fact and lay it to rest.

"3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to

the praise of His glory. 13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." (Eph 1:3-14)

The first thing that is obvious in the above Bible passage is that the blessings contained in our inheritance in Christ are spiritual and are secured in heaven as stated in Verses 3 and 11. What are these blessings? Justification (Vs 4); Adoption as sons (Vs 5), Grace (Vs 6), Redemption and Forgiveness (Vs 7), and union with Christ (Vs 10). Verse 11 talks about THE INHERITANCE, which contains all the above blessings. We are told in Vs 13 and 14 that this inheritance has been sealed and guaranteed by the promised Holy Spirit. We see that not one material blessing is mentioned as part of the inheritance of the saint in this classical Bible passage.

The question that naturally comes to mind is, What exactly is this inheritance? The only way to answer this question in my view is to look at other scriptural references that talk explicitly about the inheritance of the Christian.

"3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls." (1Pet 1:3-9)

Verse 4 of this Bible passage describes this inheritance as incorruptible, undefiled, unfading and reserved in heaven. All these imply that the inheritance can't be material possessions since all of

them suffer degradation. It is in Vs 5 we have a clue to the nature of this inheritance: “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”. What then is this inheritance? It is immortality through faith in Christ. This immortality will be consummated by the redemption of our bodies at the second appearance of Christ, according to the Bible. It is this immortality that the Bible calls the hope of the believer.

“15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. (Eph1:15-18)

“4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.” (Eph 4:4)

"13 Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13)

The Bible goes further to state that it is not only the believer that awaits this hope, the whole creation also groans and waits in anticipation of it. In fact, the believer also groans for it.

“18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. 23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. 24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it

with perseverance.” (Rom 8:18-25)

This Bible passage again calls our inheritance “the glory that shall be revealed in us” which cannot be compared to any degree of suffering we may go through in this world for the sake of our faith. In Vs 19, it says that the whole creation earnestly awaits the manifestation of the sons of God. This Bible verse is often wrongly used to teach that the world is waiting for the spectacular manifestation of Christians in this present world. Prosperity preachers call this “Dominion”. However, the scripture in Vs 23 of this passage says the manifestation that all the creation and the believers earnestly await is the redemption of our bodies (the resurrection of the saints). The passage goes further in Vs 24 and 25 to call this future event our hope. In fact, this Bible passage mentioned the word “Hope” six times to emphasize this concept.

Here is another Bible passage to further corroborate Romans 8:18-25:

“1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” (2Cor 5:1-5)

Again, we see from this Bible passage that the Holy Spirit in us guarantees this inheritance as we previously stated. Therefore, our inheritance is not material. It is spiritual. *It is immortality that will find its full expression in the redemption of our bodies at the second appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Canaan land, the inheritance of the Israelites, is a figurative expression of our future home in eternity.

Has anyone bothered to ask why prosperity preachers rarely talk about heaven, our future home, and the resurrection in their messages? Has anybody thought it necessary to inquire why we rarely hear about the rapture, the end-times and eternal judgment like we used to hear in the past before the prosperity message took over the Christian landscape? The answer is simple. They have succeeded in “replacing”

the heavenly inheritance of the believer with earthly material possessions. Isn't this a sad development considering the fact that the Bible says, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable?" Isn't it interesting that many of the people that are always talking about their inheritance in Christ have not bothered to consider our true inheritance?

Other Bible Passages Used to Teach Covenant Right

There are several other Bible passages that prosperity preachers use to teach the supposed believer's covenant right to material wealth apart from the ones we have considered. We would examine three of them here to see if the claim is true.

Deuteronomy 8:18

"18 "And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day."

Here God says He is the one who gives power to the Israelites to get wealth as an evidence of the covenant He swore to their fathers. When this Bible verse is put into proper context of the preceding and succeeding verses, it becomes clear that God's was primarily warning the Israelites to be careful of self-conceit and idolatry after they might have become materially prosperous because He is the source of their wealth.

"12 Lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; 14 when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; 15 who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the

end- 17 then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’ 18 “And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish.” (Deu 8:12-19)

We have previously established that the blessing of Abraham in the New Testament is spiritual (justification by faith) and not physical. It follows that the promise of material wealth here is exclusively for the nation of Israel since the passage refers primarily to the natural descendants of Abraham that was about to enter the promised land. More so, we have no such promise of material wealth for all believers in Christ in the New Testament.

Truly, God is the source of all genuine wealth. It makes no difference whether the owner of the wealth acknowledges God as the source or not. Insofar as the wealth is honestly acquired, God is the source because the earth and everything therein belongs to Him. He is the one who gives life, business ideas and the strength to work to all.

Zechariah 1:17

“Again proclaim, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: “My cities shall again spread out through prosperity; The Lord will again comfort Zion, And will again choose Jerusalem.””’

The prosperity preachers use this particular scripture to teach that they need substantial material wealth to preach the Gospel.

A close look at the New Testament scriptures shows that money was not the primary emphasis among the apostles of Christ in their quest to spread the Gospel message to the known world of their time. Rather, the leading and power of the Holy Spirit were the emphases.

For us to make meaning out of the verse, we have to start reading from at least verse 12 of the chapter 1 of Zechariah and then relate the content to the historical perspective.

"12 Then the Angel of the Lord answered and said, “O Lord of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on

the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?” 13 And the Lord answered the angel who talked to me, with good and comforting words. 14 So the angel who spoke with me said to me, “Proclaim, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: “I am zealous for Jerusalem And for Zion with great zeal. 15 I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; For I was a little angry, And they helped- but with evil intent.” 16 ‘Therefore thus says the Lord: “I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it,” says the Lord of hosts, “And a surveyor’s line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.”’ 17 “Again proclaim, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: “My cities shall again spread out through prosperity; The Lord will again comfort Zion, And will again choose Jerusalem.”’” (Zac 1:12-17)

What was happening here? Zechariah was one of the prophets God sent to Israel after they had spent 70 years in exile in Babylon for their rebellion against God. Before the children of Israel were taken into exile, king Nebuchadnezzar ensured that the city of Jerusalem and several other cities in Judah were burnt and destroyed. The city of Jerusalem in particular was in complete ruin. So, God raised Zechariah to prophesy that the time had come to rebuild Judah and its capital city, Jerusalem. He was saying that Judah and her cities would yet prosper. He wasn't talking about the Church. This prophecy was fulfilled a very long time ago (more than 2,500 years ago).

We see that this scripture is not a promise for the Church. It is a promise for the nation of Israel that has been fulfilled. The prosperity preachers either out of ignorance or through mischief took that Bible verse out of context to propagate falsehood. Yes, we need money for evangelism but money is not the primary necessity for spreading the Gospel. We have been lied to.

Haggai 2:8-9

“8 The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts. 9 The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

The prosperity preachers often interpret this Bible verse to mean the

wealth of the present-day church (the latter house) will surpass the wealth of the early church (former house) and by implication the individual members of the church of the latter days would be rich.

It may not be entirely wrong to say that the present-day church will be richer materially than the early church since the world is generally richer today than it was at the time of the early church. We do not need any prophecy to know this since simple logic says so. However, the prophecy is not about wealth for the church of the latter days. Rather, it is a prophecy about the Jewish post-exilic temple that was being built by Zerubbabel and the Israelites that returned from the Babylonian exile. It was a word sent to encourage them because of the difficulties they encountered while the building was in progress. This will become clearer if we read the chapter from verse 2.

“2 Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: 3 Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? 4 Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,’ says the Lord; ‘and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,’ says the Lord, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ says the Lord of hosts. 5 ‘According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!’ 6 “For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 7 and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,’ says the Lord of hosts. 8 ‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts. 9 The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the Lord of hosts.” (Hag 2:2-9)

God did not only send Haggai, He also sent Zachariah to encourage them through a similar prophecy.

“6 So he answered and said to me: “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the Lord of hosts. 7 ‘Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And

he shall bring forth the capstone With shouts of “Grace, grace to it!” 8 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 9 “The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know That the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. (Zac 4:6-9)

Though God supplied the resources for the completion of the Temple, we know from the history of the Jews that Zerubbabel’s Temple could not be compared to Solomon’s Temple in magnificence. Even when the Temple was extensively renovated and upgraded by King Herod the Great, the magnificence of the Temple could not be compared to that of Solomon’s. In regard to the peace that was promised, we also know that Palestine was not entirely peaceful in the half millennial period between the return of the exiles and the time of Christ. The people experienced persecutions at different times. Therefore, it cannot be said that the prophecy was literally fulfilled as stated in Haggai 2:8-9.

How was this prophecy fulfilled? It was fulfilled in Christ. Christ the King of Glory and the Prince of Peace used the second Temple (later house), a privilege the first Temple (former house) did not have. Christ is the glory of the latter house. He is the peace that was promised.

We see, again that this prophecy has nothing to do with material wealth for the Church. It is rather unfortunate that the scripture has been made to say what was never intended.

A keen observer would have by now seen a consistent pattern in the prosperity theology- scriptures are generally taken out of context to teach a predetermined doctrine that is not found in the Bible.

Chapter 5

We Must be Rich Because Jesus and the Apostles were Rich

In order to justify their position that material wealth is the Christian's inheritance, prosperity teachers teach that Jesus and his apostles were rich while they were on earth as against the orthodox Christian belief that Christ and his apostles were poor.

There are four arguments, among others, they often deploy to teach that Christ was rich:

No Inns with Vacant Rooms

“That Christ was born in the manger is not an indication his parents were poor. It only means there were no inns with vacant rooms in Bethlehem around the time of his birth because of Augustus census.”

While it may be correct that Jesus' parents could have had the means to get an accommodation in the inn, this argument can still not invalidate the fact that they were poor. A strong evidence in support of their financial constraint is the fact that they could only afford the type of offering prescribed by the Mosaic law for the poor during Jesus' dedication and Mary's purification.

“22 Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” (Luke 2:22-24)

“6 When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of

meeting. 7 Then he shall offer it before the Lord, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who has borne a male or a female. 8 And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.” (Lev 12:6-8)

Jesus had a Treasurer

“That Jesus had a treasurer in his ministry and took care of the poor is an indication he was rich.”

We know that having a treasurer in the ministry and ministering to the needs of the poor do not imply possession of personal wealth by the minister because ministry money is commonwealth and not money owned by an individual. This argument holds no ground because the Bible says there were women who ministered to Jesus’ needs out of their personal substance (Luke 8:2-3). If indeed he was rich as these teachers claim he would not have had any need to accept their care. Also, he wouldn’t have performed miracles on the occasions that he needed to feed the multitude and pay the temple tax (Mat 14: 15-21; Mat 15:32-38; Mat 17:24-27). He would have just used part of his wealth to meet these needs.

Costly Alabaster Perfume

“Jesus allowed a costly alabaster box of perfume to be purred on him, therefore, he was rich.”

This argument is actually baseless since the pouring of a costly perfume on Jesus was meant to be a prophetic action indicating that his body was being prepared for burial.

“12 For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial.” (Mat 26:12)

Soldiers Parted His Garment

“The soldiers who executed Christ parted his garment by lot, hence,

he was rich. Otherwise, he couldn't have been able to afford a garment that was worth their attention.”

This argument also cannot be true because the fact that someone dresses decently is not a sign of affluence. More so, clothes were often homemade in the ancient time. He could have been given the dress by his mother or any of his followers.

Another evidence indicating that Jesus was not rich during his earthly sojourn is the fact that he had no beast of burden to conduct his numerous ministerial travels. He traveled mostly by foot except on the occasions he needed to cross the sea of Galilee when he used boats, which were mostly borrowed. There is no record that he owned any of the boats. Even when he needed an ass to fulfill the triumphal entry prophecy, he had to borrow it (Zach 9:9; Mat 21:2-5). On another occasion when the Lord was to have supper with his disciples (the last supper) he had to ask for the large room needed for the event for free (Mat 26:18). Jesus categorically stated that he had nowhere to lay his head, probably because of his numerous journeys (Mat 8:20). There were times he had to sleep on the Mount Olives in Jerusalem. If indeed he was rich, he would have at least been able to get accommodation in the inns to lay his head during his travels. Bearing in mind that Jesus was a carpenter before he began his ministry, did not engage in any secular job thereafter and did not collect offerings or tithe from the crowd that followed him, it is rather naïve or mischievous to teach that he was rich.

Unbeknownst to the prosperity teachers, Jesus couldn't have lived an affluent life because this would have negated some of the prophecies that were spoken concerning Him. He was meant to live a lowly and despised life for Him to be able to properly identify with humanity. Even on the only occasion recorded in the Bible that he used a beast of burden, He had to use an ass because using a horse would have negated the prophecy concerning Him. He was meant to live a lowly life and not live like an earthly king.

“9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zec 9:9)

Jesus could have easily become rich if getting rich was important to

Him. He could have asked the crowd that followed him to contribute offering and tithes to him like we see prosperity preachers do today and they would have obeyed him. He refused to do that because material wealth accumulation was not His reason for coming to the world. This was one of the major confounders to the religious leaders of His time. They couldn't accept a peasant Messiah who had no earthly wealth and political or military power.

“2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. 3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” (Isa 53:2-3)

What of the Apostles of Christ? Is it true they were rich? Apart from biblical records suggesting that a few Christian leaders in the early Church like Philemon (Philemon) and Gaius (3 John) may have a reasonable level of material resources, we find no record of any of the apostles of Christ that was rich. The Bible says they were men who suffered hunger and thirst, homelessness and poor clothing among other afflictions for the sake of Christ.

Peter told the crippled man at the beautiful gate, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you (Acts 3:6).” Prosperity preachers have said this is not an indication that the apostles were poor since this statement was made at the beginning of their ministry. They claim that their financial condition improved along the way and they later became well to do. Though it may be true that their condition improved to some extent with time, there is no scriptural evidence that the apostles were ever materially rich. Available evidence points to the fact that they were men who suffered need from time to time.

“9 For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! 11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being

persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.” (1Cor 4:9-13)

A classic example in this regard is the apostle Paul. A man who had a continuous flow of abundant material resources could not have spoken like we find in the following Bible passages:

“11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Php 4:11-13)

“27 In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” (2Cor 11:27)

It is important to state that the apostles of Christ and several holy men that followed after them refused to accumulate wealth and live ostentatious lives not because they could not make money through their offices but because it was necessary to send a clear message to the world that the riches of the glorious Gospel cannot in anyway be compared to material riches.

If great material possession was their priority, they could have easily made it through their ministries. Someone like Peter, whose shadow healed the sick, would have easily become rich if he wanted to but that was not a priority for him. What of Paul whom mighty signs and wonders followed with ease? This man was so blessed with heavenly revelations that he single-handedly wrote more than a half of the New Testament scriptures! In addition to this, he planted many churches in Asia Minor and Europe. He could have easily commercialized his writings, become a General Overseer and ask the churches he planted to contribute money to the “Headquarter church” but he did none of these. How materially rich would such a man have been if that was his priority?

Were the early Christians wealthy materially? We know that most Christians in the early church were poor and many were indeed extremely poor. They served the Lord with singleness of heart despite all odds. Many of them suffered economic deprivation and plundering because of their faith in Christ.

“1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.” (2Cor 8:1-2)

“5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5)

“26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.” (1 Cor 1:26-29)

“32 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: 33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; 34 for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.” (Heb 10:32-34)

Can anyone, in all honesty, say these early Christians were materially rich?

If indeed the position of the prosperity teachers is true, we may logically conclude that the apostles of Christ and majority of the early Christians who were poor were a failure. Is this really the position of the Bible? No! Not at all. We know from the Bible that material wealth is not the same as spiritual riches. It is possible for someone to be poor materially and be rich in faith. It is possible for someone to be materially wealthy and be poor in faith. It is also possible to have or not have both. **WHAT IS IT THEN? WHETHER WE ARE MATERIALLY RICH OR NOT WE SHOULD, BY ALL MEANS, STRIVE TO BE RICH IN FAITH.**

“20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ 21 “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:20-21)

“5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5)

“17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” (1Tim 6:17-19)

Chapter 6

We must Be Wealthy Because Jesus Promised Us Abundant Life

The prosperity teachers teach that the Christian ought to be wealthy since Jesus promised us abundant life. This is premised on the words of Jesus in John 10:10 that says, **“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”** They teach that by reason of faith in Christ, the believer ought to enjoy good health, material wealth and the good things of life to the full in addition to the salvation from sin.

In order to validate this claim, many of the prosperity teachers indulge in ostentatious lifestyle by living in palatial mansions, wearing expensive and sometimes flamboyant dresses and body accessories, driving exotic cars, lodging in expensive hotels in their ministerial travels and walking around with a retinue of bodyguards. Several of them claim they need private jets to preach the “gospel” and some have gone ahead to purchase them. All these they do with the sacrificial donations of the people of God in addition to the fact that these ministries are registered as not-for-profit or charity organizations.

Some have said that their spending on this lavish lifestyle is not from church money but from the royalties of their intellectual properties. Is this excuse really ethical or acceptable considering that these intellectual properties like books, audio tapes, and videotapes are often sold on the platform of a charity organization?

What exactly was Jesus saying to the Jews in John 10:10? It is almost impossible to understand this Bible verse unless we examine John 10 from the beginning till verse 18 and other relevant Bible passages in general. The reader is advised to read this portion of the Bible for a better understanding of this chapter.

In John 10:6, the Bible says Jesus spoke in parable in this particular conversation with the Jews. So, whatever he said there cannot be taken

literally. In verses, 1-5 Jesus described two types of shepherds. In verse 1, he described a pseudo-shepherd who would not enter through the door and called such a person a thief. Since Jesus said he is the door to the sheep in verse 7, it means anyone who attains leadership position in the house of God without His express permission is a thief. Such a person is a false apostle, false teacher or false prophet as the case may be. From verse 2-5, Jesus described the authentic shepherd who enters through the door, that is, a leader in the house of God who leads with Jesus' consent.

In verse 8 Jesus stated, "All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them." This may be a bit confounding since there were many genuine prophets and servants of God that came before him. This implies that Jesus wasn't talking about these genuine servants of God but about false prophets, false teachers, false Christs and, in particular, the false religious leaders like the Pharisees and Sadducees who claimed they represented Moses but walked contrary to Moses' commandments.

Contrary to the common interpretation of the first part of John 10:10 that the "Thief" in the verse refers to the devil, Jesus was not speaking about the devil. Primarily, He was speaking about the hypocritical religious leaders of his time, that is, the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes and Priests who deliberately opposed the truth and hold the people captive in religious bondage.

What was Jesus saying here? He was saying that these thieves, the false teachers, imposed themselves on the people of God for the evil motive of stealing, killing and destroying. In other words, their sole motive is to plunder the people of God for self-aggrandizement. As they steal from the people, they also kill and destroy them by feeding them with wrong doctrines that can't take them to the kingdom of God. In regard to this, Jesus reprimanded these Jewish leaders in Mathew 23:1-36.

"4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." (Mat 23:4)

"13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are

entering to go in. 14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. 15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." (Mat 23:13-15)

Jesus was saying that the false teachers of his time made life extremely difficult and unbearable for truth seekers, rob them of their possessions, and lead them into perdition by their covetousness and false teachings.

Ezekiel spoke about this type of leaders in the past. Unfortunately, it happened again in the time of Jesus.

"2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. 6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them." (Eze 34:2-6)

In the second half of that verse (John 10:10), Jesus now contrasted Himself with these false teachers, that as against plundering and destruction of the sheep, he came to give them life in abundance.

"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (Joh 10:10)

It was for this reason Jesus said in Mathew 11:28-30, **"28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and**

lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Jesus was telling the people to come to Him so that they can escape the harsh demands of the Mosaic Law, the heavy burden the religious leaders of His day heaped upon them and sin with its consequences.

We now have to define what this abundant life is about. Was Jesus truly promising automatic material abundance to anyone who believes in Him? Again, we will only be able to answer this question by referring to relevant Bible passages.

Jesus fed the multitude with bread and fish in the earlier part of chapter 6 of John and departed to another community by boat after he dispersed the people. The people then began to frantically look for Him the following day. On the surface it appeared they were looking for Him because of his teaching but Jesus knew that they were looking for Him for an entirely different motive. He then uttered this profound statement:

“26 Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” (John 6:26-27)

The people asked Him, **“What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” 29 Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:28-29).** The people argued further that Jesus ought to give them a sign from heaven just like Moses gave their fathers Manna. Jesus responded that He is the authentic bread from heaven. He concluded the conversation on bread by saying, **“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).**

We need to appreciate the political and economic underpinning to this discussion between the Jews and Jesus. At that time, the Romans were the colonial masters of the Jews and the Mediterranean world in general. Many of the Jews were peasants who struggled to eke out a living for themselves at this time. The Romans had a draconian tax regime that was enforced by the tax collectors. This tax regime was

necessary to maintain the numerous Roman military expeditions and the administrative overhead of the vast empire. Many of the tax collectors were corrupt, they extorted the people by charging more than what was officially due. This is why the Jews detested the tax collectors with so much passion. So, it was much to the Jews' delight that someone could miraculously provide food for them. They reasoned that if this person could provide food miraculously, he should also be able to miraculously defeat the Roman army and emancipate them from oppression and suffering.

“14 Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.” 15 Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.” (John 6:14-15)

For an average Jew, this kind of thinking may not be out of place since Moses prophesied that a prophet like him would come after him. They had been waiting for this prophet who would come as a deliverer like Moses to emancipate them from the bondage of Rome Just like Moses delivered them from the bondage of Egypt. They also expected that he would feed them with free food just like Moses fed their fathers in the wilderness with manna. To their chagrin, however, Jesus said this was not to be. He maintained that He neither came to establish an earthly kingdom nor to feed the people with physical food. Rather, he came to feed them with the spiritual bread from heaven, which is Himself.

Bearing in mind the dire condition the Jewish nation was in at the time of the first advent of Christ, wouldn't it have been reasonable for Jesus to accede to the request of these people if indeed the abundant life He promised is material? But we see Jesus declined their request. Does this mean that Jesus did not care for them? No! Not at all. It is because Jesus knew that the true need of man is not material but spiritual. He knew that no matter the amount of material possession a man has he would never be satisfied unless his spiritual hunger is quenched. This is why He told them in verse 35 of John 6, **““I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”**

Discussing this subject with the Samaritan woman at the well in John

4:13-14, Jesus said, **“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”** In other words, the material things of the world can never satisfy man. Only the life that Christ gives can satisfy him. Even Solomon the Richest man so far in human history acknowledged that material abundance can never satisfy anyone.

“10 He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.” (Eccl 5:10)

Further, Blaise Pascal a 17th century philosopher and mathematician declared, *“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.”* We can see from all indication that this God-shaped vacuum is what Jesus came to fill.

What then is this abundant life? It is nothing else than ETERNAL LIFE that Jesus gives, that is, His very life in us. Throughout the Gospel according to John and the entire New Testament scriptures, we see this fact being reiterated in both plain and figurative expressions. We find no concept of Jesus coming to give material possession to man. Why? Poverty isn't the problem of man. Men have been getting rich before Jesus' first advent and they will continue to get rich whether they believe in Him or not. The major problem of man is sin and it is only eternal life that could take care of it. This is what Jesus came to give humanity.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

“And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.” (1John 2:25)

“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” (1John 5:11)

“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the

true God and eternal life.” (1John 5:20)

“17 For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom 14:17)

Since man can never be satisfied with material possession, the abundant life that Jesus promised is not so much of the abundance of earthly wealth but of the godly contentment, peace of mind and strength of character the Holy Spirit supplies to the believer in every circumstance of life, popularly called the fruit of the Spirit. If this were not so, we could easily conclude that Jesus defaulted in fulfilling this promise since many of his disciples and early Christians were poor. But we see that these early disciples persevered in the face of poverty, persecution, and trials to live lives that are worthy of their calling and spread the Gospel of Christ to every nook and cranny of the Roman Empire.

“11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil 4:11-13)

“22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” (Gal 5:22-23)

There are several other attendant blessings attached to our redemption and the gift of eternal life, apart from the inner strength of character the Holy Spirit supplies. These, among others, include:

1. Forgiveness of sin and deliverance from guilt and condemnation. Apart from being forgiven, we have the assurance that our past sins no longer have consequences in our relationship with God?

“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” (Col 1:14)

“1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in

Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Rom 8:1-4)

1. Deliverance from the power of sin. We are no longer slaves to sin. We can say “No!” to sin and serve God in holiness and purity.

“34 Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. 36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” (Joh 8:34-36)

“17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” (Rom 6:17-18)

2. Deliverance from the authority of the entire kingdom of darkness

“12 Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” (Col 1:12-13)

3. Deliverance from the bondage of the Mosaic law, human traditions, and religious rituals

The Mosaic Law and religion, in general, tell man what to do without giving any helping hand. This creates a grievous burden that is often unbearable for man. Christ, on the other hand, did not only give us the truth to know and obey, He also gives us sufficient grace to obey. Isn't this wonderful?

“16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:16-17)

“And by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Act 13:39)

“1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.” (Gal 5:1-3)

Isn't it sad that many of the prosperity preachers subject the brethren whom Christ declared free to the harsh demands of the Mosaic Law in form of compulsory payment of tithe, first-fruits, seed offerings, several other donations and many man-made draconian rules just like the religious leaders of Jesus' time, making their lives miserable?

4. Unrestrained access to the presence of God.

In the Old Testament, only the High priest had access to the presence of God once a year by the blood of animals. We now have 24/7 access to the presence of God by the blood of Christ. In fact, we live in the very presence of God continuously.

“14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb 4:14-16)

“20 Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.” (Mat 28:20)

5. Acceptance into the family of God.

We that were once outside the commonwealth of Israel, without hope and God in this world, have been accepted into the beloved with all the rights and privileges. Isn't this wonderful?

“11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—

who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— 12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (Eph 2:11-13)

6. The indwelling Holy Spirit

This is the ultimate of all the blessings. The Holy Spirit is the effector of all that Jesus accomplished for us. He is our comforter, teacher, and guide. He is the guarantee of all the promises of God in Christ for us. He is the seal of our redemption.

Chapter 7

The Great End-time Wealth Transfer

Another important pillar of the prosperity theology is the doctrine of wealth transfer from non-Christians to Christians and by implication the Church. The prosperity teachers teach that there is an imminent wealth transfer from non-Christians to Christians. This, they claim would help to finance the last great move of the Spirit that would usher in the second advent of Christ.

These teachers teach that God would raise last days apostles in the marketplace with extraordinary financial management abilities who would take over the financial system of the world from those who do not believe in Christ. These marketplace apostles, according to them, would be able to make up to a hundred percent return on investment as against the usual 5% - 20%, fulfilling the supposed biblical hundred-fold reward promise.

Is this doctrine truly scriptural? We shall now examine the cardinal scriptural references that are often used to defend it so as to determine its veracity.

Proverbs 13:22b

**“...the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.”
(Prov 13:22b)**

We have to first examine the first part of Proverbs 13:22 in order to be able to interpret the second part appropriately.

“22 A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children, But the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.” (Pro13:22)

The first thing that comes to mind concerning this Bible verse is that it is a poetic couplet like many of the other verses of Proverbs from chapter 10 forwards. These couplets are pitchy statements that present moral lessons in a condensed form. The first segment is usually self-

explanatory while the second segment contrasts or clarifies the first. Hence, the meaning of the second part of this Bible verse cannot be clearly understood without interpreting it in the light of the first segment.

What does it mean for a good man to leave an inheritance for his children's children? Although prosperity preachers often interpret this statement to mean that a Christian man ought to leave enough material inheritance for two generations after him, this statement simply implies that the legacies, both material and immaterial, of a good man, will endure for at least three generations. Why? The lessons he would have instilled in his children both by precepts and practice would help them to develop the strength of character required to perpetuate his legacies. In other words, the children of the good man would be able to keep and multiply his legacies by following his example. Interpreting the second segment of this couplet in the light of the first, it simply implies that the wealth of the wicked would be lost by his children to the children of the good man since their father would not have taught them how to retain wealth. This concept is not farfetched because human experience shows that ill-gotten wealth seldom lasts beyond the third generation.

The second observation is that there is nothing in this Bible verse that suggests it is prophesying about any future wealth transfer from non-Christians to Christians. It is simply stating a general principle of life that is not limited by religion, that riches obtained through ethical means last longer than those obtained by unethical means. It remains unclear why the prosperity preachers imposed their awkward interpretation on this Bible verse.

Job 27:16-17

“16 Though he heaps up silver like dust, And piles up clothing like clay—17 He may pile it up, but the just will wear it, And the innocent will divide the silver.”

The thought expressed in this Bible verses is similar to that of Proverbs 13:22. Riches unjustly acquired don't last for too long before they are acquired by those with sound ethical principles. There is nothing in these verses that suggest any form of wealth transfer from the world to the Church.

Isaiah 45:3

"3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the Lord, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel."

In order to understand the meaning of this Bible verse, we have to read chapter 45 of Isaiah at least from verse 1 to 6.

" 1 Thus says the Lord to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held— To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: 2 'I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the Lord, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me. 5 I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other.'" (Isa 45:1-6)

Verse 1 of this Bible passage clearly shows whom God was addressing; it was Cyrus the future king of Persia and not the Church. Isaiah the prophet was simply prophesying about Cyrus' conquests of the nations, highlighting how he would subdue them, defeat their kings and plunder their wealth.

It was the custom of oriental kings in ancient times to store treasures like gold, silver, copper, brass and precious stones in fortified obscured places in order to deny predators access to them. Invading armies often result to sorcery in order to locate these hidden treasures. So, God was saying through Isaiah that He would show Cyrus the hidden treasure of the nations he would conquer in the future. Nothing in this Bible passage explicitly or implicitly suggests that wealth would be transferred from the world to the Church.

The riches of the Gentiles shall become ours

It is not uncommon for prosperity preachers to proclaim, “The riches of the Gentiles shall become ours.” This they do citing some of the promises in Isaiah’s prophecy in chapter 60 and 61. The reader may need to read the whole of chapter 60 and 61 of Isaiah to make sense of the verses cited below.

“11 Therefore your gates shall be open continually; They shall not be shut day or night, That men may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles, And their kings in procession.” (Isa 60:11)

“6 But you shall be named the priests of the Lord, They shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, And in their glory you shall boast.” (Isa 61:6)

In order to interpret the Scripture appropriately, the person(s) to whom the message a Bible passage is addressed must always be kept in focus. In regard to the message contained in the cited Bible verses, we know that God was speaking to the Israelites about their restoration to the promised land from exile. We also know that this prophecy has been partly fulfilled during their return from the Babylonian exile, it is being currently fulfilled (from 1948) and will fully materialize during the millennial reign of Christ on earth. The parts of this prophecy that relate to wealth transfer were not addressed to the Church. They are primarily meant for the nation of Israel.

How is this prophecy being currently fulfilled? The wealth of the gentile nations is being transferred to the nation of Israel through the numerous technological inventions of the Jews and through the money usually taken to Israel for pilgrimage. It is on record that the Jews have the highest number of Nobel prizes per persons among all the ethnic groups in the world. A reasonable number of the world topnotch inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs are of Jewish descent. So, in a way, the Jews currently control a reasonable proportion of the world's wealth.

Apart from these main scriptural passages, the prosperity teachers also teach that there are six wealth transfers that have happened on earth and the seventh one, which will be from the people of the world to Christians is imminent. These wealth transfers they claim include:

From Pharaoh to Abraham

This notion is being supported by Genesis 12:10-16 and Genesis 13:1-2. Is this really what the Bible says?

“10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, ‘Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. 12 Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you.’ 14 So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. 15 The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh’s house. 16.” (Gen 12:10-16)

We know that Genesis 12:10-16 talks about the dowry Abraham falsely obtained from Pharaoh on Sarai his wife when he gave her out in marriage to Pharaoh because he feared for his life. Isn’t it incredible that anyone would teach that assets falsely obtained because of lack of trust in God’s protection are divine wealth transfer?

As we earlier stated, Genesis 12:5 strongly suggests that Abraham was already a rich man in paganism before God called him.

“5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.” (Gen 12:5)

Genesis 13:1-2 simply corroborates this idea since the dowry Abraham obtained from Pharaoh alone could not have made him become very rich in cattle, gold, and silver.

“1 Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. 2 Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.” (Gen 13:1-2)

We see that nothing in these scriptural passages suggests either previous or impending divine wealth transfer.

From the Philistines to Isaac

The story was told in Genesis 26 of how there was another famine in Canaan which made Isaac go to Abimelech in the land of Philistine in preparation to move to Egypt. God appeared on the scene and instructed Isaac not to go to Egypt. Isaac obeyed God and lived in the land of the Philistines.

Isaac faced his business (farming and animal husbandry) diligently and God blessed him until he became very great. The Philistines became envious of Isaac because of his wealth. To allow for peace, Isaac departed from the land of the Philistines at their request.

“12 Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. 13 The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; 14 for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him.” (Gen 26:12-14)

There is nothing in this narrative that suggests any wealth transfer from the Philistines to Isaac. Whatever Isaac got at this time was as a result of God’s blessings on his labor. God would not have been able to bless him if he was not diligent at his business.

From Laban to Jacob

This story is found in Genesis 31:4-13. According to Jacob's narrative, Laban cheated him by changing the terms of his compensation ten times. God then showed him in a vision how to make the flock reproduce the types of animals that would fit the description of his agreed compensation.

“4 So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock, 5 and said to them, “I see your father’s countenance, that it is not favorable toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me. 6 And you know that with all my might I have served your father. 7 Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. 8 If he said thus: The speckled shall be your wages,’ then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said

thus: ‘The streaked shall be your wages,’ then all the flocks bore streaked. 9 So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me. 10 “And it happened, at the time when the flocks conceived, that I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the rams which leaped upon the flocks were streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted. 11 Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, ‘Jacob.’ And I said, ‘Here I am.’ 12 And He said, ‘Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.’” (Gen 31:4-13)

It is true that wealth was transferred from Laban to Jacob. However, God did this as a compensation for Jacob’s labor which Laban was not willing to release. There is nothing in this passage that suggests wealth would be transferred from the people of the world to the Christians or the Church.

From Egypt to Joseph.

In Genesis chapter 41, Pharaoh the king of Egypt, the world superpower of the time, made Joseph son of Jacob the Prime Minister of the land, the second in command to his throne, after he was able to interpret his dreams.

“39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. 40 You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.” 41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” 42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. 43 And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, “Bow the knee!” So he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44 Pharaoh also said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.” (Gen 41:39-

Nothing in this narrative suggests that Egypt's wealth was transferred to Joseph. Rather, God arranged this position for him so as to preserve the children of Israel from dying of the famine that ravaged the Eastern Mediterranean countries of the time.

“18 Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, “Behold, we are your servants.” 19 Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” (Gen 50:18-20)

Though Pharaoh committed the administrative oversight of Egypt to Joseph, which he faithfully discharged, Joseph did not personalize Egypt's wealth. He sought for Pharaoh's approval when he needed to relocate his people to Goshen in Egypt. If indeed Egypt's wealth was transferred to Joseph, he would have bequeathed it to the children of Israel who would have taken over the affairs of the land of Egypt. This was not to be because he didn't own Egypt.

From Egypt to Israel

In Exodus 3:21-22, God instructed the Israelite women through Moses to borrow clothes, silver and gold jewelry from their Egyptian neighbors at the time of their departure from Egypt with a promise that He would grant them favor.

“21 And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. 22 But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.” (Exo 3:21-22)

This promise was fulfilled in Exodus 12:36. To what intent was this done? It was done to fulfill God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would leave the land of their oppressors with great substance (Genesis 15:13-14) and compensate the Israelites for their years of servitude in Egypt.

It is true that there was a divine wealth transfer here but it was basically on the basis of justice and not an arbitrary transfer like the prosperity teachers teach.

From the gentile nations to king Solomon

The idea here is that God transferred the wealth of the gentile nations to Solomon the king of Israel because the Bible states that “king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom” in 1Kings 10:23.

Yes. It is true that King Solomon was the wealthiest human of his time but this did not happen because of an arbitrary wealth transfer but because of God’s promise to him.

“11 Then God said to him: “Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. 13 And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. 14 So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.” (1Kings 3:11-14)

We need to also bear in mind that Solomon was a hard worker. He was a philosopher who spoke and wrote numerous wise sayings and poems (Ecc 12:9-10), a farmer (both animal and crop husbandry), and a businessman who sold war chariots and horses, had mariners and precious metal explorers (1Ki 9:26-28; 1Ki 10:28-29). Solomon's wealth did not just fall on his lap, he gave value in exchange for it.

Is there truly going to be any wealth transfer from the people of the world to the Christians? There is nothing in all the Bible passages cited above and the events associated with them to suggest that wealth would be transferred to the Christians either as individuals or as the body of Christ on earth.

No single Bible verse whether in the Old or the New Testament supports this doctrine. It appears these teachers conjured this doctrine out of thin air and supported it with scriptural passages that are generally interpreted out of context. It is generally believed that a Christian doctrine should never be propounded without the explicit support of at least two New Testament scriptures. What we find here is a supposed Christian doctrine that is being peddled around without the support of a single New Testament Scripture. How true can this be?

We need to bear in mind that God is a just God. “Whatever a man sows he will also reap.” God cannot transfer wealth arbitrarily from non-Christians to Christians as the prosperity teachers teach. It is only those who deliberately cultivate wealth by observing the principles of wealth creation, whether Christians or non-Christians, that would become wealthy. Since the prosperity preachers say that a major prerequisite for partaking of their end-time wealth transfer is sowing monetary seeds to their ministries, it can be easily deduced that this doctrine is essentially a gimmick being used to make unwary simple-minded Christians release their hard-earned money.

Chapter 8

Give, that it May be Given unto You

Despite the fact that the prosperity theology teaches that material prosperity is in the atonement just like salvation from sin, it strongly emphasizes that the seeker must of a necessity firstly give something, especially monetary offering, to God before he can receive material blessing. In other words, salvation from sin is free but material blessing is not free despite that the two have been taken care of by the atonement of Christ as they teach.

How do we reconcile this discrepancy? Let not the reader be confounded as we have demonstrated abundantly by the scripture that material prosperity is not in the atonement. Jesus didn't need to die for God to bless people materially.

On the premise of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 6:38, the prosperity teachers implicitly and sometimes explicitly teach that the seeker must compulsorily give monetary donation(s) to them or their ministries before he can receive financial or material blessings from God. These monetary donations have been packaged into different types such as tithe, first-fruit offering, covenant partner seed, project offering, Shiloh offering, firstborn redemption offering, 24-hour miracle seed etc. Though this concept is called different names by different prosperity preachers such as seed-faith and covenant practices, the practices remain essentially the same.

As against the teaching of Christ and his Apostles that places a strong emphasis on giving to the poor and the needy, some prosperity teachers go as far as elevating giving to themselves or their ministries above giving to the poor. They teach that giving to the “anointed man” or an “anointed ministry” is “sowing on a fertile ground” while giving to the poor or the needy is “sowing on an infertile ground” or “sowing to the flesh”!

“38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be

measured back to you.” (Luke 6:38)

A cursory look at this Bible verse may give an impression that the prosperity preachers could be correct that we have to compulsorily give something before we can receive God’s blessings but a principled interpretation says otherwise. So, what exactly was Jesus saying here? Again, we will have to look at the preceding texts of this Bible verse before we can appropriately interpret it.

“27 “But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29 To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. 31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. 32 “But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. 37 “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:27-38)

Luke 6:20-49 is like an abridged version of the sermon on the mountain which is contained in Mathew chapter 5-7. From Luke 6:27, Jesus began to teach the principles of human relation, emphasizing the need to cultivate a charitable disposition to life in general. So, verse 38 isn’t about monetary donation to an “anointed man or ministry” as the prosperity teachers are wont to teach, it is about being generous in all ramifications- attitude, manner, word, cash and kind- as highlighted in

verse 27 to 38 of Luke 6. It is important to bear in mind that Jesus wasn't teaching a new principle in this Bible passage, He was only reiterating a well-established principle that we do not get ahead in life by focusing all our attention on ourselves or those we like but by liberality towards all and sundry, including the unlikable and our supposed enemies. To this, several other Bible passages also agree.

“24 There is one who scatters, yet increases more; And there is one who withholds more than is right, But it leads to poverty. 25 The generous soul will be made rich, And he who waters will also be watered himself. 26 The people will curse him who withholds grain, But blessing will be on the head of him who sells it. 27 He who earnestly seeks good finds favor, But trouble will come to him who seeks evil. (Prov 11:24-27)

“7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Gal 6:7-9)

So, we see that Luke 6:38 is not about compulsory monetary donation in order to receive (“give that you may receive”) as taught by prosperity teachers but about having a general liberal disposition to life which in general parlance is called “having a large heart”. It is about the universal principle of cause and effect, also known as the law of sowing and reaping.

Chapter 9

Seed-Faith

Oral Roberts, being the father of the Abundant Life theology, developed the concept of the seed-faith which serves as the foundation for the “giving to receive” doctrine. As we earlier stated, Oral published a book on this concept in 1970 entitled “The Miracle of Seed-Faith”. A revised version of the book was published in 1999.

In the book, Oral taught that things received by faith start with a seed. He coined the term “seed-faith” from the words of Jesus in Mathew 17:20, **“For assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”** He interpreted the phrase “have faith as a mustard seed” in this Bible verse to mean that a seed has to be compulsorily planted in order for a seeker to release his faith to produce result. This seed, according to him, includes any form of giving be it in kind or in cash but his main emphasis was on monetary donations to a Christian ministry. In addition, he used several other scriptural passages that have the word “seed” or “sowing” to support this idea even when they have nothing to do with financial donation. We shall deal with the “sowing and reaping” concept later.

Also, Oral called the seed a “point of contact”. He taught that people need this point of contact as the “evidence” to which they can hold on to in the process of releasing their faith to produce tangible result(s). In other words, he taught that the “evidence” in Hebrews 11:1 is the seed sown by the seeker. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Oral implicitly and sometimes explicitly taught that without this “Seed” it is almost impossible to get things from God.

In addition, he taught that the seeker needs to release his faith by attaching a specific thing he desires to get from God in return for the “Seed” he is sowing. Having done this, he has to open his mouth and speak about his desire(s) to God. This is the origin of the practice of

“seed naming” or “sending offering on assignment” that has become so ubiquitous in the Pentecostal circle. Interestingly, some Pentecostals have taken this practice as far as going to put money on the “altar” during an exciting message to tap into the “anointing”!

How did Oral Roberts come about this doctrine? This doctrine started out as what he initially called the “Blessing-pact partnership”. Oral stated that the idea first came to him in the early 1950s when he was faced with a staggering problem. He felt powerless at this time because he couldn’t control the situation. He believed he was inspired by God as he observed farmers who were harvesting their crops as he drove down the highway in the great Pacific Northwest of the United States to start planting seeds of faith like the farmers in order to get miracle harvests to his challenges. Based on this concept, he began to promise his ministry partners (regular ministry donors) that God would bless them in return for their financial contributions to his ministry. These partners were given a document called the “Blessing-pact covenant” which they were asked to keep in their Bibles and use as a point of contact [9].

The “Blessing-pact covenant” concept evolved and later became known as the seed-faith. Oral claimed he got the seed-faith inspiration from the words of one Art Newfield who contributed \$400 to the fund he was raising for the building of the personage of a church he pastored in the early days of his ministry [9]. According to Oral, the seed-faith revelation dawned on him when Art Newfield made this statement: “I want to tell you why I gave you this money. I’m a wheat farmer, and I know I have to plant a seed to get a harvest in my wheat field. This \$400 is not just money. It’s a seed of my faith I am sowing to the Lord to get my own needs met.” Notice that this concept wasn’t initially derived from biblical exegesis, it was simply from “personal revelations”.

But is this truly what the Bible says? In order to establish the veracity of this doctrine, we have to first interpret Mathew 17:20 correctly.

In the early part of Mathew 17, Jesus and three of his disciples went to the mountaintop where He was transfigured before these disciples. As they descended from the mountain, they met a chaotic situation that involved a man with a son who had a lunatic spirit and the other disciples of Christ. The man had asked for help but the disciples could not cast out the devil that was tormenting the child. Jesus took authority

over the unclean spirit and cast it out. The disciples were amazed, they then asked Jesus why they could not cast out the devil. It was in response to this question that Jesus made the statement in Mathew 17:20.

“17 Then Jesus answered and said, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.” 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” 20 So Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” (Mat 17:19-20)

The reader will notice that Jesus firstly rebuked the disciples for their faithlessness in verse 17 before he cast out the devil. We know that the mustard seed is a very small seed with a diameter of 1-2 millimeter. Hence, Jesus wasn't teaching His disciples any seed-faith concept as taught by Oral Roberts, He was simply telling them that they don't necessarily need a great faith to cast out the devil and do the work He was doing in general. All they needed was an atom of faith in God like a grain of mustard seed. In other words, Jesus was making an analogical description of the size of faith that is needed to perform miracles using the grain of mustard seed as the reference. How the seed-faith concept was imposed on this scripture remains a mystery.

We know that the Greek word translated “evidence” in Hebrews 11:1 is “*elegchos*” which could also mean “*proof*” or “*conviction*”. So, the “evidence” is simply a conviction that the believer derives from the Word of God and not from monetary donation called seed-faith.

In regard to “seed naming” or “sending offering on assignment” that is associated with the seed-faith, they look more like a paganistic exercise whereby a pagan priest tells an inquirer to speak his desires to an object of divination during an oracular consultation. We find no such practices in the Bible.

It is possible for someone to receive a leading to give something out or make a donation while he is seeking for answer to a specific need. It is, however, unbiblical to convert such personal experience to a

universal doctrine that must be compulsorily obeyed by all Christians in order to access God's blessings. It is erroneous to think we can force God to reward our giving according to our dictates. We know from the Bible that God is not a debtor to any man. He has promised to reward every good done, but the type of reward he would give in return is left to Him. In the event of a specific pressing need, we have been expressly instructed by the Lord to ask in simple faith with adequate assurance that God will hear and answer our prayer.

“7 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Mat 7:7-11)

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” (John 15:16)

“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:24)

“¹⁴ Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” (1 John 5:14-15)

Chapter 10

Monetary Sowing and Reaping

In the last chapter, we discussed the concept of seed-faith and how it originated. We mentioned specifically that Oral Robert developed this idea about 70 years ago.

In addition to what we have said heretofore, it is important to mention that one of the major errors of the prosperity gospel is that it took several Bible passages that have the word “seed” or “sowing” out of context and interpreted it to mean monetary giving to “*the anointed*” or “*an anointed ministry*” in anticipation of a financial and other types of material reward. We shall now examine three of these Bible passages to see how they have been misinterpreted and what they truly mean. We shall then proceed to look at what the word “seed” connotes in the Scripture.

Galatians 6:6-10

“6 Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Gal 6:6-10)

Prosperity preachers often interpret verses 6-8 of this Bible passage to mean that believers must sow monetary seed into the life of “the anointed” or “an anointed ministry” in order to obtain a monetary harvest. I was told that some prosperity preachers took verse 7 further to mean giving to “the anointed” or “an anointed ministry” is sowing to the spirit while giving to the poor or the needy is sowing to the flesh.

In order to interpret this Bible passage correctly, we need to examine

verses 9 to 10 of the chapter in conjunction with 6 and 7. In verse 6, Paul stated the need for those who are being taught the Word of God to reciprocate the kind gesture by sharing their material resources with their teachers. This is in consideration for the time and effort needed by these teachers to labor in the study of the word and prayer in order to be able to minister effectively which could have been used for secular money-making endeavors. Although it is not out of place for individual members of the local church to present gifts to their ministers as they deem fit, it is safe to conclude that any local church that is paying economically realistic regular salaries to her ministers from the financial contributions of her members has fulfilled this sacred obligation to a reasonable extent since Paul addressed this letter to a body of believers, the Galatian church.

In verses 7 and 8, he went further to state the certainty of the universal principle of sowing and reaping, also known as the law of cause and effect, that seeds always produce after their kinds. A corrupt seed (sowing to the flesh) will produce a corrupt fruit; a good seed (sowing to the Spirit) will produce fruits unto eternal life, that is, it will be rewarded not only on earth but in the hereafter. In other words, Paul was saying ACTIONS always produce RESULTS after their kinds. A positive action will lead to a positive reward, a negative action will lead to a negative reward. He was not in any way saying giving money to a minister of the Gospel is sowing to the Spirit. We must be careful also not to limit this principle to giving money to ministers of God as the only authentic way of getting a financial reward. While it is true that God will definitely reward every act of kindness done to His genuine ministers, we cannot dictate to Him the time and type of reward He would give to us. We must bear in mind that the primary way God blesses people economically is through work. Work is a major form of seed sowing, especially if we do it as unto the Lord.

Contrary to the assertion of the prosperity preachers, the seed in verse 6 is not the money but the ACT OF KINDNESS demonstrated by the giver. We need to realize that money or gifts, in general, are neutral substances, it is what we do with them that determines their value. Hence, it is absurd and disingenuous to think that Paul was referring to the money the prospective giver would donate as the seed. Contrariwise, he was referring to the act of kindness the prospective giver would demonstrate by sacrificing some of his earned resources for the poor and needy as the seed.

In verse 9, Paul taught the principle of delayed gratification, that patience and perseverance in doing good or what is right are required in order to get the expected result. In the light of the foregoing, he then admonished in verse 10 that we should seek to make use of every available opportunity to do good, not only to Christians but to all men.

1Corinthians 2:6-11

“6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. 9 As it is written: “He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.”10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, 11 while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God..” (1Cor 9:6-11)

These verses seem to be the most used by the prosperity gospel preachers to validate the transactional philosophy of the prosperity gospel. That is, the seeker must of a necessity give something, especially money to “the anointed” or his ministry before he can get genuine financial blessings. Implicitly, they are saying “the anointed” is the representative or conduit of God through which He channels financial blessings to His children. Is this kind of teaching correct? What exactly is Paul saying here?

In 2Corinthians chapter 8-9, Paul wrote generally to the Corinthian Church about his previous discussion and arrangement with them on monetary donation to the poor saints in Jerusalem. From verse 6 to 11 of chapter 9, he encouraged them to give generously to this worthy cause, reminding them that it is certain God would reward their generosity and act of kindness by not only providing for their needs but by also granting them more than enough resources to give to such worthy causes.

There are three major differences between what Paul taught the

Corinthian church and what the prosperity teachers teach. i) Whereas Paul taught that the primary motive of giving is genuine love (for Paul, receiving as a result of giving is a reward and not the motivation), the prosperity gospel preachers often teach that the overriding motive of giving is to receive something from God as we see in the case at hand.

“7 But as you abound in everything- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us- see that you abound in this grace also. 8 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.” (2Cor 8:7-8)

They often encourage the giver to attach their seeds (money) to some specific real or perceived needs in their lives and send them on assignment to God. In other words, giving is basically transactional (buying and selling) in nature and not an act of charity as the scripture enjoins. ii) While Paul taught the brethren to give generously to a specific cause in a transparent manner, the prosperity preachers are often evasive about the real motive of their request. iii) Another difference here is the point we stated earlier that the seed is not the money, but the ACT OF KINDNESS since money in itself is neutral. The prosperity teachers, however, teach that the money given is the seed.

Psalm 126

“1 When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream. 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.” 3 The Lord has done great things for us, And we are glad. 4 Bring back our captivity, O Lord, As the streams in the South. 5 *Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy. 6 He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him.”* (Psalm 126:1-6)

Verse 5-6 of this Bible passage is often used by prosperity preachers to cajole seekers to give sacrificial monetary donations to their ministries with the promise that they would reap a bountiful harvest in return for their sacrifice.

In order to objectively interpret this Bible passage, we have to look at the whole of Psalm 126 from the beginning to the end. Although verse 5-6 of this Bible passage could be interpreted in a general sense to mean that delayed gratification is a necessity for tangible achievements in life, which the Psalmist exemplified through the farming process, to narrow it down to the so-called sacrificial monetary donation is totally unacceptable.

Reading from verse 1 of this Psalm, it becomes apparent that the primary object of the Psalmist here has nothing to do with money. He was basically talking about the prayer, repentance, and labor of the Israelites at the end of the Babylonian captivity that led to their release, return, and settlement in their homeland, Israel. In other words, the Psalmist was saying that revivals don't just happen, they are birthed.

This observation is indeed correct because we see how Daniel mourned, fasted and prayed for the restoration of Israel. Ezra the scribe led a contingent of the people to fast and pray for safety for the journey to the Holy Land. In addition, he taught the people the Law of the Lord, led them in fasting, repentance, prayer, and renewal of their commitment to the Covenant on their return. Nehemiah also mourned, prayed and fasted for the restoration of the broken walls of Jerusalem. He led the rebuilding of the walls in a very turbulent time, led the people in repentance because they had violated the Covenant of the Lord, and made them reaffirmed their commitment to the Covenant. Zerubbabel also played a prominent role in governing the restored people and the rebuilding of the Temple. There were several other men and women who labored fervently in silence to ensure the restoration of Israel from captivity. This is the weeping and tears the Psalmist was referring to. He was not talking about giving money to get a good return.

Interpreting this Bible passage in the light of the New Testament, it implies that we would have to deny ourselves of certain enjoyments to give ourselves to prayer, fasting, Bible study, evangelism and every other relevant labor of love that is necessary to engender revival.

How is "seed" used in the Bible?

How is "*seed*" used in the Bible? We have previously alluded to the fact that *seed* is essentially defined by the prosperity gospel as money

that is sown to "the anointed" or "an anointed ministry". Is this truly what the Bible teaches? No! We know that *seed* has several meanings in the Bible.

There are three major words that are translated *seed* in the English Bible: 1) The Hebrew word *zera*, which generally implies seed or offspring. It occurs in 299 places in the Old Testament. 2) The Greek word *speiro*, which implies to scatter or sow. It is translated *seed* and *sow* and occurs in 53 times in the New Testament. It is the word that was used in the parable of the sower 3) The Greek word *spermah*, which implies seed or offspring. It appears in 44 places in the New Testament. There are two other Greek words in the New Testament that are translated *seed* in a few places: 1) The Greek word *sinapi*, which implies mustard seed. It occurs in 5 places in the New Testament. 2) The Greek word *sporo*, which implies scattering. It appears in five places in the New Testament.

It is evident that the word *seed* as recorded in the English Bible has different roots and does not connote the same thing at all times.

Here are some of the ways *seed* is used in the English Bible (please note that the usage is sometimes figurative):

1. The seed of plant (*zera*; Genesis 1:11-12)
2. Semen (*zera*; Lev 15:16-18)
3. Children, offspring or descendants of a person (*zera*: Gen15:13; Gen 26:3; Gen 17:9)
4. A prophetic reference to Christ e.g. the seed of the woman (*zera*, Gen 3:16), Abraham's seed (*zera*, Gen22:18; *spermah*, Gal 3:16)
5. The Word of God (*speiro*, Mat 13:19; *spermah*, 1John 3:9)
6. People, who could be good or bad (*spermah*; Mat 13:38)
7. Kingdom of God (*siniapi*; Mat 13:31)
8. Means of doing good- seed to the sower (*spermah*; 2Cor 9:10a)
9. Act of kindness- seed sown (*sporos*; 2Cor 9:10b)

So, we see that *seed* is never used to connote money in the Bible. The most important of such usage, to my mind, is Christ, who is also the Word of God. Isn't it curious that the prosperity preachers hardly

refer to God's Word as *seed* despite the established pattern in the Bible? It remains unknown why they transmuted the word to money despite that it isn't primarily about it. Perhaps it is the saying of the Lord Jesus that one cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time that is being fulfilled here.

Chapter 11

Specific Monetary Seeds

Apart from the general teaching on monetary sowing, prosperity preachers sometimes emphasize some specific monetary seeds. These include seed for hundredfold return, seed for 24-hour miracle, seed for altar, vows and pledges.

Seed for a hundredfold return

Here, the prosperity preacher tells the prospect to give a certain amount of money and expect a hundredfold return. This is usually premised on a twisted interpretation of the words of Jesus in Mark 10:29-30.

“29 So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, 30 who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.” (Mark 10:29-30)

What exactly was the subject of the discussion here? We have to be honest enough to admit that the subject of the discussion here is not giving and receiving of MONEY. Jesus was talking about SACRIFICES made for the sake of the kingdom of God. He talked about forsaking other things for the kingdom. We have to be extremely careful not to promise people what God did not promise them. Otherwise we would be liable before the supreme Judge.

Jesus promised that whoever forgoes anything for the sake of joining his fold will receive a hundredfold reward on earth and in the hereafter. How will such a person receive the reward on earth? It stands to reason that it cannot be that the individual would receive a hundredfold of monetary reward as it is being taught by the prosperity preachers. Else there would be no need for Christians to work anymore. For example, a

Christian who gives \$100 *seed* today should automatically reap \$10,000 thereafter. If he sows the \$10, 000 he would reap \$1,000,000. Sowing the \$1,000,000 would lead to a harvest of \$ 100,000,000 etc. etc. So, we see that this popular interpretation can't be true.

How then is this promise to be fulfilled? It is meant to be fulfilled through the Christian's association with the brethren. He now has more than a hundredfold of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, children, houses etc. in the brethren that are scattered all over the world.

"32 And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." 33 But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" 34 And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 35 For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." (Mark 3:32-35)

We can see that this promise literally came to pass in the early Church because of the strong brotherly-love that existed amongst them. They were always willing to share their money, material possessions, houses, natural talents and gifts etc. with the brethren in need. The Lord Jesus was talking about the kind of brotherly-love He expects in His Church. He wasn't talking about literal multiplication of money to the giver. He was simply talking about acceptance into the commonwealth of the brethren as contained in Ephesians 2.

I sincerely believe this is a major shortcoming the modern Church needs to urgently address. If indeed genuine brotherly-love exists in the Church, how can individual members, especially ministers of the Gospel who are supposed to live by example, accumulate so much money for themselves without scruple while thousands of their members wallow in abject poverty? The shameful thing is that some of them even boast publicly about their material wealth.

Another Bible passage that is often cited to support this teaching is Genesis 26:12.

"12 Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him." (Gen 26:12)

Again, this Bible verse has been taken out of context to imply what it does not say. In order to understand the meaning of the verse, we need to firstly read Genesis 26 from verse 1 to 15.

There was another famine in the land of Canaan after Abraham died. God instructed Isaac to dwell in the land and not go down to Egypt with a promise that He would be with him and bless him if he obeyed. God never asked Isaac to give a monetary offering to anyone as we have been made to believe. Although the true meaning of the verse is that Isaac planted crops in the land, God never specifically instructed him to do so at any point. Isaac naturally did what he knew to do since he was a farmer. He was merely practicing one of the natural principles of material prosperity i.e. DILIGENCE at work.

The main lesson for us as children of God from this Bible passage is that obedience to God in regard to where we should live (if we have a specific instruction from God) and diligence at work, our professional calling or vocation attracts God's blessings. This Bible passage is not saying that monetary donations to an "anointed man or ministry" as taught by the prosperity teachers will lead to a hundredfold reward.

Anyone who is diligent at his work will definitely reap a bountiful harvest. This was what Isaac did and God blessed him.

"Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown men." (Prov 2:29)

Seed for 24-hour miracle

Here, the prosperity preacher tells the prospect to give a monetary offering and get a 24-hour miracle in return.

The scriptural basis for this practice is not very clear, but it seems to be connected to the story of Elijah the prophet and the widow in 1Kings 17 where the widow and her child's need for food was immediately met because she obeyed Elijah's instruction to prepare a meal for him.

Though this is a case of immediate receiving after giving, we must be careful not to build a doctrine around such an isolated occurrence. This is because the Bible does not give us the liberty to choose the type and the timing of the reward of our giving. In fact, we are encouraged to wait patiently for the reward of our giving.

"9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as

we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Gal 6:9 -10)

It may not be inappropriate to expect God to reward our giving. However, it is unscriptural to think we can command Him to reward us within 24 hours of giving or force him to give the exact object we desire in return for our giving. Let's get this clear: God exists by Himself. We can't force Him to do what He does not want to do.

Seed for altar building

Prosperity preachers are in the habit of asking people to sow monetary seeds to build imaginary altars unto God. The type of altar they ask people to build varies from prosperity altar, to protection altar, to promotion altar etc.

Is there any scriptural injunction to support this kind of practice?

The word altar, as used in the Bible, primarily implies an elevated place where sacrifices were offered through burning to God as an act of worship.

In the patriarchal dispensation, a period which extended from creation to the giving of the Mosaic Law, God interacted directly with the head of the family (the patriarch) who was the leader, prophet and priest that led his household in offering sacrifices to God on the altar. This we see in the lives of Job, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gen 8:20; Gen 12:7; Job 1:5; Gen 26:25; Gen 35:1). Because the Israelites' patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) often migrated from place to place, it was recorded of them that they built altars unto God in their various places of sojourn (Gen 12:8; Gen 13:18; Gen 22:9; Gen 35:3, Gen 35:7)

After the establishment of the Mosaic Covenant, God instructed the Children of Israel to choose a city as soon as they enter the promised land where the tabernacle of worship and the brass altar of sacrifice would be set for their collective worship (Deu 12: 1- 14). They were strictly instructed not to multiply altars so that they won't fall into the sin of idolatry like their future neighbors. Shiloh, in Ephraim, was the first city selected for the national altar and the Tabernacle of worship (1Sam 1:3; 1Sam 4:3-4; 1Sam 14:3). At the time David ascended the throne of Israel, the Ark of Covenant was no longer in the Tabernacle

because it was not returned there by the Philistines who captured it in the days of Eli the High Priest. He moved the Ark of Covenant into another tabernacle he build for it in Jerusalem (2Sam 6:15-17; 1 Chr 13:1-14; 1Chr 15:2-29, 1Chr 16:1). Solomon later built the Temple with another altar in Jerusalem to replace the Tabernacle and the brass altar which were left in Shiloh, and moved the Ark of Covenant into the holiest place in the Temple (1Kings 6:1-38; 1Kings 8:1-9). Thus, the altar at the Temple in Jerusalem became the only acceptable altar for sacrifice for all Israel from the time of Solomon until the nation was dispersed the second time in 70 AD.

Although the Israelites violated the divine instruction by multiplying altars and falling into idolatry at various times until God restored them from the Babylonian exile, the Shiloh altar, initially, and the Jerusalem altar, later, remained the divinely sanctioned altars for Israel in a sequential manner.

Since the Old Testament is the shadow of the New, it follows that there can be only one authentic altar for all Christians just like there was only one authentic altar for the Israelite nation of old, and we know that this altar is the cross of Christ as the scripture says.

“9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. 11 For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. 13 Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. 14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. 15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” (Heb 13:9-15)

“7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 8 Therefore let us keep the

feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” (1Cor 5:7-8)

“14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. 18 Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?” (1Cor 10:14-18)

Therefore, it is strange that prosperity preachers are in the habit of asking people to sow monetary seeds to raise altars unto God despite these clear Bible passages. Pray, what kind of altar are they raising unto God with money, seeing that there is no single instruction in the Bible to this effect? This, to my mind, is pure idolatry. It is definitely not an altar unto God, it can only be an altar unto Mammon.

Vows and pledges

Another method the prosperity gospel preachers employ to make people sow monetary seeds into their ministries is through financial vows or pledges. It could be a one-time vow or a prolonged financial pledge that would be remitted on a regular basis. They also often categorize the pledgers who they call covenant partners into different grades such as silver, gold, diamond and platinum partners with a specific amount of money to be paid on a monthly basis attached to each grade of partners. In order to cajole their prospects to select the higher grades, some prosperity preachers go as far as promising them differential rewards based on the amount of money given.

Does a Christian need to make a financial vow or a pledge before he can receive from the Lord? Is it scripturally acceptable to make a promise of differential reward to givers based on the absolute amount of money given?

The practice of vow and pledge making was common in the Old Testament, but there is no single verse in the New Testament that instructs Christians to make vows or pledges, whether for the sake

making vows or as a condition for receiving God's blessing. Isn't this significant? In fact, we are specifically instructed by the Word not to swear oaths which is in a way similar to vows.

“33 Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ 34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.” (Math 5:33-37)

“12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.” (James 5:12)

Why then are the brethren being cajoled to make financial vows and pledges in order to receive God's blessing? This, to my mind, violates the New Testament teaching and can bring the believer into judgment. I am of the opinion that people should not be compelled or MANIPULATED to make financial pledges as some simple-minded children of God with inadequate means can make large and impractical pledges. People should simply be asked to give as they wish or as they are led by the Spirit of God without compulsion or manipulation.

It is certainly good to encourage people to give regularly in a disciplined fashion to support God's work but we should be careful not to hang it on their necks as a spiritual obligation that must, by all means, be fulfilled irrespective of the financial condition of the giver since the New Testament teaches giving without compulsion. The key thing is to give; give generously, freely and without the compulsion of an oath, vow or pledge.

“12 For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.” (2 Cor 8:12)

“7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2Cor 9:7)

We need to continually remind ourselves that our relationship with God as New Testament believers is premised upon the “Father-Son relationship”. If it is irrational for a son to make vows and pledges to his earthly father in order to receive his basic needs, why would we advocate that Christians need to make vows and pledges in order to receive blessings from their Heavenly Father who is far more magnanimous than we humans? It is unlikely any child of God who understands this truth would ever make vows for the rest of his life.

“11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (Math 7:11)

It is unscriptural to make a promise of differential rewards to givers based on the absolute amount of money given since the Bible says we should give according to our capacity. God does not reward people based on the absolute amount of money they give but according to the capacity of the individual. As far as God is concerned, it is not how much one gives that matters but the proportion of one’s income that is given. The story of the widow who contributed her last penny into the offering box clearly demonstrates this concept.

“42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. 43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.” (Mar 12:42-44)

Isn’t it ridiculous how the prosperity preachers overtly discriminate against the poor in all their seed sowing and fundraising campaigns without scruples? The poor are actually despised by some of these prosperity preachers. They are seen as a burden and not as beloved children of God whom Christ died for.

It may be alright to encourage the brethren to commit themselves to giving a specific amount towards a specific worthy cause or project, ministers of the Gospel must be careful not to emotionally manipulate them to make financial pledges and vows by telling them of instant rewards from God like the prosperity preachers often do. Such practices are not consistent with the Gospel.

We would be wise to follow the New Testament method of fundraising, which involves a transparent announcement of the need and the encouragement of the brethren to give generously toward such need. Why is this difficult to practice

Chapter 12

Merchandising God's Gift (Simony)

Not many Christians are aware of the concept called Simony, though it has been around since the early days of Christianity. This sacrilegious concept is named after Simon Magus the Samaritan sorcerer of Acts 8:9-24 who offered to pay money to Peter and John for the ability to impart the baptism of the Holy Spirit to people by laying on of hands, for which he was sharply reprimanded that the gift of God could not be bought with money.

According to John Ayliffe, an 18th century English jurist, Simony is defined as “a deliberate act or a premeditated will and desire of selling such things as are spiritual, or of anything annexed unto spirituals, by giving something of a temporal nature for the purchase thereof; or in other terms it is defined to be a commutation of a thing spiritual or annexed unto spirituals by giving something that is temporal.” In other words, Simony is the commercialization of the gifts, blessings and grace of God, which are meant to be freely given, for money.

Despite that the Lord Jesus Christ strictly instructed to the contrary, the commercialization of the grace of God in the Christian era has been around for a very long time.

“7 And as you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ 8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” (Mat 10:7-8)

The apostles of Christ warned the Church of their time severally of wolves masquerading as sheep who crept into the Church for the sole aim of making money through the Gospel.

“17 I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. 18 For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.” (Rom

16:17-18, ESV)

“17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.” (Phil 3:17-19; ESV)

“14 They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! 15 Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, 16 but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.” (1Pet 2:14-16; ESV)

“1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” (2Pet 1-3; ESV)

“4 For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. 10 But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. 11 Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and ABANDONED THEMSELVES FOR THE SAKE OF GAIN TO BALAAM'S ERROR and perished in Korah's rebellion.” (Jude 1:4, 10-11, ESV)

Despite these clear warnings, the commercialization of the Gospel remains a recurrent decimal in church history. It became aggravated in the late Middle Ages when the grace of God was practically being sold in form of indulgence and holy relics to the people. Though the

Reformation instilled sanity for a considerable time, the advent of the prosperity gospel has now taken this practice to a height that was hitherto unknown. Virtually all the gifts and blessings of God that are essentially free have been commercialized through this aberrant theology.

Telling people to sow monetary seeds to tap into an “anointing” is nothing but a scam. This is simply because the Holy Spirit, who is the anointing, cannot be bought with money. You can’t pay for Him. He is God. You can also not pay for the grace of God, it is free.

Age, title or charisma makes no difference, whoever preaches this kind of gospel is simply a peddler of error and a scammer. That is who the Bible says they are.

Again, we know that divine promotion usually does not have anything to do with monetary giving as we see in the Scripture. This is why the practice of telling people to give certain amount of money to move to the next level is false. It is like saying God's promotion is for sale. We know this can't be true since God's gift cannot be bought.

A cursory look at most people God promoted in the Bible shows that their promotion had nothing to do with monetary giving. How much money did Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Saul, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel and his friends, the twelve apostles and Paul, to mention a few, pay before God promoted them?

Of course, there is reward for giving which we all know but divine promotion cannot be bought with money. Once the so-called promotion can be paid for, it is no longer of grace.

One of the other evils of Simony is that it implicitly teaches that personal responsibility can be discounted with money. For example, a certain preacher told seekers to sow a \$1,000 seed to raise an altar of protection for their children. She pushed the matter further by saying that three of her children married as virgins and told the seekers to tap into that anointing by sowing the \$1,000 seed.

Certain questions readily come to mind in regard to this kind of practice- can a parent buy piety for her children with money? The answer to this question is a capital NO! What is the scripturally prescribed way of raising godly children? We know that the scriptural way to raise children is to continually instruct them in the Word of God both by precept and example. After this, what is left is to continue to

pray for them and trust God that they would turn out right.

Therefore, asking people to sow monetary seed to raise the so-called altar is like telling the parents they can discount their responsibility with money. The same is also true concerning financial promotion. We have earlier stated that the primary way by which God blesses people is work which cannot be discounted by sowing monetary seeds.

Is it wrong for a minister of the Gospel to raise money? No! it is not. The Apostles of Christ raised money in the Jerusalem church at inception for the poor and needy. Paul raised money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. They did this transparently without manipulating anyone. The challenge we have with many of the prosperity gospel preachers is that they often do not mention any charitable cause for their fund-raising activities. Even when they mention the reason, their emphasis is often on the imagined or real needs of the prospects and not on charity. This kind of approach invariably transmutes such activities that should ordinarily be charitable to a transactional one.

It is a sad reality today that people keep falling for this trickery because they neither bother to know God for themselves through His Word nor get themselves acquitted with church history.

Chapter 13

Tithe, That Your Life May Not Be Tight

Tithing seems to be the most important pillar of the prosperity theology. It is not uncommon to hear some prosperity preachers make the statement, “Your life would be tight if you don’t tithe.” This is a way of saying those who do not pay tithe will have financial difficulties.

Is there any scriptural basis for this assertion?

We cannot embark on a detailed study of the subject in this work since it will require a whole volume to do that. However, I will highlight the major conclusions arrived at in my previous work on the subject and then proceed on a detailed analysis of the major scriptural text (Malachi 3:8-12) used to teach the subject. The reader will do well to get a copy of the work entitled “Tithe and Giving in the Christian Church” for a comprehensive study.

1. Tithing is a Jewish practice and not a New Testament practice. It is irrelevant to the New Testament believer.
2. Tithing was introduced to the Church by the Roman Catholics (the Western Christendom). The Church never taught tithing nor received tithe until the late 6th century AD when apostasy had already set in. It became a Law enforced by the instruments of government during the time of the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne at the close of the 8th century AD.
3. Only farmers were mandated to tithe in the Torah (the five books of Moses). The tithe is essentially agricultural produce. It is against the Mosaic Law to pay money for tithe (Deu 14:22-27). Again, it was the Roman Catholic Church that introduced monetary tithe to the Church.
4. The Law cannot be cherrypicked. It is all or none, according to the Bible. There are 613 laws in the Mosaic Law. The Law of tithe is just one of them. If we must teach tithe, we must also teach the

remaining 612. This is why the Bible says no one can be justified by the Law since all of them must be observed to obtain justification by the Law. So, to keep the law of tithe for acceptance with God and disregard the others is an exercise in futility.

“1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” (Gal 5:1-4)

5. The Christian cannot incur the curse of the tithe because he has been redeemed from the curse of the Law that established the tithe through Christ.

“13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Gal 3:13-14)

6. The tithe doctrine teaches that any Christian who does not tithe will incur divine curse. This implies that such a Christian cannot make heaven since no divinely cursed person can make heaven. Therefore, the tithe doctrine essentially teaches that the atonement of Christ alone is not enough for salvation. This supposition is not only wrong, it is totally heretic since the Bible clearly states that acceptance with God under the New Covenant is solely by faith in the finished work of Christ.

“8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Eph 2:8-9)

The Christian is at liberty to give any percentage of his income to the Lord, from less than one percent (<1%) to a hundred percent (100%), as long as it is freely given. He could decide to

give a certain percentage at regular interval but this should never be allowed to replace the finished work of Christ in his life like the tithe.

“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2Cor 9:7)

7. Empirically, the tithe has not delivered on its promises to those who practice it worldwide since majority of them remain poor or at middle income level after years of adherence. More so, all the events of life that could be caused by the supposed “devourer” like sickness, “untimely death”, financial loss, unemployment etc. happen to them just like non-tithers. The tithe could never have delivered on any promise in the first instance since the Mosaic Law that established it has been abrogated by the sacrificial death of Christ (Heb 7:18-19; Heb 8:7-13; 2Cor 3:7-8).

We shall now consider the main scriptural text (Malachi 3:8-12) the prosperity teachers use to teach tithing, rigorously applying the principles of biblical hermeneutics to it. We would start from verse 7 instead of verse 8 of Malachi 3 so as to get a clear picture of what God was telling the children of Israel at that point.

“7 Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” Says the Lord of hosts. “But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’ 8 “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,” Says the Lord of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. 11 “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” Says the Lord of hosts; 12 “And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land,” Says the Lord of hosts.” (Malachi 3:7-12)

Generally, prosperity preachers interpret this Bible passage to mean that the Christian needs to tithe his income diligently to the local church to access God's financial blessing, protection and escape the divine curse. Is this interpretation correct bearing in mind the redemption Christ purchased for us through His death and resurrection?

The basic truths from Malachi 3: 7-12 essentially include:

1. God was speaking to the Israelites about their constant violation of his ordinance from the days of their fathers. This implies that the message in this Bible passage was not any new revelation, but an injunction to comply with an already revealed counsel of God in the Law of Moses (Malachi 3:7).

What then is the meaning of this ordinance God was talking about? The Law of Moses is classified into three main categories according to the Bible: commandments, judgments, and ordinances. The “commandments” expressed the righteous will of God (Exodus 20:1-26); the “judgments” governed the civil/social life of Israel (Exodus 21:1- 24:11); and the “ordinances” governed the religious life of Israel (Exodus 24:12 to 31:18). These three elements constituted “the Law”, as the phrase is generically used in the New Testament. Therefore, according to Numbers 18 and Malachi 3:7, tithe and offering belong to the religious or ceremonial aspect (ordinances) of the Mosaic Law to which circumcision, burning of incense, religious washing, animal sacrifice etc. belong.

2. That they were violating two of the ordinances at that time: tithe and offering (Malachi 3:8).
8. That this message was strictly for the children of Israel who were under the Law and not the Gentiles or the Church. God never made the Mosaic Covenant with the Gentiles or the Church; they are therefore under no obligation to obey its tenets.

That tithe is FOOD and not money as we have been wrongly taught. It was only farmers that were required to pay it.

“10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,” Says the Lord of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.” (Malachi 3:10)

9. That the Israelites were under God's curse for not obeying this law. This is not a new curse as we are often made to believe, but the one that was already written in the Mosaic Law (Deut 28 15-68).
10. That contrary to what we have been made to believe, the devourer in the 11th verse is not an evil spiritual being but PESTS that destroy farm crops. A simpler translation easily gives this out.

“11 And on your account I will keep back the LOCUSTS from wasting the fruits of your land; and the fruit of your vine will not be dropped on the field before its time, says the Lord of armies.” (Malachi 3:11; BBE)

11. That TITHES and OFFERINGS were mentioned in Malachi 3:8 but the prosperity preachers deliberately ignore offerings and lay undue emphasis on tithes.

“8 Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings.” (Malachi 3:8)

What then are these offerings? They are the peace (fellowship) offerings, burnt offerings, meat (food) offerings, first-fruits, oil and wine offerings, heave offerings, freewill offerings and any other type of offering apart from tithes that were brought to the priests at the Jerusalem Temple.

If the Israelites were under God's curse for not bringing all the offerings to the temple, it means that Christians also need to bring all the Mosaic offerings in addition to their tithes for them to escape the curse. To tithe and not give all the other types of offering, including animal sacrifices, is completely illogical.

12. That the tithe to be brought to Jerusalem was not the whole, but

10% of the whole tithe paid to the Levites at the Levitical cities as stated in Numbers 18:24-32 and Nehemiah 10:37-39.

13. That the blessings attendant to compliance is not automatic as it is being currently taught. The Israelite farmer needed to cultivate his farmland and tend the crops to get a harvest. The bigger the farm, the more the harvest. God's portion of the bargain was to give rain and prevent pests (insects) from destroying the crops planted. The lazy farmer won't get much reward!
14. That a Christian can't be cursed for not paying tithe because the Mosaic Law that established it has been abolished as we stated earlier.
15. That the blessings promised were not new blessings, but the ones already written in the Law of Moses.

“8 The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” (Deu 28:8)

16. That the blessing of the open heaven in this Bible passage is RAIN and not inspiration, concept, and idea (ICI) as taught by the prosperity teachers. Oral Roberts popularized this idea. The Holy Land is a desert that is often plagued by drought. So, they needed rain direly to survive.

“12 The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.” (Deut 8:12)

If the assertion of the prosperity teachers were correct, then God must have defaulted on his promise since many of the contemporary topnotch innovators, inventors and entrepreneurs are non-tithers who neither believe in God nor the Christian faith. The truth is that in the natural realm God gives inspiration for great accomplishment to whoever He wills just like the rain and sunshine. In spiritual matters, however, the Holy Spirit is the source of inspiration for the child of God. Every bona fide child of God is entitled to this. He does not need to pay any tithe to have access to divine revelation.

“9 But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” (1Cor 2:9-12)

Again, the believer in Christ is seated in heaven. He does not need any open heaven that is procured with tithe because heaven is his home already.

“4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph 2:4-7)

17. That God does not rebuke “devourer” on behalf of the Christian like he promised the Israelites of old. He has given the believer the authority to do so. If he refuses to use that authority he is to blame.

“19 Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” (Luke 10:19)

“7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

“8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” (1Pet 5:8-9)

18. At the end of the day, when Malachi 3:7-11 is interpreted in the light of the atonement of Christ, it tells how Christ has made it

unnecessary for anyone who believes in Him to bear the heavy burden of the Mosaic Law before he can be blessed. Isn't this wonderful! This great accomplishment of Christ is what the tithe doctrine has trampled upon since it was cleverly introduced into the Church over 1,400 years ago

Chapter 14

Commission and Anointing for Wealth

One of the major errors of the prosperity theology is the belief that ministers of the Gospel are called to make people wealthy materially by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Some of the frontline prosperity gospel preachers are in the habit of saying God commissioned them to make people prosperous. They claim they have anointing for wealth. We have also heard some of them say God called them to raise millionaires.

The prosperity theology centers on giving money to a prosperity gospel preacher (“the anointed”) or his ministry (“anointed ministry”) in anticipation of a multiple harvest.

Does God truly commission ministers of the Gospel to go make people have money? Is there such a thing as anointing for wealth?

We have no other place to turn to in finding answers to these important questions than the Bible.

In order to answer the first question appropriately, we have to consider what the Great Commission which summarizes what the calling of a New Testament minister is all about. According to Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission essentially entails making disciples for Christ among all the nations of the earth.

“18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mat 28:18-20)

According to the cited scripture making disciples for Christ has three components:

1. Taking the gospel message to the unsaved, telling them what Christ has accomplished, that Christ has paid the price for their reconciliation with God. They need not run away from Him

anymore.

“18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ,” (2Cor 5:18-20)

19. Baptizing those who accept the reconciliation offer, which is a symbolic gesture of the spiritual experience of conversion.

20. Teaching the converts ALL THINGS that Christ commanded.

In simple terms, the Great Commission is essentially about getting people born again and nurturing them to maturity with the doctrine of Christ, also known as the apostles' doctrine.

“42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Act 2:42)

“9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.” (2John 1:9)

In regard to Christian maturity, God's ultimate plan for all His children is to become like Christ.

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Rom 8:29)

“18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2Cor 3:18)

So, we see that the ultimate plan of God through the Gospel is to raise sons (generic) who are like Christ among all the nations of the earth. This is what ministers of the gospel are commissioned to do. They are commissioned to bear witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and to teach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). They are called to raise a people for our God. They are not

commissioned to make people wealthy as the prosperity preachers claim.

In regard to the possession of anointing for wealth, we find no such concept also in the entire scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. There are two basic ways the anointing of the Holy Spirit manifest in the New Testament: 1) Through ministry gifts (offices) like apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists, teachers and the help ministries (Rom 12:3-8; Eph 4:7-14; 1Cor 12:27-30). 2) By the spiritual gifts (charismatic gifts) such as prophecy, word of knowledge, diverse tongues, word of wisdom, gift of faith, gifts of healing and working if miracles (1Cor 12:7-11).

Entrepreneurship by which people create wealth is a natural talent and not a spiritual gift. This is why there are entrepreneurs among people of all religions, including those who don't believe in God. No one needs to be a Christian to be an entrepreneur. However, it is possible that a Christian entrepreneur could avoid losses or get unusual opportunities through obedience to the leading of the Spirit but entrepreneurship is not an anointing.

One of the cardinal tenets of Evangelicalism, out of which Pentecostalism emerged, is that the Scripture is the final authority in matters of doctrine and practice. This is what the Reformers of old called "Sola scriptura." That is, the Scripture is sufficient.

The Scripture says concerning its supremacy and sufficiency:

" To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isa 8:20)

"And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." (2 Peter 1:19)

" 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2Tim 3:16-17)

We know that Jesus, the Son of God, gave due regard to the

supremacy of the Scripture in the days of His flesh. He subjected every inspiration and suggestion He received to the Holy Scripture, always saying, "It is written."

Even God the Father, who is the all in all, is bound by His Word: **".... For You have magnified Your word above all Your name."** (Psalm 138:2)

Bearing in mind that God does not contradict His Word and the fact that there is no such calling as "making people wealthy" in the entire scriptures of the Old and New Testament, how then can anyone claim he received a calling or commission that runs contrary to God's Holy Word?

"When purpose is not known abuse is inevitable." Let's be aware that making people prosperous is primarily the work of government. It is the governments of nations that ought to provide the enabling environment for the generality of their citizens to thrive economically. It is not the work of ministers of the Gospel. This is why nations that are badly governed are usually poor. The role of ministers of the Gospel and the Church is to build men who will then build the nation. The mandate of the Church is not to raise millionaires but to raise men who are like Christ, though some of them could turn out to be millionaires. Therefore, it is an abuse of purpose for any minister of the Gospel to undertake an assignment that is clearly not in God's agenda for him.

Nevertheless, ministers of the Gospel have the responsibility to support the needy materially from the commonwealth of the Church. In fact, this responsibility does not pertain to ministers of the Gospel alone. It is a joint responsibility of the whole church. For example, when some members were in need in the early church, the apostles did not claim they had anointing for prosperity. They also did not ask people to sow into their lives or ministries to tap their anointing. They raised funds from the brethren who had and appointed deacons who distributed the funds to the poor according to their needs (Act 4:34-37; Acts 2:44-45; Acts 6:1-6). This is how to take care of the poor. It is not by giving false hope to people.

Again, the ways and means by which these so-called prosperity preachers use to accomplish their supposed mandate does not leave much to be desired. They go around twisting scriptures to defraud

people of their hard-earned income. If indeed their intention is to prosper people, they won't be going about giving people false hope, they will teach people how to genuinely make money and then raise capital for them through the voluntary donations of the brethren.

From the foregoing, it is evident that there is nothing called commission or anointing for wealth as far as the scripture is concerned. Whoever makes such a claim is either deliberately lying or he has allowed his mind to deceive him. He may also have been deceived by a seducing spirit.

Know this today beloved- whenever a prosperity preacher says he wants to help you become rich, he is indirectly telling you he needs your help. He is telling you to help him become a millionaire without having to work for it. This is why they keep telling you incessantly to sow money into their lives. They are not helping you; they are helping themselves. Really, they can't help you because their claims cannot be substantiated by the Scripture.

Since these claims have been left largely unchallenged for a very long time, some young people are now claiming they have also been commissioned to make people have money. The old lions did it in a big way. The young lions have seen the "proofs". They have seen the big cathedrals, campgrounds, private jets, exotic cars, big mansions, the power and the pomp that came out of such claims in the past. They are now set to do it in a bigger way. This is a challenge staring us all in our faces. Would we continue to watch and pretend everything is alright?

Part III

Fruits of the prosperity Gospel

Chapter 15

Fruits of the Prosperity Gospel

According to the word of our Lord Jesus Christ in Mathew 7:16-20, a tree is known by the type of fruit it produces. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit neither can a bad tree produce good fruit.

“16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” (Mat 7:16-20)

Nature always reproduces after its kind. It is not enough to claim possession of high-sounding revelations from God, the practical fruits we bear go a long way to validate our claims. I believe it is appropriate at this juncture to consider some of the practical features of the prosperity gospel and the preachers.

Self-indulgence

We stated in chapter 6 the self-indulgent lifestyle of the prosperity gospel preachers how they waste charity funds on frivolities. In addition, some praise themselves to high heavens for not drawing salary from church coffers but in reality, the church bears the cost of some of the elements of their ostentatious lifestyle such as the palatial homes, the means of transportation that ranges from very expensive cars to private jets and the exaggerated security paraphernalia. This, to my mind, is not different from the executive overindulgence that is common in the corporate world. Is this what Jesus died for?

When challenged on why they overindulge themselves, they narrate how much they sacrificed and suffered to establish the ministry. The truth, however, is that they could not have sacrificed and suffered alone to establish a thriving large organization like the ones they control.

Such large Christian ministries can only be built by the collective sacrifice of a community of believers which include the pastoral associates and the members. Also, there is no profession in this world that does not have its peculiar sacrifice. Hence, the kind of entitlement mentality exhibited by some of these people can't be reasonably justified.

Disregard for Social Justice

Social justice is a term that relates to the proper formulation and administration of the rules of the society such that there is a fair distribution of responsibility, wealth, opportunities and privileges within the society.

One very important attribute of God that any diligent student of the Bible cannot but appreciate is the emphasis He places on justice (fairness) generally and as it relates to the poor and the less privileged.

“8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God??” (Micah 6:8)

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith....” (Mat 23:23a)

If there is any place where social justice is supposed to be thoroughly entrenched, it is the Church of God. However, the reverse is the case in many of the Prosperity-Pentecostal denominations of today where there is a skewed distribution of responsibility, wealth, opportunities and privileges. The disparity between the economic situation of the overall heads of these organization and their pastoral associates is often too wide than to be acceptable in the house of God. It is not uncommon to find the founders or General Overseers of many of these denominations live in opulence as we stated earlier while the majority of their associates struggle to get by in life.

While the leaders have full access to the commonwealth of the organization and sometimes engage in secular activities to make extra income, they make rules that prohibit their coworkers from engaging in income generating extracurricular activities. Hence, these coworkers

are left with either the option of living in penury or to result to unethical means to augment their income. Whereas the leaders send their children to schools in the Western world, many of their associates can't afford a decent education for their children.

A popular Nigerian media house surveyed the salaries of pastors in some of the leading Prosperity-Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria in 2017 and found that majority of the pastors earn peanut salaries that range from ₦ 25,000 (\$69) to ₦ 45, 000 (\$ 125) per month, although some of the high-ranking ones who are in the minority could earn up to ₦ 85, 000 (\$ 235) or more per month. While some of these pastors claim they have other privileges such as subsidized or free housing and subsidized school fees for their children, an honest observer will admit that a salary range of \$69 to \$125 per month is barely enough for the upkeep of a child talk less of taking care of a family. Yet, some of the overseers of these ministries have private jets and live the type of opulent lives already described. Is this type of social injustice acceptable in the house of God? I am of the opinion that this type of institutionally imposed servitude makes the godly life that is expected of a Christian worker extremely difficult, to say the least.

Oppressing the Poor

Contrary to the scriptural injunction that we should not discriminate against the poor in the house of God, the poor are actually overtly discriminated against in many of the Prosperity-Pentecostal churches.

“1 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. 2 For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, 3 and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” 4 have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” (James 2:1-4)

No matter how committed a member may be, his financial status or social standing is often a consideration in the recognition, privileges, positions, and the access he gets. There are denominations in Nigeria that select their part-time pastors primarily because they are well-to-do

financially and not because they are spiritually matured and called to the office of the pastor. This, they do so as to make these individuals bear the financial burdens of the nascent branches.

The poor or the financially challenged are not wanted in the real sense of the word. Some even go as far as telling those needing financial assistance to go elsewhere because they claim the Church is not a charity. A story was told of one of the pastors of a popular Nigerian denomination who sold his house and gave the proceed to the church because they were told to give sacrificially towards a project. At a later time, he had difficulty paying his house rent and went to the church for assistance but to his chagrin was told that the church is not a charity. Of late (1n 2018), one of the sons of a popular Prosperity-Pentecostal denomination overseer in Nigeria posted a sarcastic video clip online where he mocked the poor and needy, told them to desist from asking for money from their church and advised them to result to trade by barter if they do not have money. Isn't this incredible?

The other way these prosperity denominations discriminate against the poor is in the call for monetary donations which they call "sowing of seed." Many a time, they tell the prospective givers to sow a specific amount of money which is often beyond the reach of the poor in order to obtain financial promotion from God. Apart from the fact that this type of practice amounts to merchandising the grace of God, it is tantamount to discrimination against the poor which the Bible forbids. Why is this so? This type of practice says indirectly that those who do not have money to pay but are interested in making financial progress are automatically cut off. Would God truly discriminate against the poor in the allocation of His blessings? We know He does not do so.

"6 For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. 7 But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another." (Psalm 75:6-7)

To underscore the compassion that Jesus has for the poor, He gave them from money freely given to Him mostly by anonymous donors. Not for once did He request for monetary offering from the huge crowds, who were mostly poor, that followed him during his earthly ministry. Instead, He performed miracles on two occasions to feed them when they were hungry. The apostles of Christ also followed this example. They raised money for the poor and needy. They did not overburden them. Contrary to these examples, the prosperity preachers

insist that the poor must compulsorily give money either directly to them or to their ministries before they can be lifted out of poverty. They must give compulsory tithe, first-fruits, special seed, dangerous seed, Shiloh offering, thanksgiving offering etc. before God can prosper them. Can God be this cruel?

Certain questions readily come to mind in this regard, why was Jesus' approach so different from the prosperity gospel's prescription if monetary donations by the poor to an "anointed person" or an "anointed ministry" is so important to get ahead in life? Whose example are the modern-day prosperity preachers following?

We have no other way to describe this type of disposition to the poor than to say it is oppressive and exploitative.

Financial Opacity and Scandals

It is common knowledge that transparency in financial dealings is a major problem in the Prosperity-Pentecostal circle. Many a time, adherents are told to sow monetary seeds without being told in clear terms what the money they are giving will be used for. This invariably makes it difficult for anyone to demand for accountability.

The US Senate Committee on finance investigated the ministries of six US prosperity televangelists for possible violation of tax-exempt status in 2007 because of complaints received from members of the public concerning their lavish lifestyle [10]. At the conclusion of the investigation three years after, it was reported the only two of the six preachers involved fully cooperated with the committee and implemented the recommended reforms. The remaining four either did not respond or responded partially. Some of them even threatened lawsuit to deter the committee from looking into their books.

Again, the South African government through the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities in 2015 investigated some churches for commercialization of religion and abuse of people's beliefs [11]. The committee requested their ordination certificate, registration certificate, bank statements, and annual financial statements from 2012 until the time of the investigation. Surprisingly, several of the church leaders, including a popular Nigerian prosperity preacher, refused to cooperate

with the committee at the time the cited reference was reported. Some of them also threatened to sue the committee for daring to investigate them. The question that naturally comes to mind in this regard is, why would the church that is supposed to be a shining example of transparency to the society use legal technicalities to hide her financial statement from the government if there were no financial infractions?

These two examples give us insight into the level of financial opacity that is common practice among the Prosperity-Pentecostal churches which ought not to be.

A careful observer cannot but notice that since inception the prosperity gospel movement has been plagued by one scandal or the other, ranging from financial to sensual.

I am of the opinion that the naturally unsustainable lavish lifestyle and the questionable fundraising tactics many of these preachers employ make them unnecessarily prone to scandals. We will not go into the details of the various scandals since that is not the intent of this work. However, it suffices to say that hardly is there any Christian movement since the Reformation that has been plagued by as many scandals as the prosperity gospel movement.

Authoritarianism and Personalization of the Commonwealth

Whereas the biblical pattern of leadership is essentially Presbyterian, majority of the Prosperity-Pentecostal churches are led by autocratic leaders. These leaders are usually not accountable to anyone. Followers are regularly threatened with the “touch not my anointed” dictum which gives the leaders a sort of ministerial immunity against probity. Many of the leaders wield almost absolute power because the church councils or boards are frequently made up of men who can neither question nor say no to the overall leader. Hence, the excesses of these men are left unchecked. This is another reason why the prosperity preachers are generally prone to scandals.

Since the leader is not accountable to anyone, the church organization and her commonwealth are inevitably personalized. There is a personalization of the commonwealth of the organizations by the leaders akin to what obtains in the political landscape of the underdeveloped world where the political leaders practically own the

wealth of the State. Many of these organizations are usually run like a family business concern despite that they are built by the collective effort and donations of the members. The decision on what project to spend money on or who to occupy a position in the organization is usually at the discretion of one man. In fact, it is almost a given that a family member of the leader would succeed him after his demise. Is this the Bible pattern?

Promotion of Self-centeredness

Whereas the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ teaches that a father-son relationship exists between God and the Christian, the prosperity gospel teaches that the relationship is transactional. While the former produces children who genuinely love and render services to God as a Father, the latter breeds children who serve God mostly for gain.

For example, the Bible states clearly that the primary motive of giving is love, receiving as a result of giving is guaranteed whether one expects it or not as far as the Bible is concerned. It is nothing to worry about.

“If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” (1Cor 13:3)

“7 Therefore, as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. 8 I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.” (2Co 8:7-8)

“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” (Luke 6:38)

Unfortunately, the prosperity preachers teach that the overriding motive of giving is to receive something from God as we have stated severally in the course of this treatise. Without fail, the prospect has to attach some specific need(s) to the seed (money) and send it on assignment to God for him to receive a harvest. For them, giving is an arbitrary act done to get something from God, it doesn't have to be connected to the solution to a problem. In other words, giving is

primarily for getting something from God and not an act of kindness done to alleviate suffering or solve problems. It goes without saying that this kind of practice has transmuted giving to a mere commercial transaction and not an act of charity or worship as enjoined by the Bible.

This mutant gospel has now produced for us a multitude of self-centered Christians whose primary motive of worship is self-interest and not God's interest. We now have cases of supposed Christians who steal money from the treasuries of their employers to live the affluent life they have been told God would give them. Not only do these people embezzle money, they also sow seeds and pay tithes to their various places of worship from the proceeds of corruption.

It is not out of place at this juncture to say that this aberrant gospel has substantially whittled down the salutary effect the true Gospel is known to have on the society. A careful observer will notice that the leaven of the prosperity gospel has not only corrupted the church, it has also permeated into the fabrics of the society at large. Both Christians and non-Christians in the societies where the message is popular have substantially discarded the culture of contentment, hard-work, delayed gratification and frugality which are necessary for an orderly and prosperous society for greed, laziness, instant gratification and overt display of affluence. Can this truly be the Gospel?

Private Jets

Bearing in mind the controversies that acquisition of private jets has generated so far in the Prosperity-Pentecostal circle, I believe it is appropriate at this juncture to examine its propriety or otherwise.

To the best of my knowledge, there is no preacher of the Gospel that acquired private jet(s) until the advent of the prosperity gospel. The first preacher to acquire private jet during the course of his ministerial life, to the best of my knowledge, is no other person than the father of the Abundant Life theology, the late Oral Roberts. Since then, acquisition of private jets has become synonymous with attainment of success in ministry in the Prosperity-Pentecostal circle.

Sometimes ago, a blogger created a list of American preachers that own private jets in order to appreciate the magnitude of this problem.

As at 2011 when the list was last updated, at least 23 preachers, mostly Prosperity-Pentecostal, owned private jets, although they may be more now [12]. The list contains different models of aircrafts manufactured by various companies like Cassena, Bombardier, Gulfstream, Dassault Falcon, Learjet etc. but Cassena seems to be the preferred manufacturer among the preachers. Majority of them have one plane but some have up to two or three planes.

Since Nigeria has swallowed the prosperity gospel hook line and sinker, the menace of private jet acquisition is now gradually becoming popular.

As at the time of this writing, there are at least five (5) Nigerian preachers that currently own private jets going by the information available in the public domain. One of them has used two jets serially and a helicopter before the current one. The aircrafts owned by these preachers include a Gulfstream G550, a Bombardier challenger 604, a Gulfstream GIV, a Bombardier Challenger 601 and an aircraft of unknown model.

I believe it is proper at this time to examine the cost of purchase and the annual maintenance of a private jet to see whether it is just and financially prudent to use charity funds for this type of venture. We will use the Bombardier Challenger 605 as an example.

The bombardier challenger 605 was introduced as an upgrade of 604 in 2006 by bombardier aerospace, Canada [12]. It is a super midsize aircraft that match the operating cost of a small aircraft. The overall cost of the aircraft as provided by Conklin and Decker according to the cited reference is as follows (cost in Naira at exchange rate of N361 per \$1):

Cost of ownership:

- New aircraft= \$27 million (₦ 9,747,000,000)
- 2008 used vintage aircraft = \$15million (₦ 5,415,000,000)
- Cost of maintenance per annum:
- Variable cost = \$1,515,861 (₦ 547,208,493)
- Fixed cost = \$724,861 (₦ 261,674,821)
- Book depreciation = \$3,102,300 (₦ 1,119,930,300)

- Total annual cost, including depreciation= \$5,342,974 (N 1,928,813,614)

Really, it may not be morally wrong if someone acquires a private jet with his personal income or if one receives it as a gift from people of honest means and has an honest private means of maintaining it. However, it is unjust and financially imprudent for anyone, especially in a poverty ridden country like Nigeria, to use money contributed sacrificially by donors for charity to purchase and maintain such humongous luxury as we have seen highlighted. This is especially so considering the fact that one person and his associates or personal aides enjoy the benefits in most cases.

We have seen from the calculation above that the annual cost of maintenance and depreciation on a medium size private jet is close to two billion Naira (~5.5 million dollars). This is a modest estimate seeing that there are private jets whose cost of purchase can be as high as times two the cost of the one stated here.

Is anyone telling me that it's the members of the ministries or the financial supporters of these ministers that will have to also bear this burden apart from the other financial demands?

Let's stop deceiving ourselves, having a private jet is not a necessity for preaching the Gospel. It seems to me that the rush to procure private jets by prominent Prosperity-Pentecostal ministries is just an attempt to acquire and maintain a status symbol.

I am not aware of anyone among those who claim they now need private jets in order to preach the gospel that has surpassed the Apostle Paul in the work of ministry, yet he did not even own a horse. I guess if that Apostle were like these people, he would have told his numerous converts in Asia and Europe to contribute money to buy a ship for him since that was the equivalence of today's private jet. He would have also demanded for horses for his ministerial travels. He did neither of these. He traveled either on foot or by commercial water travel.

Each time this issue is raised, there are people who in defense of these ministers argue that they should be left alone for various reasons. Some go as far as saying that these preachers are justified to demand for private jets since Jesus rode on a donkey. Isn't this kind of defense ridiculous bearing in mind that Jesus didn't even own the donkey he rode once in His life time?

I ask, why is it that we see it as wrong if a public office holder diverts public funds for private luxuries but we see nothing wrong in ministers of the Gospel doing the same? I candidly believe that the ministry, much more than secular public offices, should not be a means of acquiring private luxuries.

Notwithstanding, nothing that has been said so far implies that ministers of the Gospel should not be supported and provided with modest means of modern transportation. Rather, my appeal is that those who are opportune to occupy such exalted offices among mortals should learn to live modest lives in order not to constitute themselves as an offense to the same Gospel they claim to preach through the abuse of their rare privilege.

About three months before this writing, we heard the news of a popular American Televangelist who has used at least three private jets serially asking his supporters to contribute \$54 million to buy the latest brand of a particular private jet for him. He was even bold enough to say that Jesus told him to ask for it. If I may ask, which Jesus was he talking about? It's appalling the kind of entitlement mentality being exhibited by these people because people have not been willing to ask critical questions about this issue for a long time.

The confounding thing is that many of these ministers are not even full-time traveling evangelists like the late Billy Graham or the retired Reinhard Bonnke. I am not aware that any of these two cited evangelists had private jets. A reasonable number of these jet owning preachers are pastors of local churches who don't travel often like a typical evangelist. Funds that ordinarily should have been used to sponsor missionaries to the unreached are being used to massage people's ego.

To those who contribute money to these wasteful ventures I say, buying private jets for the enjoyment of a few individuals can never be equated to propagating the Gospel. It is ignorance and greed that make people donate money to such projects. Greed in the sense that many of the givers give not because they love God but because the collectors promise that God would make the donors become rich for their giving. If indeed our interest is in the propagation of the Gospel, we would pool such huge resources together to sponsor missionaries to the unreached. There are a thousand and one missionaries and intending

missionaries that are being deprived of funds. Many of them would gladly take an insignificant fraction of the monies we contribute to these entitled people to go to the mission field and work for the Lord.

Part IV

What Jesus and the Apostles Said About Money

Chapter 16

What Jesus Said about Money

No amount of earthly wealth can equate the value of a human soul

“And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (Luke 12:15; ESV)

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Mat 16:26; ESV)

Jesus taught that we should be content with what we have and be careful of covetousness because no amount of earthly possession can equate the value of the soul of man.

The prosperity theology, however, teaches the adherents to be covetous. It tells them that by mere monetary seed sowing and positive confession the riches of this world would be transferred to them! It tells them to expect stupendous wealth when they have not offered any value in the market place in exchange for the expected wealth. Is this not covetousness? Little wonder, several of the adherents who could no longer wait endlessly for the promised easy wealth have resulted to self-help by looting the treasuries of their employers.

We have heard stories of prosperity gospel adherents in Nigeria who embezzled money and were caught. Some of them confessed during interrogation that parts of the money they stole were donated to their places of worship. Isn't this incredible?

Use money to lay up treasure in heaven

“19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and

steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Mat 6:19-20)

Jesus strongly admonished His disciples not to lay their treasures upon the earth because the earth and its content are subject to decay. Rather, He advised that we should lay up treasures in heaven where there is no decay.

Why is this important? It is because earthly accumulation of riches to no purpose distracts the mind greatly from God. It contends for the space that is reserved for God in the heart of man because of the false sense of security it gives. This is why it is very difficult for those who have accumulated substantial wealth outside Christ to accept the Gospel wholeheartedly. They see no need for Christ.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12:34)

“22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.” (Mat 13:22)

“Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:23)

How are we supposed to lay treasures in heaven? Contrary to the teaching of the prosperity teachers that giving to the poor is "secular giving" or "sowing to the flesh," the Lord Jesus says we are to lay up treasures in heaven by GIVING TO THE POOR. In fact, all the teachings of Christ on giving, except one, are on giving to the poor!

“32 Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.” (Luke 12:33; ESV)

“When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (Luke 18:22; ESV)

“And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.” (Luke 16:9)

It is not uncommon for prosperity gospel teachers to tell the adherents that they would become rich without telling them what else they would do with the money apart from the enjoyment of the good things of life such as cars, houses, landed properties, good schools for children, vacation etc. This, to my mind, runs contrary to this instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ. It amounts to teaching the adherents to primitively accumulate wealth on the earth like the rich fool in my view.

Invest money into profitable ventures

Don’t allow money to lie idle. The parable of the talents teaches this (Mat 25:14-30).

“So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.” (Mat 25:27)

God does not waste resources. He expects returns on every of the resources He entrusts to us, including money.

No one can serve God and money at the same time

““No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Mat 6:24)

Mammon is a Syriac word, the name given to the god of wealth and riches. Although the Israelites of old did not serve it at the time of Christ on earth, they referred to wealth and earthly riches by the name. They recognized that unbridled desire to accumulate wealth has a way of occupying man’s heart to the exclusion of God, so much so that wealth will then become the object of worship of the person.

God desires that we love Him with undivided attention. No one can love money and claim to love God at the same time. No one can be loyal to two masters simultaneously. Those who set their minds to

become wealthy at all cost invariably become servants (worshippers) of Mammon. Since it is practically impossible to serve two masters at the same time, such people are worshippers of Mammon even if they claim to be serving God under any guise.

Isn't it interesting that contrary to the teaching of Christ, the prosperity teachers implicitly teach that money (Mammon) is the primary object of worship of the believer and not Christ?

Everything about that perverted gospel is centered around money. Whereas Jesus says to make disciples of all nations, the prosperity theology says to make millionaires of all nations. The ultimate aim is to make the seeker become wealthy and not to make him become like Christ. Elaborate services are conducted in honor of Mammon in the name of breakthrough programs as against the teaching of the scriptures and fellowship that the Church of Christ is known for. Some of the preachers now say they are called to raise millionaires. Even prayer meetings are conducted unto Mammon. For the seeker to obtain any favor from his god, he has to offer monetary sacrifices in form of tithes, first-fruits, seeds, special offering, project offering, dangerous offering, sacrificial offering, vows, pledges etc. Without these sacrifices, he can hardly get anything from this god. Any little financial favor obtained is attributed to the monetary sacrifice offered to this god during testimony time. Rarely would the true God be acknowledged. The glory has to go to Mammon.

Can we now see why the prosperity gospel, which invariably is Mammon gospel, is the greatest contender with Christ in the Church today? Can we see why we should no longer keep quiet about this pernicious gospel? Can we see why we need to rise up and pull his altar down?

Chapter 17

What the Apostles Said About Money

I believe it is appropriate to examine what the apostles of Christ said about money just like we examined what Christ said about it for us to see whether they were on the same page.

Earthly wealth is transient

“9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, 10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. 11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.” (James 1:9-11, ESV)

According to James the Just, earthly wealth and all it can afford are transient. The rich must always bear this fact in mind to remain humble. No one should put his trust in money.

Material wealth is not a measure of spiritual wealth

“Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5)

“Useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.” (1Tim 6:5)

As against the teaching of the prosperity preachers that faith has to necessarily translate to earthly riches, those who are not wealthy tend to be richer in faith than the rich. This is not farfetched because the false sense of security material wealth provides often prevents the owner from actively seeking God like those who are not wealthy would ordinarily do.

This does not in any way imply that a materially wealthy person cannot be rich in faith at the same time. However, the materially rich has to consciously purge himself of the deceitfulness of riches to be able to seek God enough to become rich in faith.

This observation is in tandem with the Lord's remark about the Laodicean Church that prided herself in material riches but was spiritually wretched.

“17 Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.” (Rev 3:17)

Godliness with contentment is highly profitable

“6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. (1Tim 6:6-8)

Just like the Lord Jesus, Paul taught that we should learn to be content once we are able to meet the basic necessities of life because our wants can never be adequately satisfied. Why? This approach saves us from the distractions associated with the insatiable pursuit of earthly wealth which prevent us from loving and serving God with undivided attention. The reader will agree that the prosperity gospel actually runs afoul of this wise instruction because it actually teaches the adherent to pursue accumulation of worldly wealth.

The love of money is the root of all evil

“9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” (1Tim 6:9-10)

Although, the statement “the love of money is the root of all evil” cannot be taken literally because there are several vices such as destructive anger, pride, uncommercialized sexual promiscuity, rumor mongering etc. that may not be necessarily related to the love of money, the reader will agree that there are too many vices that are directly or indirectly related to the love of money. Such vices include prostitution, wars, armed robbery, financial corruption in all its ramifications, unethical professional practices, human trafficking, hard drug peddling etc.

The LOVE OF MONEY is the real problem and not money in itself because the possession of a reasonable amount of money is necessary to live a decent life.

We must be wary of the danger inherent in unbridled desire for wealth as it displaces the love and fear of God from the human heart making it prone to all kinds of temptations that could ensnare it and eventually destroy the person.

Store up treasures in heaven with earthly wealth

“17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” (1Tim 6:17-19)

Paul taught that it is not wrong to be wealthy but those who have been so endowed should learn not to set their hearts on earthly riches because of its uncertainty. Rather, a wealthy Christian should trust in the giver of riches (God) just like his brethren who are not materially rich. Above all, such a Christian should remember to store up treasure in heaven with his material wealth through charity.

The rich should avoid excesses

“29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on.....31And those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.” (1Cor 7:29,31)

“29 What I mean, my friends, is this: there is not much time left..... 31 those who deal in material goods, as though they were not fully occupied with them. For this world, as it is now, will not last much longer.” (1Cor 7:29,31; GNB)

Contrary to the practice of prosperity preachers who are in the habit of living ostentatiously in order to validate their message, Paul lived a very simple life and taught the church to also do the same. A wealthy Christian should be conscious of the fact that his wealth is entrusted to him by God. He is a custodian and not the owner. The onus is on such a person to avoid wasteful spending and manage the resources entrusted to him judiciously.

The benefits inherent in a simple lifestyle are tremendous. First, it saves one from unnecessary distractions so as to focus on the things that are truly important in life. Second, it prevents undue attraction of predators. Third, it helps to free up resources that can be deployed into charity.

The reader will agree with me that many prosperity preachers have created unnecessary encumbrance for themselves by reason of their flamboyant lifestyle. They can no longer freely mingle with the brethren they ought to minister to. Since they know they are prone to predatory attacks because of their lifestyle, they have to hire security guards for protection which further alienates them from the flock.

Ill-gotten wealth leads to sorrow and damnation

“1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. 4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.” (James 5:1-6)

The end of ill-gotten wealth is sorrow and eternal damnation unless the person involved repents. This kind of end is avoidable with contentment.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the Apostles were on the same page with Christ in regard to their teaching and attitude to money. Although only two of the Apostolic writers (Paul and James) wrote explicitly about money (riches), an objective Bible student would admit that none of the writers, in general, laid undue emphasis on material wealth accumulation. They unanimously warned against the dangers inherent in greed and covetousness. They all rated material blessing lower than spiritual blessing in their writings. Their focus was primarily on the realities the death and resurrection of Christ bestowed on us, which are our real treasures.

Unfortunately, the prosperity gospel preachers rarely talk about the treasures we have in Christ. They would rather teach that material gain is tantamount to godliness. This wrong emphasis has continued for about 70 years with its attendant adverse consequences on the course of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Should we allow it to continue?

Part V

Does God give material Blessings?

Chapter 18

What Exactly did Christ Promise?

Someone may ask, “Are you saying God does not bless his children with material things?” No! Not at all! The converse is the truth. Our argument is that Jesus didn’t come to the world to die to give us material wealth. He came primarily to settle the sin question and give ETERNAL LIFE to all who choose to believe in him.

God has been blessing people materially since the creation of the world. He gave Adam the garden of Eden without his asking. He didn’t need to send Jesus to the world to die so as to give us earthly wealth. It is totally wrong for anyone to teach or insinuate such a thing.

“31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:31-32)

We see in the above Bible passage that Paul says God is able to give us all things with Christ. If word usage means anything, the phrase “with him” in this Bible passage indicates that God gives us other things in addition to Christ as against the blessings of the atonement of Christ like redemption, justification, adoption etc. that are given to us “in Christ”.

“3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good

pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." (Eph 1:3-14)

We see that the phrase "in Christ" and its variants "in him" and in whom" were used at least seven times to depict the blessings inherent in the atonement in the above Bible passage. Not for once do we find any material blessing associated with this phrase, "in Christ", throughout the scriptures of the New Testament. This simply means that these spiritual blessings are given to us as a result of Christ's death while the temporal blessings are given because of God's generosity. Can we see the difference now?

It is important to state clearly at this point that there are no explicit scriptural references to support the notion that abundant material wealth will be given to the Christian by reason of his faith. What is incontrovertible is that God cares for his children. What exactly does God promise in regard to material blessings for his children? He promised supply of needs and not supply of wants!

"25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which

today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Mat 6:25-34)

In the above Bible passage, Jesus told his disciples of the necessity to trust God to meet their needs and not be anxious like the Gentiles who do not know God. He cited examples of how God takes care of the birds and flowers of the field who are far less valuable than them. In verse 31, He specifically told them not to be anxious for WHAT TO EAT, WHAT TO DRINK AND THE CLOTHE TO WEAR. He then proceeded in verse 32 to instruct them to rather make seeking the kingdom of God their lives’ priority with the promise that “all these things” would be added to them.

It is not uncommon for many prosperity preachers and Christians, in general, to misquote the phrase “all these things” as “all other things.” By this, they inadvertently misinterpret this statement of Jesus to mean that God would add abundance of material blessings to anyone who makes the kingdom of God his priority. Is this truly what Jesus meant? No! Not at all. Jesus didn’t say “all other things” would be added to a diligent seeker of the kingdom. Rather, he said “all these things”, that is, the food, drink, and raiment he mentioned in the previous verse. What can we infer from this? Jesus did not promise us automatic wealth accumulation as a reward of seeking His kingdom. He promised He would meet our basic necessities as represented by food, drink, and clothing. Someone may further ask, “Are there other scriptural references to support this assertion? Yes, there are!

We see Paul in his first letter to Timothy corroborate the words of our Lord Jesus Christ on the need for Christians to be contented once their basic needs have been met because of the deceitfulness of earthly riches.

“6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry

nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” (1Tim 6:6-10)

Again, we see the apostle Paul made an affirmative statement to the Philippians that God would reward them by supplying their NEED FOR MEETING HIS OWN NEED. Notice that the Bible verse below never said wants.

“19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Philip 4:19)

So, we see that the abundant life in Christ is not about abundance of material possession but the possession of Eternal Life and its manifold expression, the very life of Christ in us that fills the insatiable void in the human heart.

Let the reader note that nothing in all we have said so far implies that a Christian cannot be materially rich. Our emphasis is on the fact that material possession is not what Jesus came to give those who believe in him. He came to give us ETERNAL LIFE. We must settle it that any supposed Gospel message that emphasizes something else above eternal life or incorporates material wealth into the atonement of Christ is false. It can never be the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why? There is absolutely nothing else in this life that cannot be obtained without Christ, except ETERNAL LIFE.

For a detailed account of how to prosper financially in a godly way, get a copy of the book “How people prosper financially: A Christian perspective on financial prosperity”.

Part VI

Gospel Financing

Chapter 19

How to Finance the Gospel

Someone may ask, “How do we finance the Gospel if the prescription of the prosperity gospel is incorrect?” We are thankful that Christ and His apostles did not leave us without light in this regard.

The starting point in addressing this subject is to first define what Gospel financing involves. Gospel financing essentially entails the monetary cost for the welfare of ministers of the Gospel, the logistics used for Gospel ministration, and the care of the needy (charity).

As far as the Bible is concerned, the only acceptable way to finance the Gospel is by the freewill (voluntary) donations of the brethren.

“9 Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, 10 nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.” (Mat 10:7-8)

The Lord Jesus made it abundantly clear that ministers of the Gospel are to be catered for by freewill giving. They are not to charge for their ministration under any circumstance. They must give freely because they received the grace of God freely.

“7 And as you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ 8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” (Mat 10:7-8)

We see this played out in the earthly ministry of Christ. It seems He actually took it to “the extreme.” Despite the huge crowd that followed Him, He never for once demanded any form of financial support from them, be it freewill giving or the obligatory monetary tithe. His ministry was funded largely by anonymous donors. The few women on record who ministered to Him did so freely.

“1 Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, 2 and certain

women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities— Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, 3 and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance.” (Luke 8:1-3)

The apostles of Christ also followed this example. They did not demand any form of obligatory giving from anyone. The apostle Paul, in particular, seemed to have also taken it to “the extreme” like the Lord Jesus. He refused to ask any of the churches he pioneered for financial support despite that he had the right to do so. He left it to their discretion to give to him as they willed. In fact, in the region of Achaia (present-day Greece), he rejected any form of personal financial support from the churches he established there because there were some false teachers who extorted money from them. He did this so as to prevent these false teachers from claiming that he was also in the habit of extorting the churches like they did. How easy is it to do this?

“13 For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!14 Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. 15 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.” (2Cor 12:13-15)

“8 I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. 9 And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. 10 As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. 11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! 12 But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. (2Cor 11:8-12)

Paul made do with voluntary donations from churches in other regions. Whenever such was not forthcoming, he resorted to tent making. On some occasions, he refused to depend on the Gentile

churches of some particular regions for financial support in order to show them an example of how to live the Christian life!

“2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. 3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.” (Act 18:2-3)

“9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.” (1Thess 2:9)

“7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 8 nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, 9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.” (2Thess 3:7-9)

“33 I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. 34 Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. 35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Act 20:34-35)

On the few occasions the apostles raised funds, they were handled in a very transparent manner. They encouraged the people to give freely without compulsion as opposed to the tricking and cajoling tactics the prosperity preachers employ.

“On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” (1Cor 16:2)

“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2Cor 9:7)

It is not uncommon for some people, in defense of obligatory monetary tithe, to retort, “The early Church gave 100%. Why are you

saying people should not give 10%? If you insist that we must adhere to the New Testament instruction, then let's start giving 100% of our income to the Church to see how easy it is."

Anyone who is familiar with the portion of the Scripture being referenced here would easily point out that this argument is on a false premise. Why? The apostles of Christ never for once demanded anyone to give 100% of their income to the Church. No one actually gave a 100% of their regular income in that biblical account. What happened then? In the early days of the Jerusalem church, several people sold their landed properties and brought the proceeds to the Church for distribution among the brethren as they were moved. This was probably because of the persecution and deprivation some of the brethren went through as a result of their new-found faith. What they gave was not 100% of their regular income as some of our brethren often claim. It was money obtained from the sales of landed properties.

"33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. 36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." (Act 4:34-37)

After this incidence, which appeared like a crisis situation, it seems the Jerusalem church continued normally until another crisis, engendered by famine, occurred. On that occasion, the apostle Paul came to the rescue of the Jerusalem church by raising funds from the Gentile churches in Macedonian and Achaia.

"26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem." (Rom 15:26)

"1 Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; 2 for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians,

that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. 3 Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready.” (2Cor 9:1-3)

From the foregoing, it is clear the Gospel was strictly financed by the voluntary contributions of the brethren at the beginning. Christ and His Apostles were careful not to coerce anyone to give or constitute themselves as a burden to the brethren. Can we now appreciate the stark contrasts between the sacrifice the early church leadership made and the entitlement mentality of the prosperity gospel preachers?

Some people have defended the obligatory tithe and the questionable ways the prosperity preachers raise funds on the ground that it would be difficult to make people give without these practices.

I believe this defense is baseless for three major reasons. First, the Gospel was largely financed for the first 7 centuries AD, at least, without obligatory monetary tithe. Second, there are several secular nongovernmental organizations that raise large sums of money annually from freewill donations of both Christians and non-Christians without any form of manipulation. This fact attests to the general philanthropic nature of man. We only need to present our cause in a sincere and convincing manner to the brethren, they will give. Third, it is unacceptable to continue to use deception to obtain money from people for the advancement of the Gospel.

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom 6:1)

The major reason why it is impracticable for many to teach grace giving as opposed to obligatory giving is the personalization of the local church and her instruments of governance. Whereas the local church is meant to be a community of brethren where there is mutual accountability, what we find mostly in Pentecostalism today is an array of private enterprises dotting the Christendom landscape as churches. These denominations are mostly owned by individuals. They do not belong to the worshipers. It will be practically impossible for the owners of these private enterprises, daubed churches, to convince anyone to give freely without threat or trickery as the Scripture enjoins. No rational man would ordinarily do such.

The only biblical solution, in my view, is to go back to the biblical

pattern of the local church and teach the brethren the biblical way to give.

It may not be wrong to teach people to give in a disciplined and consistent manner to support the local church so long as it is freely done. We could encourage the brethren to choose a certain proportion of their income they truly know they could afford and give regularly to support the furtherance of the Gospel like Paul taught the Corinthian church to do in regard to the appeal fund for the Jerusalem church. However, to make this a legalistic percentage that must be given by all is inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the New Testament.

There is GRACE FOR GIVING, according to the Bible, which the modern Church neither knows nor teaches. The time is now to revert to the right way.

Chapter 20

Gospel Financing: How Well Have We Done?

In the last chapter we discussed how the gospel is supposed to be financed and mentioned that gospel financing basically entails the monetary cost of the welfare of ministers of the gospel, the logistics required for gospel ministration, and the care of the needy (charity). I believe it is important for us to examine how well we have done in each of these key areas with the searchlight of the Scripture.

Do ministers of the gospel deserve to be supported by the people they minister to? Yes, they do. The Scripture says those who preach the gospel are to live by the gospel just like those who minister at the altar in the Old Testament lived by the altar.

“13 Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.” (1Cor 9:13-14; ESV)

“Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.” (Gal 6:6; ESV)

This shouldn't be considered extraordinary because every worker gets his daily sustenance from his work. Since ministers are workers in the household of God, they should also be sustained by the house. What applies to secular workers should also apply to them. The time ministers use in traveling, studying, praying, counseling, preaching, and teaching is time they ordinarily could deploy in other productive engagements with reasonable financial reward. So, they deserve to be adequately compensated so that the ministry of the gospel would not suffer.

How is this supposed to be done? As previously stated, I believe any local assembly that is paying economically realistic salaries regularly to her ministers from the financial contributions of her members has

fulfilled this sacred obligation to a reasonable extent.

However, an objective observer cannot but admit that the balance of ministerial compensation in the modern time is heavily tilted to a small proportion of ministers at the upper echelon of the church ministerial hierarchy, especially in the Prosperity-Pentecostal circle. Since the prosperity theology teaches that the Christian needs to sow monetary seeds into the life and ministry of an anointed man of God in order to prosper financially, a vast number of Pentecostals now prefer to donate their money to ministers who claim they have anointing for wealth hoping that this action of theirs would make them wealthy.

Many of the leaders tend to amass wealth to themselves and use it lavishly to validate their message. The gap between the economic condition of the heads and a few people at the top of these organizations and their ministerial subordinates is often too wide to be considered acceptable in the house of God. While the leaders live in opulence, many of their pastoral associates struggle to make ends meet.

Also, missionary organizations that are not associated with church denominations are being starved of funds because their ministers usually do not lay claim to the possession of anointing to make people wealthy. While the popular urban prosperity preachers and televangelists are living in opulence, the missionaries on the field who are attempting to reach the unreached are being starved of funds. Church members are taught to do all their financial giving to their denominations. It is now like a sacrilege for Christian to give to ministries or ministers that are not affiliated to their denominations except those who claim they have anointing to make people wealthy.

While the scripture instructs the brethren to take care of the financial needs of the ministers of the gospel, we must bear in mind that it does not in any way condone a situation whereby ministers of the gospel take undue advantage of the brethren and live larger than life with money sacrificially donated by the people of God as we are now witnessing in the Pentecostal circle. It may interest the reader that the apostles of Christ also contented with this type of behavior in their time and warned the brethren to be wary of such imposters.

“12 And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do.

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.” (2Cor 11:12-15; ESV)

“17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.” (Phil 3:17-19; ESV)

“2 Many people will follow their immoral ways, and because of them the way of truth will be maligned. 3 In their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words. The ancient verdict against them is still in force, and their destruction is not delayed.” (2Pet 2:2-3)

In regard to the cost of logistics for gospel ministration, the modern church has complicated the issued far beyond the intent of the Scripture. Whereas the Bible prescribes evangelism, plain scriptural teaching, fellowship and prayer for church growth, Pentecostal ministries are in the habit of organizing various expensive programs that add little or no value to the spiritual wellbeing of the brethren in the real sense of the word.

“42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” (Act 2:42-43; ESV)

“As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2Tim 4:5; ESV)

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” (1Tim 4:13)

Such programs include musical concerts, various types of conferences and anniversaries that feature popular local and foreign guest artiste and speakers with expensive taste who must be lodged in luxury hotels and given huge honorariums. This is in spite of the fact that there could be seasoned brethren in the local assemblies who could

do better than some of the invited guests but they won't be used for such duties because they are considered as nonconformists.

There is the scramble for hosting of programs on national and international electronic media networks, though a reasonable number of these programs are used to disseminate an adulterated version of the Gospel and fundraising activities. Certain critical questions come to mind in regard to these electronic media outreaches: Is every church ministry called to be on air? Considering the adulterated messages that are being pushed out by some of these ministers, is the output of these media programs in terms of the conversion of the unsaved and discipleship commensurate to the financial cost? Are there no effective alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the Great Commission than this method? It may not be wrong for a ministry to host a program on electronic media if it is not biting more than it can chew financially but all effort must be made to get value for the money spent in terms of the content being pushed out to the audience. Such content should be a fair representation of the gospel of Christ.

In addition, some of the leaders demand very costly ministerial paraphernalia such as private jets and exotic cars which are purchased and maintained with money donated by the members. Can we, in all honesty, say all these are required for the ministration and dissemination of the gospel? Is this not mere branding and ego trip?

Forgetting that the Church is not physical buildings but the people, many of the major Pentecostal denominations are now in a competition to build the largest auditorium in the world. They spend so much money building gigantic auditoriums calling them "church" forgetting that God does not dwell in houses built with human hands. The leadership, like Solomon of old, heap heavy burdens on the people with their incessant demands for monetary contributions for these projects even in the midst of pervasive poverty in Africa.

While it may not be wrong to have a modest and decent building for the assembly of the brethren, it becomes a source of concern when ministerial success is being defined by the size of the church building. It seems many can't get it that God is more interested in people than in physical buildings. The leadership continues to waste scarce resources on these unnecessary projects without due regard for what became of similar projects in the past. Why can't they ask what became of Solomon's numerous building projects and take a cue? What of the fate

of similar projects in modern history like the John Alexander Dowie's Zion Illinois City, the Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral and A. A. Allen's Miracle Valley?

In regard to the care of the needy, the modern church cannot be said to have done well because by the time the wealth that has been personally amassed by the leading prosperity preachers and the huge amount of money being wasted on unnecessary programs, logistics and buildings have been removed from the donations, little is left to take care of the needy. This may be why some of these denominations are now claiming churches are not charity organizations despite that they are registered as such.

Again, because the prosperity gospel teaches people to give to "the anointed" in order to prosper financially, extremely poor people in dire need of financial assistance are being deliberately neglected while there is a scramble to sow monetary seeds into the lives of the self-acclaimed prosperity anointing carriers to help people tap into such anointing. People go to the extent of donating large sums of money and costly gifts like brand new automobiles to these people who are already stupendously wealthy while poor people are being neglected.

There is a video clip in circulation on the internet of late (in 2018) in which an anonymous Nigerian called a popular American prosperity preacher to pledge the sum of one million US dollars (\$1,000, 000). To put it into proper perspective, he pledged the sum of three hundred and sixty-three million naira (₦ 363, 000, 000)! Isn't it surprising this caller couldn't find use for this huge amount of money in his country, Nigeria, that became the world capital of poverty early this year (2018) with 87 million people living on less than \$1.9 a day? This gives us an insight to the extent of damage the prosperity gospel has done to the minds of its adherents.

Yet, we see that the care of the poor and the needy took a prominent place in the early church as the few documented accounts of fundraising in the New Testament were primarily for the care of those who were in need (Acts 2:44-5, Acts 4:34-35, Rom 15:26, 2Cor 9:1-3). Also, to underscore the importance the early church attached to the care of the poor, when Peter, James, and John who were the chief men among the apostles interacted with Paul and Barnaba in the early days of their ministry, they emphasized the need for the duo to remember the poor (Gal 2:9-10).

The world population currently stands at about 7 billion but only a third of this is Christian. Among these, a substantial number are nominal Christians who have not really had an encounter with the Lord. This grim picture has remained so because the modern church has not been strategic about reaching the unreached. Whereas our Lord Jesus says we should go into all the world and make disciples of all, it seems we are content with building monuments to ourselves in form of world-class cathedrals and campgrounds. We do not want to spread across the earth as the Lord commanded. It is like the rebellion of Babel is being repeated unbeknownst to many.

“18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mat 28:18-20; ESV)

While the prosperity preachers would have us believe so much money is needed to disseminate the gospel, the pattern laid down by the apostles of Christ in the Bible shows otherwise. Though a reasonable amount of money is required to propagate the gospel, the amount of money that is currently being wasted on frivolities could have taken the gospel a lot farther than where we are if it has been used judiciously as prescribed by the Bible.

As we can see, it is obvious that the modern church has not done well in the three core areas of gospel financing. I believe one of the goals this ongoing Reformation effort is meant to achieve is to awaken the brethren to the fact that we have wasted too much money on frivolities and ego trip. Imagine the good that could be done with the huge resources we have hitherto wasted on a few entitled persons, unprofitable expensive programs and the ego massaging cathedrals we have built in terms of sponsoring missionaries to the unreached, and in the provision of potable water, medical clinics, schools, clothing, and food to the unreached in remote places who are generally deprived of these things! In what way could we truly demonstrate the love of God to these people if we are unable to do these things?

I believe the modern Church really needs to repent and change her ways. This current arrangement is simply not sustainable; a divine disruption is inevitable. The Tower of Babel will fall again like it

happened in the beginning.

Though the prosperity preachers are in the habit of saying wealth will be transferred from the people of the world to them, I believe this is a dream that won't happen. Yet, another type of wealth transfer will happen sooner than later. I believe a mighty shift will happen. Heaven's resource shall be taken from those who misapply it to build personal empires (things) and given to those who will use it to build God's temple (people) and sponsor the messengers of peace to the unreached. It shall be withdrawn from those who waste the commonwealth of the church on frivolities and be given to their neighbors who are better than them. It may take a while but it will happen. God will by His Spirit turn the hearts of His children from the hirelings to shepherds after his own heart.

2 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? 3 You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; 6 they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. 7 "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 8 As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, 9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 10 Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them." (Eze 34:1-

10; ESV)

As events continue to unfold, I believe more nondenominational missionary organizations shall begin to emerge to take the Gospel to the forgotten people. Whether we like to believe it or not, many children of God are beginning to see through the hypocrisy, craftiness, and excesses of these leaders. It is just a matter of time; the truth of God's word will spread round the globe and people will prefer to donate their money to ministries that will utilize it for the true Gospel of Christ.

Epilogue

Thanks be to God, the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who supplied the inspiration and strength to begin and complete this work.

The crux of this treatise is that Jesus did not die to give financial prosperity to man. Man had the ability to make money before He came to the world. The primary reason Jesus died for humanity is to save man from Sin. As it is written, "He shall save his people from sin." To teach that financial prosperity is in the atonement of Christ like the prosperity gospel preachers do is to do violence to the Gospel message.

Money is an invention of man. Jesus couldn't have left His throne in heaven to the earth and die to give money to man. Attempt to smuggle economic prosperity into the atonement of Christ has been fruitless. It is also an effort in futility to attempt to monopolize God's goodness like the Israelites of old did. People prosper economically by deliberately utilizing the resources God placed at their disposal judiciously. This is not a matter of religion; it is a matter of responsibility.

The state of affairs at the time the prosperity gospel began suggests that the theology started innocuously as a measure to correct the perceived anomaly engendered by the overstretch of the sovereignty of God in classical evangelicalism that tended towards fatalism in relation to poverty. However, the movement was hijacked at the early stage by overly ambitious charismatic men who saw it as a means of raising money from their unsuspecting followers to build private empires.

Also, the advent of the prosperity gospel coincided with the advent of the television. Several of the pioneers of the theology were under pressure to raise adequate funds for their television programs. In their scramble for funds, they began to twist the scriptures and made promises of "quick return on investment" to their followers to cajole them to give more than they would ordinarily have given.

The pattern laid down by the foremost prosperity preacher (Oral Roberts) which comprises of a ministry that is primarily controlled by

the family, acquisition of a large expanse of land, building of a private university, an ostentatious lifestyle that includes the use of private jet(s), use of exotic cars, living in a palatial home etc. has remained the same since inception. Some of the second-generation prosperity preachers have now surpassed their mentor in these things.

According to the 2018 Forbes list of richest preachers, 9 of them are Prosperity-Pentecostals while one (now late) was a non-Pentecostal evangelical. Among these, there are five Americans, four Nigerians and one Asian (Singaporean) but the richest of them is a Nigerian. This preacher (the richest) claimed God commissioned him to make His (God's) people rich in 1987 but 31 years after the said commission he is now the richest preacher in the world while his country became the world capital of extreme poverty in 2018 where an estimated 87 million people live in extreme poverty on less than \$1.9 a day. While the American and Asian rich preachers may be excused on pure economic ground, since they come from developed high-income countries, it is difficult to justify the ones from an underdeveloped poverty-ridden country like Nigeria.

Whereas some of these preachers boast publicly about their wealth, majority of their followers have not experienced the opulent life they are promised despite years of faithful "tapping" and "sowing." They still struggle to feed their families and pay their bills like non-adherents hoping against hope that their "breakthrough" would come someday. It is now evident that the prosperity gospel is a pseudo-economy like a Ponzi scheme primarily designed to benefit the people at the top of the pyramid, leaving the people at the bottom to suffer the loss.

Really, it would have been of no use following Christ and His apostles if the Gospel is about material wealth because scriptural and historical evidence both point to the fact that they were not materially rich during their ministerial lives.

The prosperity preachers seem to be unable to appreciate the fact that the riches of Christ is spiritual and not material. Contrary to the wealth and the life of pleasure the prosperity preachers promise, Christ and His Apostles taught that whoever follows Christ would have ETERNAL LIFE and the OFFENCE OF THE CROSS in reproach, hardship, opposition and persecution for the sake of the Gospel. They warned that such a person may need to pay the supreme sacrifice (death) for his faith.

When subjected to the scrutiny of the Scripture and empiricism as we have done, the prosperity gospel defies logic for three major reasons:

1. If God gives salvation, which is the most important thing in life, freely, it simply defies logic that He will ask us to pay for the mundane things of life.

"32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom 8:32)

2. If it is irrational for imperfect earthly fathers to ask their children to sow monetary seeds; pay tithes, dangerous offering, first-fruits, Shiloh offering, sacrificial offering; and make vows and pledges before they take care of their needs, why will our magnanimous Heavenly Father ask His children to pay for the necessities of life?

"7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Math 7:7-11)

Let the reader note that some of the above-stated conditions were required of the Israelite nation of old for her prosperity because a Master-servant relationship existed between God and the people under the Law. Under Grace, however, a Father-son relationship exists between God and the believer in Christ.

3. If God freely gives material things to the evil, the unthankful and those who do not believe in Him as the Bible and empirical evidence supports, why will He ask His children to pay through their noses for such things?

"35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and

evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." (Luke 6:35-36)

"45 That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Mat 5:45)

Going by Jesus' statement that we cannot serve God and Mammon, it is evident that the prosperity gospel is not the Gospel of Christ. It is "ANOTHER gospel" that is unknown to the Scripture. It is the gospel according to Mammon that presents money as the object of worship instead of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Mat 6:24).

Just like the Scripture says, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump," the theology that started innocuously about 70 years ago has become today a cancerous global phenomenon that has almost rendered the Gospel totally ineffectual because it has not been adequately challenged. We have to face the reality that the prosperity gospel has become a major distraction to the course of the Gospel and we may never really be able to completely appreciate the damage this pernicious theology has done on this side of eternity.

Too much time has been wasted already, there is no more time to sit on the fence. I believe the time is now ripe for us stand up, put on the amour of truth, join forces, and terminate this satanic orchestration against the glorious Gospel which is the only means by which man can be saved and preserved from eternal damnation.

I am not under any illusion that the issues that have been raised in this book will disappear so quickly from the body of Christ. It is, for this reason, I bow my knees before our gracious Heavenly Father, the one who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above what we could ever ask or think, that He would use this little fish and bread I am able to offer to feed multitudes. That He would grant wings to these words to fly across the globe to the nations. That this message may continue to ring to generations yet unborn. That through it the eyes of the blind may be opened and the captives may be set free.

I have delivered the message with all sense of urgency and

responsibility. I have sounded the alarm. I am now free from the burden of truth. May I find mercy on that day when I stand before the impartial judge of all to give an account of my stewardship. May the light of the glorious Gospel shine brighter than ever before. May the Lord bless the readers. Amen.

I remain His humble servant.

Abiodun Jemilohun

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