



## CYNICAL

### All the Church Wants is Money – Part 1

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Cynical is how we feel when we have been constantly exposed to people who are obviously only looking out for their self-interests. Truth be told, that's the way many feel about the church. That it's a racket – a money-making enterprise – a pyramid scheme that enriches those at the top at the expense of all those at the bottom. Sadly, that does represent a fair number of churches these days. But what we're not accustomed to hearing is honest, truth-telling messages as to why these things happen, how to discern when Scripture is being distorted and what God actually says about what should motivate our charitable giving. That's what this message sets out to do. I hope you can join us.

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“There are certain types of people you shouldn't trust. Like people who tell you that God told them to tell you to send them some money. You know the guys I mean. They get on television and say, 'God told me He wants to tell you to send me some money, say \$100, or even just \$10, if that's all you can afford, but in all honesty, I must point out that

God is less likely to give you some horrible disease if you are in the \$100 range.” - Dave Barry

*While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, “Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.” Luke 20.45-47*

“I wonder if followers of Jesus a hundred years from now, if Jesus has not returned, will look back at Christians in America today and wonder, ‘How could they worship, sing, study the Bible and live in such affluence, while billions of people were going to hell without even hearing how they could go to heaven, many of whom were living in impoverished, dire conditions on earth? They gathered for worship, they read the Bible, they sang the songs, they lived what they said were Christian lives. How could they keep prioritizing their comforts and preferences to the neglect of so many people in need?’ - David Platt

### ***1. THE FASTEST GROWING CHURCHES IN THE WORLD (and why it should cause us concern)***

“[The prosperity gospel is the] fast-growing theologically conservative movement frequently associated with Pentecostalism, evangelicalism and charismatic Christianity that emphasizes believers’ abilities to transcend poverty and/or illness through devotion and positive confession.”

- Religion and Public Life (Harvard Divinity School)

85% percent of Kenyan Pentecostals said "yes."  
90% of South African Pentecostals said "yes."  
95% of Nigerian Pentecostals said "yes." – Pew Research  
(2006)

"The number of American Protestants who claim to hear the prosperity gospel preached in their churches has risen from 38% to 52%." - Lifeway research (2017)

*For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths. 2 Timothy 4.3-4 (New Living Translation)*

❑ What is the Prosperity Gospel?

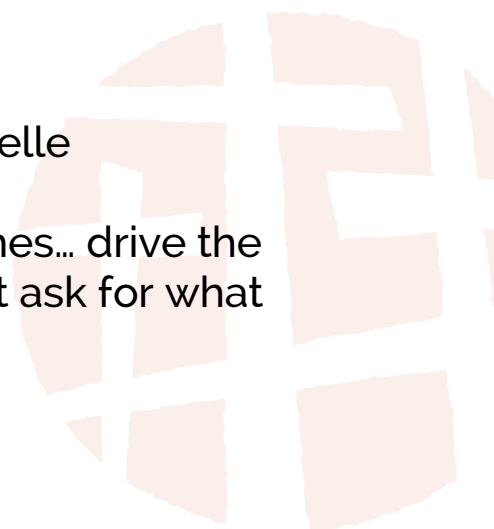
17% of American Christians identify explicitly with the movement, while 31% espouse the idea that "if you give your money to God, God will bless you with more money." And 61% agree with the more general idea that "God wants people to be prosperous." – Time magazine

**Give to Get or Name it and Claim it**

"Being poor is a sin." - Robert Tilton

"If we please God, we will be rich." - Jerry Savelle

"God wants his children to wear the best clothes... drive the best cars and have the best of everything; just ask for what we need." - Kenneth Hagin, Sr.



*If I have put my trust in money, if my happiness depends on wealth... it would mean that I denied the God of heaven. Job 31.24-25, 28 (Living Bible)*

❑ Who are they?

"The doctrine of prosperity is a gross example of the church's cultural accommodation to the wordily values of American materialism." - Dan McConnell, *The Promise of Health and Wealth*

"Someone will be watching this ministry on the air, who promised a large sum [of money] to God. And you act like you have given it, but you did not pay it. You are so close to lying to the Holy Ghost, that within days you will be dead unless you pay the price God said. And somebody here is getting the message. You are on the edge of lying to the Holy Ghost. Don't lie to the Holy Ghost. The prophet has spoken." - Oral Roberts, (August 7, 1992)

"You give \$1 for the Gospel's sake and \$100 belongs to you; give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000. I know that you can multiply, but I want you to see in black and white how tremendous the hundredfold return is... Give one house and receive hundred houses or one house worth one hundred times as much. Give one airplane and receive one hundred times the value of the airplanes. Give one car and the return would furnish you with a lifetime of cars." - Gloria Copeland, *God's Will is Prosperity*

*"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a*

*hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields - and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.” Mark 10.29-30*

A me-centered filter

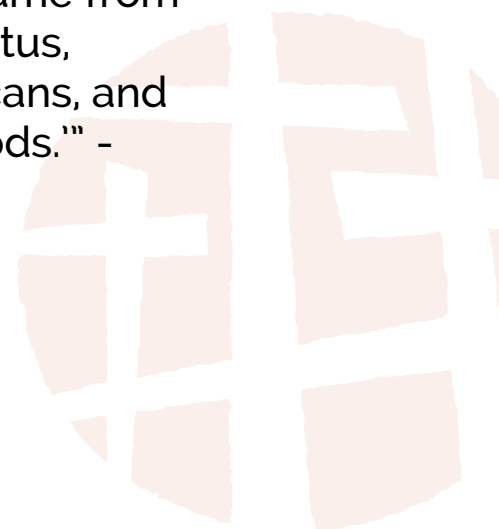
*All the believers were together and HAD EVERYTHING IN COMMON. They sold property and possessions TO GIVE TO ANYONE WHO HAD NEED. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They BROKE BREAD IN THEIR HOMES AND ATE TOGETHER with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2.44-47*

❑ It preys on the desperate

“People in America who embrace the prosperity gospel tend to be African Americans, evangelicals and those less educated.” – Time magazine

**Americans threw away over \$100 billion on lottery tickets in 2022.**

“...the highest rate of lottery gambling (61%) came from those in the lowest fifth of socioeconomic status, concluding that ‘males, blacks, Native Americans, and those who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods.’” - Gambling on the Lottery (2011)



## **2. HOW THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL DISTORTS SCRIPTURE**

*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*

*But woe unto you that are rich! For you have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! For you shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! For you shall mourn and weep. Luke 6.24-25*

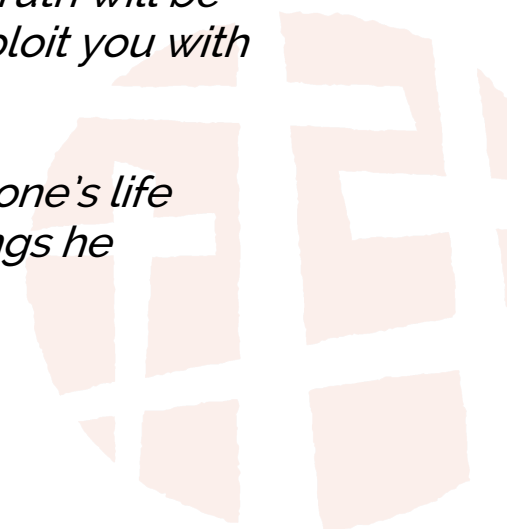
*I pray that you may prosper in all things. 3 John 2*

*...men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. 1 Timothy 6.5*

*So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires. Don't be greedy for the good things of this life, for that is idolatry. Colossians 3.5*

*...there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies... And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words. 2 Peter 2.1-3*

*Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses. Luke 12.15*



*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29.11*

*If someone showed up with a good smile and glib tongue and told lies from morning to night— 'I'll preach sermons that will tell you how you can get anything you want from God: More money, the best wines . . . you name it'— you'd hire him on the spot as your preacher! Micah 2.10-11  
(Message)*

### **3. THE TRUE MOTIVE FOR GIVING**

*...each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9.6-9*

Intentionally

Not Reluctantly

"3 out of 4 Christians say they cringe when the offering plate is passed." – George Barna

Cheerfully



## *DISCUSSION QUESTIONS*

1. What, if any, experiences have you had around prosperity gospel churches or preachers?
2. Pastor Keith talked about how the prosperity gospel has really taken root in Africa in some of the deepest pockets of poverty that exists in the world. It's also fairly well rooted throughout Latin America and in places like India. Why do you think the prosperity gospel seems to thrive in such desperate places? When so many never actually receive all the material benefits promised, why do they continue to hang on and attend such churches?
3. Pastor Keith discussed how easy it is to read Scripture from a me-oriented filter. Which basically means, whenever we read the Bible, we are constantly asking ourselves, "What does this verse mean to me?" But this a very problematic approach because it divorces Scripture from its original context, culture, setting and people. The first question we should be asking ourselves in Bible study is, "What did this verse mean to the original hearers?" Things like the 100-fold heresy (Mark 10.29-30) and the distortion of Jeremiah 29.11 are the direct result of reading these passages asking only what they mean to ourselves. Review these Scriptures and discuss what these passages meant to the original audience. Can you think of other Scriptures that we miss the meaning because we are too quick to apply it to ourselves without first discerning its original intent?



4. There are repeated warnings in Scripture about greed and money – far too many to cover in a single message like this. Take some time to search out some of these other Scriptures and share them with each other. With so many explicit warnings about wealth and the desire for wealth, how is it that prosperity preachers and churches circumvent these passages and justify the pursuit of wealth?

5. Paul addresses the proper motivations for giving in 2 Corinthians 9, “...*each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work*” 2 Corinthians 9.6-9. What stands out most to you about this verse? In what ways have you observed the truths you read about here? What would you say to encourage someone who wanted to begin a habit of giving but had fears or misgivings about it?

