

The perniciousness of the health/wealth/prosperity gospel.



The Lord Jesus Christ provides us Christians with the metanarrative of love in Matthew 22:37-40: Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38 "This is the first and great commandment. 39 "And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 40 "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

We are to love God and love others. In fact, as Jesus notes, it is the whole point of the Bible—if we miss this, we miss the whole point of the Bible and the spiritual life. If we miss this, we miss it all. Loving God and others is the metanarrative that Jesus left us. It is the theological and societal framework that Jesus provides for all of His followers.

While there are many distractions in our age that undermine the Christ-mandated metanarrative of love for God and all human beings, our enemies as well as our friends (Matt. 5:44-48), in each case something else becomes a metanarrative of life—like politics, social status, and Mammon (materialism, \$). It is self-evident and undeniable that adding "in the name of Jesus" (or "I have Bible doctrine") to one of these other metanarratives does not translate into loving God and loving all others with the love of Christ: e.g., 1 John 3:16, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

I contend that the health/wealth/prosperity gospel (HWPG) is detrimental to the believer's ability to be salt and light in his generation, undermines his capacity to love God with all his heart, soul, and mind, and undermines his ability to love other human beings with the love of Christ.

Consider history, although the HWPG is often viewed as a recent megachurch (market-place Christianity) aberration, it has been around for a long time. We see it in the exploitation of American Indians and African Blacks in antebellum America. The enormous "blessings" of free land and free human black capital were seen as signs from God that what Americans were doing was right. To their way of thinking, if God was not pleased with it, He would not be blessing America so mightily during this period. As a matter of fact, they thought they were building a bright "city upon a hill" as

righteous vessels in Manifest Destiny practicing capitalism (but it was an immoral form of capitalism in contrast to ordo/moral capitalism).

Why didn't most Bible-believing Christians condemn slavery with all of its dehumanizing brutality? It was because of the prosperity they were enjoying. To attack slavery was to attack not only the prosperity of America, it would also be an attack the very social structure of America. Many had no problem preaching against drinking and dancing and other amusements. But when it came to economics and structural sins like slavery, the message of white evangelicals took a bow to the large financial realities of the social context. Their desire for safety, security, and prosperity became their metanarrative. In sum, they saw their financial blessings as gifts from God who was pleased with their "blessed" lifestyle.

The HWPG is not limited to those who follow God for money, the same mindset can be seen in other movements which do not emphasize financial gain as such. It is found in many Bible movements in which God is pursued through programs that provide safety--by just applying certain passages. For example, if I just confess my sins, I am safe (prosperous) in God. If I just take in Bible doctrine daily, then God will bless me by giving me strength, maturity, and well-being. Is this not just another form of prosperity gospel? In every instance of HWPG, God is viewed instrumentally. God is not the object of a love that is higher than all other loves. God is just a Means to get these "blessings" (money or maturity). This is the constant charge of Satan, namely, that believers only love God because He gives them things (Job 1:9-10). The implication is that God is not inherently worth loving and worshipping as the highest Good, and that believers are no different from prostitutes who are into "love" only for the money.

The HWPG not only blinds one to travesties in society and to the Greatest Good in life, it destroys love for others as well. In the HWPG, I become the center of everything. Decisions are made to serve my needs. The purpose of life is interpreted as promoting my life. Dreams and aspirations that help me get ahead are pursued. I choose a church or campus fellowship based on what it will do for my needs. I read Scripture for what God will say to me for my life. Other people are just supporting actors in my personal story. God is also a supporting actor—He is the means by which I can achieve my goals. I am the hero of my story and I judge my relationships and my place in the world by how I am affected or by how I get what I want. What makes me happy becomes the guiding ethic and an insight into God's will for my life. I am the metanarrative! I am It! It is all about Me! It is not hard to see that such an "I attitude" resembles Satan and is totally antithetical to Jesus Christ and His metanarrative for our lives.