

The Hijacking of Christianity: The Prosperity Gospel is not new



What is the difference between a pagan who lives for the world (money, power, comfort, human approbation) and a Christian who lives for the same things in the world but with the backing, “in the name of Jesus”? Do they not seek the same things (health, wealth, power, and prosperity) even if in different contexts?

What does history tell us about the results of a Christianity that focuses on the “blessings” of this world, even if in the name of Jesus? Seems like the prosperity gospel has always been with us in one form or another. Let us consider a bit of "prosperity" history by noting (1) the marriage of early Christianity with pagan Rome under Constantine for political power and security (313), (2) the atrocious activities of the Crusaders under the banner of the Cross (1100-1300), (3) the chilling inquisitions in the name of Jesus Christ (1231-1834), (4) the brutal exploitation of colonialism under Christ’s Manifest Destiny (1400-1800), (5) racial slavery in antebellum America sanctioned by appeals to the Bible coupled with obvious financial gain for ‘God’s new nation, the city on a hill’ (1650-1861), (5) the racism in Jim Crow South, again with appeals to the Bible for blessings of status quo (1865-1960), (6) the support of Hitler, the man who was seen as a messiah who promised to return Germany to its former financial, military, and national greatness, (1930-1940), (7) consumer/prosperity Gospel of self-deification in the name of Jesus that provides prosperity of pumped-up psychological projections of wealth and good feelings (1950-2018), and (7) the Americanized political Christianity on the Right and the Left (1950-2018) as Christians contort themselves to excuse the immorality of their leaders because these

leaders promise to restore financial, social, and political greatness to their preferred social, economic, and political groups.

Doesn't all the aforementioned activity run counter to Christ's DAILY calling on our lives: Luke 9:23, "Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. 24 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."

To deny ourselves is to put God and others before ourselves. It is to live a life of love for fellow human beings. Can one love the things of this world and still love God (see 1 Jn 2:15)? Who did Jesus say were really blessed in Matthew 5:3-12, the rich, famous, healthy, and powerful? Are our minds filled with deep thoughts about the nature of God or with slogans designed to make us more healthy, wealthy, and wise? What are we really seeking in life? Stuff with His backing or Him as such? Who is the true God of our lives?

Consider the better way of Jesus. Jesus meets Peter, Andrew, James, and John and calls them to drop everything and follow Him immediately. Christ does not promise that He would enhance their fishing operations (\$), fulfill their desires, or make them healthy, wealthy, or wise. He does not promise that things would be easy or comfortable. He does not promise them wealth or political power, or that their marriages and families would be better. In fact, He promised persecution and martyrdom. What would cause them to leave everything and follow Him? Life in, with, before, and after God—love for God! Loving God and sacrificially loving all others, our friends as well as our enemies (Matt. 5:44-48). Indeed, the values He call us to exceed all the values that society holds dear.

Jesus always amazed those around Him. He was not like anyone else. He taught as one who had the authority and He did things that no one else was doing. He also bucked religious traditions and made the religious leaders very angry. He challenged all the forms of the prosperity gospel of His age. He messed with their way of life and their presumption that they, above all people, were the focus, and that God existed to bless them. In sum, He made it clear that God is not here for us. We are here for Him. We do not invite Him to come into our lives to give us the power to do and get what we want. We are invited into His life of loving God and loving all others as we partake of His matchless love and grace.

In His Grace,

Pastor Don