

DEBUNKING THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

There is a belief in our culture that many people are deceived by what is called the “prosperity gospel.” It is a false teaching that in essence says, "If I am a Christian, God promises to bless me with great health, wealth, and prosperity." This teaching is a great danger to those who believe it. What happens is people place their hope in what God gives even over and above God himself. The problem is God never promises a life of riches, comfort, and abundant prosperity, so when a person experiences suffering they feel as though God has lied to them.

Read 2 Timothy 3:12

Discuss: Why should followers of Jesus not expect that they will never experience struggle?

What is a false teacher?

Read 2 Peter 2:1-19

False teachers introduce heresy about God that sounds like the truth but is not completely true. (2 Pet. 2:1-4, Jude 4)

False teachers are motivated by financial gain, and they prey on the people who follow them. (2 Pet. 2:14-16, Jude 11, 1 Tim 6:9-10)

False teachers aim to please the ears of their listeners rather than share truths that may be hard to hear, yet are needed for freedom. (2 Pet. 2:17-20, 2 Tim 4:3-4)

Read 1 John 4:1

Discuss: Why it is important to recognize that not everyone who says they are speaking for God are true teachers?

What are some common false promises and what do they lead to?

The prosperity gospel promises entitlement to material and physical blessing. False teachers will take passages like Gen. 12, 15, and 17, which are about spiritual blessing, and say that they are about material blessing. This leads to people coming to God for what He can give them. (John 6:25-27) Scripture says that belief in Jesus means we receive the spirit and every spiritual blessing.

The prosperity gospel promises that the atonement of Jesus covers illness and poverty. False teachers will say that at the cross, Jesus died for our iniquities, sorrows, illnesses, sicknesses, and poverty. This leads to believing that true Christians should never be sick, or struggle financially. Scripture says that there are very godly “saved” people who get sick and live by humble means. Our freedom from sickness and death is in the New Heavens and New Earth.

The prosperity gospel promises that Christian giving leads to compensation from God. False teachers will use passages like 2 Cor. 9:6-9 to say that the more you give to God, the more He will give to you. For example, if I give \$10, He will give me \$1000. This leads to wrong motives in giving. Scripture says that we give with a cheerful heart believing that God will supply our needs.

The prosperity gospel promises that prayer/faith is a tool to force God to grant blessings. False teachers will use passages like James 4:2 or Matt. 21:21 to say if you have enough faith, God is bound to act on your behalf. Or if you can claim it before it happens, God is bound to give it to you. This leads to a wrong view of prayer and a misunderstanding of biblical

faith. Scripture says that we should pray for God's will to be done, and faith is reliance on what God has said, that we cannot see.

Discuss: How do these common promises lead to a "man-focused" gospel instead of a "Jesus-focused" gospel?

Building our hope on Christ and eternity

As followers of Jesus, we should see Him as our greatest blessing in this life. Our hope should not be to live for this life, but for the one to come. (Lamentations 3:24-26, Romans 8:16-18)

Personal Application

Consider if you have ever been exposed to the prosperity gospel, are there any common promises that you have believed that are not from God? How can you depend on Jesus to have less of a "man-focused" view of the gospel?