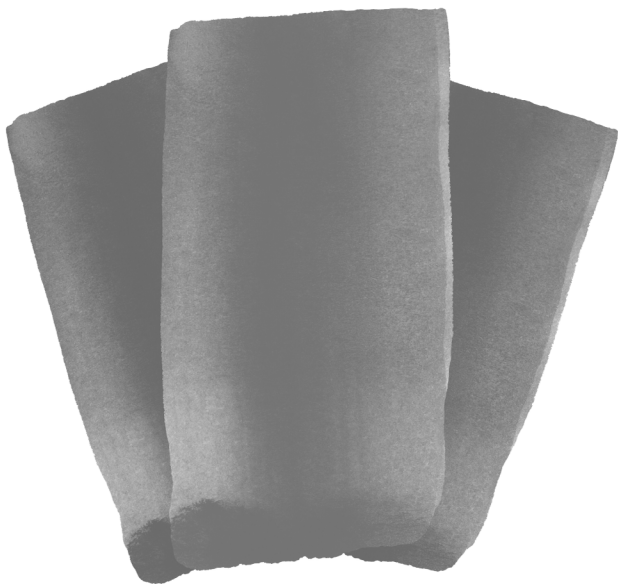


QUICK THEOLOGY

# What is the Prosperity Gospel?



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## Introduction

If you are new to Christianity, or even if you have been around Christianity for a while, you may be familiar with the phrase “prosperity gospel”. You might hear the word but not know exactly what it means... or how to identify it! But before we can address what prosperity gospel is, why it matters, and how it impacts you, we must first talk about the true gospel. You can’t know the false version unless you know what is true.

Put simply, the Greek word for gospel means “good news.” In Mark 1:15, Jesus says, “The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” Jesus’ use of the phrase “good news” here is taken from Isaiah 52:7-10, which says:

*“How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him who brings good news,  
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,*

*who publishes salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."  
The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;  
together they sing for joy;  
for eye to eye they see  
the return of the Lord to Zion.  
Break forth together into singing,  
you waste places of Jerusalem,  
for the Lord has comforted his people;  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.  
The Lord has bared his holy arm  
before the eyes of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God."*

This passage is what Jesus was referring to when He said, "Repent and believe the good news." So what is the good news? The good news is Jesus' perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection. It is the truth that He is both God and man. He is a perfect man so He can substitute for mankind and He is a perfect God with power over death. The gospel deals with our spiritual need—our separation from God—and the fact that Jesus came as the promised Messiah to make a way for us to be reconciled to God, for us to be in relationship with

Him, and for us to no longer be in opposition to Him. He fulfilled the sacrificial system as the perfect Passover lamb, who laid down His life willingly to make a way for us to be united with God.

This gospel saves us spiritually, but it also impacts us materially and physically. All throughout the Bible we read that those who walk in righteousness will be blessed. Deuteronomy discusses this at length, speaking about the way of life and the way of death. Those who aligned themselves with God in the Old Covenant system in Israel would experience the blessing of walking in the light. If they walked away from God and followed the patterns of the world, they would inherit the things of the world—death, destruction, and darkness. God has always offered blessing for the way of righteousness.





## The Old Covenant

In the Old Covenant salvation was by faith in God and the coming Messiah. Under the New Covenant in Christ, we look back and put our faith in the Messiah who has already come! In both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, people are saved by faith. In both cases we look to Jesus Christ, the Messiah. In Old Testament times people did not know who He would be; but we know Him! He has been fully revealed to us.

You may be wondering where the Bible says that those who walk in righteousness will be blessed. Luke 11:28 says, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." 1 Peter 1:14 says, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance." Obedience is a part of walking with God. Peter goes on to say that we need to be conformed to God and to His life. This results in His peace, His joy, and the righteousness given to us by Christ. 2 John 1:6 says, "And this is love, that we walk according to his



commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it." Here John talks about how we experience the depth of love in Christ by walking in His commandments. In Luke 14:27 Jesus says, "*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*" This verse is talking about the "cost of discipleship", a term coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor and martyr in World War II Germany. He wrote extensively about "cheap grace", a phrase he used to describe what happens we diminish the grace of God, making it seem as if there is no cost to following Him. There is a cost! But there is also a blessing to the obedience and sacrifice of following Jesus.

Blessing is a fact. But problems arise when we take the concept of blessing as described in the Bible and expand it, making the whole point of the gospel for us to experience these blessings. When we focus on the blessings rather than the One who blesses, we're close to prosperity gospel. Prosperity gospel uses the actual gospel as a means for personal gain. Other people call it "name it and claim it" theology or the Word of Faith movement. This theology teaches that, if you obey God correctly or believe Him enough, you will receive health, wealth, and/or abundance. For example: "If you sow a

seed of faith and give us some money, then God will bless what you have tithed to us and you will receive it back tenfold.” Prosperity gospel takes passages out of the Old Testament, twists them a little, and applies them to the modern day, saying, “If you will just plant this dollar, this \$10, this \$100, God will bless you.”

Sometimes prosperity gospel is about health. “If you only have enough faith, if you name it and claim it, then you will receive absolute healing.” But this “gospel” isn’t limited to health; it can be about anything—abundance, success in business, the house you want, or the car you want. Usually, these material things are framed as items that are necessary to advance God’s kingdom. We know that if you were to simply say “God told me I deserve a Lexus,” most people would give you the side-eye! But when it is framed as *God* needs that Lexus to do His kingdom work through you, you can say that God needs that Lexus to accomplish His kingdom work, you can make a persuasive case for why someone should give you the car!

Word of Faith teachers have claimed this many times. “God needs a private jet to reach the people that He wants to reach. “This is one of the biggest errors with the prosperity gospel. This view of God diminishes His role and elevates the needs of man. In the framework

of the prosperity gospel, God is actually *limited* to the material things a person wants.

The most visible forms of this teaching are found in the sermons of people like Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, and Kenneth Hagin, who was the founder of the Word of Faith Movement. Their teaching usually centers on health, wealth, and abundance in home, business, and world—supposedly for the purpose of advancing God’s kingdom. Notice, though, that His kingdom is often a material one. Though shrouded in spiritual language the focus is material, at least for the person at the top who is doing most of the “ministry.”