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The Case for Prosperity Theology

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I

BIBLICAL TEACHING ON PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

The Conception of Prosperity Theology

Generally speaking, prosperity means a successful, flourishing, or thriving condition, especially in financial respects.¹ Sigmund Mowinckel says that the blessing is first of all, life, health, and the productive state of wealth for man, animal, or the field. He continues to say that it is the basic power to sustain lives.² However, the blessing in the Bible has both physical and spiritual aspects.

Prosperity Theology in America shows a tendency to put more stress on material success. Prosperity Theology is sometimes called the Theology of Prosperity or the Gospel of Prosperity. People have a tendency to understand it as putting emphasis on material success, positive thinking and faith. Its leading advocates are Robert Schuller, Norman Vincent Peale, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Hagin, and E. W. Kenyon.

There are some who positively acknowledge Prosperity Theology, while others view it as Satanic and detest it. There may be various reasons for and backgrounds to these extremely opposed view-points. I want to start by looking at the different definitions of Prosperity Theology. Those who believe that God blesses his people—when they are trusting and obedient to him—accept Prosperity Theology positively. On the other hand, those who think it will ruin pure piety of believers—by adopting worldly business techniques and the theory of enterprise—reject it.

Old Testament Concept of Prosperity

In the Korean Revised Bible, there is no place in the Old Testament where ‘prosperity’ appears. The Hebrew verb *gadal* means ‘to grow’ or ‘to become big’, which implicitly contains the meaning of ‘prosperity’. It also contains the meaning of ‘to p. 27 become strong’ in the Aramaic language.³ The verb *gadal* contains the meaning of ‘prosperity’ when the work of a man becomes successful. An individual or a state has achieved prosperity when possessions, power, authority or glory are acquired.⁴ Prosperity is closely related to blessing and in the Old Testament blessing means success, the presence of God, and peace. This is the state of an individual or a country when it has received blessings.⁵

The concept of blessing in the Old Testament is more frequently expressed and more broadly applied physically and mentally than in the New Testament. This blessing was

¹ Stuart B. Flexner, *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, N.Y.: Random House 1987, p. 1553.

² Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the life of the Church*, tr. Wilson Chang, Seoul: The Christian Literature Society, 1980. p. 43.

³ Byung Hoon Kang, *Shema Dictionary*, Vol. 5, Seoul: Biblical Research, 1990, p. 409.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 410.

⁵ C. Westermann, p. 53.

given by God to God's chosen people Israel. We find the following concepts of prosperity in relation to the Old Testament blessings.

1. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Pentateuch

a. IN GENESIS

Genesis chapter [1-11](#) describes God's blessing upon all living creatures, including man, including the preservation of the species so that they may be fruitful and increase in number. From chapter [12](#) to [50](#) we find God's blessing upon a religious man and his family and a group of people.

- (1) God blessed all the creatures he had made ([1:20-22](#)).
- (2) God blessed man and woman who were created in his image ([1:27-28](#)).
- (3) God blessed Noah and his family ([9:1-3](#)).
- (4) God blessed Abraham, the father of faith ([12:1-3](#)).

b. IN DEUTERONOMY

The blessing for God's chosen people is recorded in Deuteronomy.

- (1) God blessed certain individuals, certain families, or certain groups ([11:26-29](#)).
- (2) God promised to bless his people specifically and practically when they followed his commands ([28:1-4](#)).

2. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Historical Books

The blessing in the historical books was given to God's chosen people and their country, Israel, as in Deuteronomy. We cannot but notice God's enormous blessing upon Solomon. Solomon was so exceptionally blessed because God was pleased with the request that Solomon made. ([1 Ki. 3:7-14](#)) We can relate Solomon's request to Jesus' New Testament teaching of [Matt. 6:33](#).

3. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Books of Psalms and Wisdom

a. IN JOB

What we have to notice in the book of Job is the suffering of a righteous man. Its theme is that God will ultimately bless the righteous man with prosperity when he trusts the Lord to the end and when he understands that the blessing is not his own but God's.

b. IN THE PSALMS

We find various types of blessings in the Psalms. [p. 28](#)

- (1) Blessing of prosperity ([1:1-3](#), [128:1-4](#)).
- (2) Blessing of the forgiveness of sins ([32:1-2](#), [103:3](#)).
- (3) Blessing of healing ([103:1-5](#)).

Such blessings are given to us (1) when we shun evil and delight in and meditate on God's Word ([1:1-2](#)); (2) when we keep his law ([119:1-3](#)); and (3) when we fear him ([115:12-13](#)).

c. IN PROVERBS

- (1) Blessing of wealth and crops ([3:9-10](#)).
- (2) Blessing of wisdom ([3:13-18](#)).

d. IN ECCLESIASTES

(1) Blessing of wealth and possessions ([5:18-20](#)).

As shown in the books of psalms and wisdom, God blesses his people with wealth and possessions when they trust and follow him.

4. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Books of Prophecy

a. IN ISAIAH

(1) Blessing of the Holy Spirit ([44:1-4](#), [60:1-3](#)).

(2) Blessing upon a man who keeps the Sabbath ([56:2-89](#)).

(3) Blessing comes when we pray and fast ([58:6-11](#)).

b. IN MALACHAI

(1) Blessing comes when we give tithes and offerings ([3:8-12](#)).

The Old Testament blessings depend completely on God. God grants his blessing to his people according to his will when they trust and follow him. His blessings are often shown as material blessings and the blessing of circumstances. And at the same time, the Old Testament speaks of the blessing of healing and spiritual blessings, in relation to the deliverance from slavery and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

New Testament Conception of Prosperity

The word 'prosperity' appears in the Greek Bible in terms of εὐδόω. It is a combination of the root ὁδός, meaning 'a way', and the prefix εὐ, meaning 'good'. It, therefore, means 'to lead on a good path', 'to guide well', 'to bring on to the right path'. The LXX takes it on to the sense of 'to bring to a good conclusion', to succeed'.⁶ In [Cor. 16:2](#), we find the phrase, 'in keeping with his income', which is related to prosperity in a material sense. The progressive tense used in this passage indicates the various circumstances of prosperity in each week. Also in 3 John v.2, we have a customary wish for health but the stress is on εὐοδοῦσθαι (to prosper) rather than ὑγιαίνειν (to be healthy),⁷ probably because this carries the thought that all health and success, both material and spiritual, depend on God,⁸ and that we may have confidence in him. On the other hand, in [2 Cor. 9:10](#), the word πληθύνω meaning 'to fill' or 'to be full' is used in the sense that God supplies and it becomes full.⁹

In the New Testament, God's blessing is deeply related to redemption through Jesus Christ and is [p. 29](#) emphasized in the spiritual sense. However, the material side of the blessing is never denied in the New Testament. Since the Old and the New Testament have complete unity and harmony, we must accept the fact that their ideas of blessings do not differ in essence but are the same. The material blessings of the Old Testament contain spiritual blessings at the same time and symbolize clearer blessings to come in the New Testament era. In teaching his people, God used something natural as a symbol for the spiritual blessing ([1 Cor. 15:16](#)). One of the most important examples of such symbolism can be found in the description of Canaan as the land flowing with milk and honey. Here Canaan symbolizes heaven where we believers will go after death. The New Testament,

⁶ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: 1992, p. 672.

⁷ Byung Hoon Kang, p. 410.

⁸ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, p. 673.

⁹ Byung Hoon Kang, p. 410.

on the other hand, does not ignore or deny material blessing ([Matt. 6:11, 24](#); [Tim. 4:4](#)) but emphasizes the spiritual blessing more ([2 Cor. 4:18](#); [Matt. 6:24, 33](#)).¹⁰

We notice that God's blessing in the Old Testament is changed into the blessing in Jesus Christ in the New Testament. We should relate the concept to the work of Jesus Christ. The New Testament emphasizes the spiritual side of prosperity and blessing in relation to blessing in the eternal world.

1. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Four Gospels

- a. Spiritual blessing ([Matt. 5:3-12](#)).
- b. Blessing in daily life ([6:25-33](#)).
- c. Blessing to be like children ([Mk. 10:15-16](#), cf. [Matt. 19:13-15](#); [Lk. 18:15-17](#)).
- d. Blessing of marriage ([In. 2:1-11](#)).
- e. Blessing of forgiveness ([Lk. 6:28, 23:34](#); [Matt. 6:12](#)).

2. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Pauline Epistles

- a. Spiritual blessing ([Eph. 1:3-5](#), cf. [1 Pet. 11-5](#)).
- b. Blessing in the present and in the future given to believers ([1 Cor. 3:21-23](#)).
- c. Material blessing ([2 Cor. 8:9-11](#)).
- d. Blessing of Abraham ([Gal. 3:9-14](#)).

When Paul speaks of the blessing of Abraham, he means not only spiritual blessing in Christ but also material blessing in the world.

3. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the General Epistles

a. IN JAMES

James speaks of suffering and blessing ([1:2-4](#)) and the blessing of patience in faith ([5:1](#)). We may receive suffering as a necessary step in the growth process of our faith, and furthermore as a blessing we must go through for the work of God.

b. THE BLESSING IN [3 JOHN 2](#)

There is disagreement on the interpretation of this verse for the following reasons: (1) it is a part of the apostle John's personal letter to Gaius, a faithful worker of the Lord, and thus it cannot be generally applied to all Christians and (2) it focuses too much on material prosperity. However, when we work out our concept of blessing, based on [Matt. 6:33](#), we will have a correct and biblical interpretation of this verse. p. 30

Nonetheless, the material side is never ignored. Paul said, in [2 Cor. 8:9](#), 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.' The theme of prosperity and blessing is connected to salvation¹¹ and the ultimate goal of prosperity is eternal life.¹² Therefore the Bible treats prosperity and blessing as a very important issue, not as a marginal issue which accidentally exists among other more major topics.

Christian Concept of Prosperity

¹⁰ Eui Hwan Kim, *The Biblical Blessings*, Seoul: Sung Kwang Moonwha, 1981, pp. 54-55.

¹¹ C. Westermann, p. 71.

¹² Yun Keun Lee, *The Theory of Blessing*, Seoul: Sheep Gate Pub. Co., 1990, pp. 20-21.

Generally, success means attaining some measure of money, fame, power, and self-fulfilment,¹³ attaining goals or high social position or wealth. But social standing or wealth cannot be a true measure of success since they deal with externals. From the Christian view-point, moreover, the attaining of wealth or high position by any means cannot be judged true success and the Bible describes such pursuits as the shortcut to destruction.¹⁴

Thinking in a Christian way about success leads us to conclude that the world's definition of success is inadequate. Having a measure of wealth, fame, power, self-fulfilment and the appearance of succeeding is not enough to be called success. These things may be noteworthy from a worldly perspective, but hardly transform someone into a success before God.¹⁵ In Solomon we find a perfect example of the fact that such material abundance is not enough. After attaining so much prosperity and success from a worldly perspective, he said it was meaningless and he told his people to fear God ([Eccl. 12:13](#)).

However, prosperity itself should not be misunderstood. The things which constitute the natural world were all prepared by God for the happiness of man. Prosperity and blessing from God were meant to lead our hearts to God but man has distorted them and turned them into a curse by his own stupidity.¹⁶ We can enjoy God's prosperity and blessing when we use what God has given us, in accordance with God's will.

Therefore, success may be viewed as our being the way God wants us to be¹⁷ or to achieving God's goal for us. Hence the Christian definition of success should be rooted ultimately in what pleases God. We may be considered a success by man but we could be declared a total failure by God. Therefore Christian life should be centred in Jesus Christ and our perspective on success must be in tune with his pleasure.¹⁸ For this purpose, we may voluntarily give up abundance and may discard our home, wealth, and comfort for the gospel.

The true meaning of prosperity is likely to be distorted when the out-come [p. 31](#) of prosperity or its state alone is emphasized. For this reason, the paths to prosperity should be given major consideration. Only when these paths are acceptable to God, can prosperity have some meaning and value.

II

THE CASE FOR PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

The Positive Side of the Prosperity Theology

William H. Cook says that Prosperity Theology has enabled us to find in the Bible what was not yet known. First of all, since man was created in God's image, he says that man was not created to fail but to succeed.¹⁹

He views religions as the summation of teachings to show man how to live. He also argues that in general religions were developed by leaders who could not give their

¹³ Denis Haack, *The Success Factor*, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989, p. 40.

¹⁴ Byung Hoon Kang, Vol 8, p. 15.

¹⁵ Denis Haack, pp. 48–49.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 411.

¹⁷ William H. Cook, *The Success, the Motivation, and the Bible*, Seoul: Jordan Pub. Co., 1984, p. 64.

¹⁸ Denis Haack, p. 84.

¹⁹ William H. Cook, pp. 33–35.

followers the power to live in accordance with their teachings. He asserts that Christianity does not only show the way to live but provides the relationship with the power to live the suggested life.²⁰ From this positive viewpoint, Prosperity Theology encourages Christians, through their personal relationship with God, to respond positively and actively to sufferings and hardships and to overcome them by the power and wisdom from God, instead of giving up on them. In general, this encouragement has promoted more active Christian life.

The positive and active thinking of Prosperity Theology has a very close relation to faith. From the example of the fall of Adam and Eve we find that it is very important to have a positive faith in God. Tempted by the serpent, Eve began to have negative thoughts of God and lost confidence in God. Faith is the foundation of positive thinking and the men of faith in the Bible provide theoretical grounds for it. Ministers like Norman Vincent Peale²¹ and Robert Schuller²² theorize about it, using the examples in the Bible. Some critics say that advocates of positive thinking emphasize material success only, but it is not always so.²³

Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, who is famous for his publications and lectures about active attitude and positive thinking, says 'when a person suffers self-dislike, his personality deteriorates as a result'.²⁴ He agrees with Jimmy Carter that the American nation has spiralled downward into self-doubt and low self-esteem and that the Americans can recover by positive attitude and faith.²⁵ Since churches or other organizations may be damaged by negative words,²⁶ it is very important also for the church to have positive thinking based on biblical teachings. Positive thinking enables us to accept suffering positively and to view it as a process of blessing. As long as positive thinking p. 32 is based on the theme 'No cross, no crown', it will be very beneficial to the believers.

Prosperity Theology has made a contribution to finding the positive and active side of faith and to encouraging Christians to live positively and actively in faith. It has great merit in that a person who suffers some pain and difficulties, being assured that God leads him in great love and mercy, can overcome the sufferings by positive faith in God and live with hope for the future.

Some connect the theory of visualization of David (Paul) Yonggi Cho and Robert Schuller to that of the New Age Movement.²⁷ The visualization of the New Age Movement is to believe that there are gods and that things will become as their hearts want. The visualization of positive thinking, however, is that we, as God's creatures, anticipate God's answer to our prayers—according to the Scripture, 'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see' ([Heb. 11:1](#)). In this sense we must clearly distinguish the one from the other. God's promise to Abraham that his offspring will be

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 105.

²¹ See Norman Vincent Peale, *The Positive Power of Jesus Christ*, Seoul: Voice Pub. Co., 1988.

²² Robert A. Schuller, *Just Because you are on a Roll doesn't Mean you are Going Downhill*, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1990, p. 45.

²³ Norman Vincent Peale, p. 49.

²⁴ Norman Vincent Peale, *This Incredible Century*, IL: Living Books, 1991, p. 312.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 287–288.

²⁶ Roger F. Cambell, *You Can Win*, MI: Kregel Pub., 1993, p. 48.

²⁷ Dave Hunt & T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1985, p. 8, 16.

like the stars ([Gen. 15:5](#)) is an example of anticipating what God will give before he actually gives it. God also planted great expectations in the heart of the Israelites by using the expression, 'a land flowing with milk and honey' when he led them to Canaan. Therefore we must distinguish the one type of visualization from the other and should accept what is biblical, while rejecting what is Satanic and non-biblical.

When we overly emphasize the negative side of prosperity theology, we may be in danger of neglecting some of the important teachings of the Bible. Although McConnell claims that the positive attitude and the positive confession of faith are used to obtain material wealth and magical power,²⁸ the Bible says that the attitude of positive faith and positive confession of faith in God are what God wants of us. Out of twelve spies sent to Canaan, ten were judged and killed by God because they made a negative report based on their own feeling and evaluation ([Deut. 13:27-29, 32-33](#)). Not only that; those who accepted their report also died in the wilderness.

The positive faith confession of Joshua and Caleb cannot be considered the means of obtaining material wealth and magical power. The Bible describes God as the one who creates praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel ([Isa. 57:29](#)). The Bible also says, 'From the fruit of his lips a man enjoys good things' ([Prov. 13:2](#)), and 'He who guards his lips guards his life' ([Prov. 13:3](#)). Therefore we should not limit the positive attitude and the positive confession of faith to the secular level, but should study it in relation to the spiritual growth of believers.

Of course, there is a danger that positive thinking and faith may slant toward spiritualism or psychology. Nonetheless, we should never denounce a person who is facing [p. 33](#) hardships for using psychological means when he clings to [Psalm 23](#), 'The Lord is my shepherd I shall not be in want' and tries to go through the dark valley of sufferings. We need to discern between good and evil by the life a person leads.

McConnell points out that Prosperity Theology, by overly stressing prosperity and healing, leads Christians to neglect the cross in their lives.²⁹ We should emphasize the cross in the life of each and every believer. However, we need to make a distinction between the cross and suffering and poverty itself, because the cross was not the end—it led to the resurrection. Hence the cross should be viewed leading to the blessing of resurrection. Without the hope of resurrection, the cross would be meaningless. ([1 Cor. 15:22-28](#)) McConnell speaks of Paul's suffering and poverty. Here Paul's suffering was for the sake of the Lord Jesus and Paul himself chose to be poor to help the needy and to devote himself to missionary work. By saying, 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain' ([1 Cor. 9:9](#)), Paul makes it clear that he gives up his lawful portion to save some ([1 Cor. 9:22](#)). This should be distinguished from the sufferings or poverty we face because we allow ourselves to be conformed to the world—failing to put on the full armour of God. We should humbly take the sufferings and poverty when its purpose is to save souls, to heal the brokenhearted, and to help people in need. On the other hand, however, we should strongly resist the suffering and poverty which comes from Satan and should rebuke and confront him—for Satan tries to weaken our faith and to destroy and kill us through such sufferings. This point is emphasized by Peter and James ([Jn. 10:10](#); [Jam. 4:7](#); [1Pet. 5:8](#)).

Negative side of Prosperity Theology

²⁸ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1992, p. 174; Dave Hunt & T. A. McMahon, p. 16.

²⁹ D. R. McConnell, p. 178.

The Bible speaks of God who fills those who seek him with good things, and at the same time, it speaks of the process of suffering and discipline to make us worthy of God's provision. Some, however, pursue the blessings alone, without thinking of suffering or discipline from God. This attitude may be denounced as shamanistic and it lacks a sense of ethics or morals and the fear of God. Prosperity theology, if it drifts away from the biblical teachings and if it pursues worldly prosperity, may also degenerate into a shamanistic cult.

David Yonggi Cho said that he got sick in his soul when he heard testimonies like: 'One day I gave so much money to this ministry and the next day I found a new job' or 'My boss gave me an increase in salary.' He went on to say that this cheapened the grace of God and that he thought it was a form of gambling.³⁰ Success is not self-centred. When a person sets up a goal for himself, he should make sure that the goal is not self-centred.³¹

Nonetheless, in America, they failed to teach Christians that prosperity should be used to build the p. 34 kingdom of God. Many Christians claim prosperity just to buy a luxury car, to have a big home and to live a sumptuous life.³² Not all Christians can be millionaires. God can make someone a millionaire if he wants to. But when God does so, he must have a plan and purpose for that person. If a Christian pursues nothing but money, he will become shamanistic; and if he uses the prosperity only for himself, it will become a dreadful curse to him.

The negative side of Prosperity Theology was openly and clearly exposed in the scandal of famous televangelists. The fall of Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swagart³³ may have shown a negative side of the Prosperity Theology. Jim Bakker had preached on prosperity in Christ for years but not on the godly life, and thus he lost the balance of faith, pursued the work of the flesh, and finally he committed sin.³⁴

If we fail to distinguish biblical prosperity from worldly prosperity, and if we take worldly standards for prosperity to church, then the congregations will be confused. God certainly wants to provide for the needs of his people. To say to the poor man that something is wrong with him or to rebuke the sick like the three friends of Job's is not the attitude we should take.

As for the ideas about prosperity, which are emphasized in relation to Prosperity Theology, we should be careful not to be connected to the spiritualism, Human Potential Movement, or the like as in the Napoleon Hill case.³⁵ If we use biblical words but fill the contents with philosophy or psychology, it will be like poison presented in a beautiful box.

Some secular scholars teach as if serving God were some kind of a business. They publish such books and mislead their readers. When the theories of spiritualism, politics, management, or marketing come into the church wrapped in biblical words, without going through biblical testing, the congregation will read God's commandments on one hand and focus on money and abundance on the other.

Prosperity Theology and Pentecostalism

³⁰ 'Cho's problem with Prosperity,' *Charisma & Christian Life*, March 1988, p. 70.

³¹ William H. Cook, p. 60.

³² 'Cho's problem with Prosperity,' p. 70.

³³ Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993, pp. 254–260.

³⁴ 'Cho's problem with Prosperity,' p. 70.

³⁵ Dave Hunt & T. A. McMahon, pp. 18–19.

There are some scholars who claim that the negative sides of the Prosperity Theology are deeply related to the negative sides of Pentecostalism. Harrell states that the doctrine of prosperity has come to be in the most important new idea of the charismatic revival.³⁶ Bruce Baron links the doctrines of healing, positive confession, and prosperity directly to the Pentecostal movement.³⁷ And McConnell says:

Whereas in its infancy, the Faith movement was known for its radical emphasis upon healing, today the Faith movement is one of the major sources of prosperity teaching among modern charismatics. Although they did not originate the teaching and are by no means the only ones to propagate it, the Faith teachers have with typical abandon made the most outrageous p. 35 claims for the doctrine. Their promises of material prosperity and financial success are undoubtedly a major source of motivation for many to join their movement.³⁸

I do not deny that some Pentecostal/ Charismatic ministers caused some problems by preaching on and pursuing material prosperity and secular success. However, some negative things of different types can happen in any denomination to some degree. We see that some prosperity advocates have changed their ways. Benny Hinn once overly emphasized prosperity, but now he seeks God's forgiveness for this.³⁹ And he says that God showed him some things he had been wrong about—faith, confession and prosperity that were out of balance—and that he had stopped teaching such things and made it clear that he no longer believed them.⁴⁰

Despite this change, Hinn still emphasizes the positive side of Prosperity Theology. He said he had no doubt that God wants to bless his people and take care of our needs. Citing [Psalm 37:26](#), 'I've never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread', he states that God wants to bless his people⁴¹ and that healing is part of our inheritance as believers and it is a provision of God's covenant with us.⁴²

It is very wrong to think that Pentecostals seek nothing but prosperity and success. The early history of the Pentecostals in society was in reality a story of mutual rejection. The Pentecostals rejected society because they believed it to be corrupt, wicked, hostile, and hopelessly lost, while society rejected the Pentecostals because it believed them to be insanely fanatical, self-righteous, doctrinally in error, and emotionally unstable.⁴³

The early Pentecostal movement spread among the poor and lower classes.⁴⁴ In its process, financial success was pursued and there was a tendency to understand prosperity and success only in a material sense. Nevertheless, the Pentecostal movement does not always relate prosperity to financial achievements. In the early Pentecostal

³⁶ D. R. McConnell, p. 170.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 170–171.

³⁹ 'Benny Hinn Speaks Out,' *Charisma and Christian Life*, August 1993, p. 28.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴³ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, MI: William Eerdmans Pub., 1989, p. 185.

⁴⁴ Robert Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, MA: Hendrickson, 1992, pp. 238–240.

movement, holiness and sanctification were emphasized as much as power. According to the Statement of Fundamental Truth, which was written in the early days of the Pentecostal movement and had hardly been revised until 1969, sanctification is an act of separation from that which is evil, and of dedication to God and that is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵

Pentecostals are also concerned about social participation as well as the sanctification of individuals. In 'A Statement of Social Concern' of the Assemblies of God in America, they state, 'We pledge to exert our influence as Christian citizens to justifiable social action in areas of domestic relations, education, law enforcement, p. 36 employment, equal opportunity, and other beneficial matters.'⁴⁶

III CORRECT UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF PROSPERITY

Priorities in the Concept of Prosperity

David Yonggi Cho points out that American Theology stresses the blessing of the kingdom like a sugar-coated gospel but does not emphasize the importance of repentance and keeping God's commands in order to enjoy the blessing of the kingdom of God.⁴⁷

To be given a measure of wealth, fame, power, and self-fulfilment is to be given a gift to be used with great care for the glory of God. Jesus' stow of the talents ([Matt 25:14-30](#)) illustrates the proper approach to such stewardship. It also teaches that those who use their talents wisely can please their master.⁴⁸ The Bible says that God has plans to prosper us, not to harm us ([Jer. 29:11](#)). It is important for the minister to guide his congregation correctly so that the blessing of God will be a real blessing—not a curse. The ministers should maintain a good balance of biblical teachings and they should discipline themselves first by living in accordance with the Word.

The change of our conception about prosperity should start with getting our priorities right. Prosperity or success should never be put ahead of God. Satan tempted Jesus by such things, but Jesus rejected them and put God above everything else. Since prosperity and success follow those who serve God, any prosperity or success without God is nothing but a curse. Therefore a minister must lead his congregation to serve God correctly, to be open to God's blessing or prosperity and success, to have right priorities and to use the blessings wisely.

The second important issue about prosperity is that we should ascribe glory to the right person. God declares, 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine. ([Hag. 2:8](#))' God is the Creator and the source of all blessings. A minister, therefore, must teach his congregation lest they should take the blessing for granted or think that they have achieved it by themselves. Since the blessing is not ours, we should thank God for it and use wealth, fame and power for God's glory.

The third important issue about prosperity is that it should be considered in relation to American and European work ethics. From the 1600s Puritan writers had written many

⁴⁵ William W. Menzis, *Anointed to Serve*, MO: Gospel Pub., 1988, p. 388.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 395.

⁴⁷ 'Cho's problem with Prosperity,' p. 71.

⁴⁸ Denis Haack, p. 93.

books on work, success and their relation to the Christian life.⁴⁹ Ralph Waldo Trine spoke of the work ethic and the Puritan tradition of faith in God's provision:

God holds all things in His hands. His constant word is, My child, acknowledge Me in all your ways, and in the degree that you do this, in the degree that you live this, then what is Mine is yours. Jehovah-jireh,—the Lord will provide.⁵⁰ p. 37

He continued to say that this kind of understanding had an ethical demand.

All the time be faithful, absolutely faithful to the situation in which you are placed. If you are not faithful to it the chances are that it will not be the stepping-stone to something better, but something poorer ... Don't fold your hands and expect to see things drop into your lap, but set into operation the higher forces and then take hold of the first thing that offers itself. Do what your hands find to do, and do it well.⁵¹

According to Trine, the spirit of prosperity is to trust the provider, Jehovah-jireh, and to be faithful with one's task, doing one's best.

The Pastoral Life of the Minister

Satan, the enemy, tries to tempt ministers of God using wealth, fame, and seduction. The fall of the two former televangelists in America may be a perfect example. No one is completely on guard in this matter. Whoever is not alert can fall into similar danger. Thus ministers as church leaders must hold a sound biblical doctrine about prosperity.

First, a minister should always be humble, whether he is prosperous or not. The more God blesses him with grace, the more he should humble himself and give glory to God, striving to do the work that God has assigned to him.

Second, a minister should never neglect studying the Bible. Without the biblical understanding of prosperity, he is likely to mislead his people as well as himself. It is more desirable to study the Bible and pray then to insist on biased theological doctrines.

Third, a minister should be alert in prayer. Although he is well established theologically and theoretically regarding the issues of wealth, fame or seduction, he cannot always skilfully deal with them on his own. Thus he should pray to God that he might receive power from above and guide his people well.

Fourth, to live successfully in the world, a minister needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The most successful man on earth was Jesus and, at the same time, he was the most Spirit-filled man. The Bible describes Jesus as the most spiritual man from the very beginning of his public ministry.⁵² He knew about success better than anybody who ever lived on earth. He granted the motivation of success to people more than anybody ever did, and he made the fulness of the Spirit concrete.⁵³

Fifth, a minister should lead a godly life. While leading the congregation to an abundant life, he should control himself completely. Jesus sanctified himself till the last moment of his public ministry. He said, 'For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. ([Jn. 17:19](#))' The teaching given to the congregation about biblical success

⁴⁹ William DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1992, p. 165.

⁵⁰ Ralph Waldo Trine, *In Tune with Infinite*, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., p. 177.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 180, 183.

⁵² William H. Cook, p. 228.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 224.

and prosperity and how to manage it will be more effective if it is demonstrated through his own life than just taught theoretically.

Sixth, a minister should keep the balance of faith. The Bible does not cover only one topic. Since it speaks about God, man, degeneration, salvation, [p. 38](#) blessing, and so on, we should be very careful not to be biased toward one issue or the other. Either to overly emphasize material blessing or to totally reject it by emphasizing only spiritual blessing cannot be the right attitude toward God's blessing. It will be desirable for ministers to study the Bible carefully, to understand the current situation of their people, and to preach the gospel in a balanced way.

Although the Bible speaks about both the spiritual and the material sides of prosperity, it stresses that all things are in the hands of God alone. Therefore, pleasing God and focusing on Jesus should be the basis of Christian prosperity. No doubt the Christian church should reject a shamanistic attitude to worshipping material things. However, it should guide its congregation so that they will accept the biblical concept of prosperity and success with open minds and that they will grow in spirit and lead successful lives. For this purpose a minister should take very good care of his people like a good shepherd by controlling himself. This is not to say that he should be totally ascetic under compulsion. It should be his voluntary choice as a man of holy calling to remove any obstacles to the spiritual, abundant life of his congregation and to let them continuously grow in faith.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of prosperity is to glorify God and to help our neighbours. This is because all that we have has come from God.

Serious problems will rise when we become interested in the blessing itself, forgetting God, the source of all blessings. The Bible tells us to take interest in the poor and underprivileged, especially widows and orphans ([Ex. 22:22](#); [Deut. 10:18, 14:29](#); [Isa. 1:17; 10:2](#); [Jer. 22:3](#); [1 Cor. 7:8](#); [1 Tim. 5:3, 16](#); [James. 1:17](#)). This is what God asks of those who have received the blessing of prosperity.

Therefore the true purpose of prosperity is to share it with others, not to keep it to oneself ([Ac. 20:35](#); [2 Cor. 8:1-15](#)).

When we share the blessing with others, we

- (1) acknowledge that all our possessions belong to God ([1 Chron. 29:14](#)),
- (2) understand that what we do to our neighbours, we do to God ([Matt. 25:25](#); [Heb. 13:16](#)), and
- (3) trust God more than the materials by giving God what is God's ([Mal. 3:7-10](#)).

The Old Testament puts more stress on material prosperity, while the New Testament puts more stress on spiritual prosperity. However, they do not contradict each other, but are in harmony with each other, since all prosperity has the same purpose—to give glory to God. What we have to do with the two sides of prosperity is to make a good balance between them, to share them with others who are in need, and use them for God's glory. Prosperity should be used in such a manner as to express our love for God and for our neighbour. And I believe that in this way we practise [p. 39](#) the love of Jesus Christ manifested on the cross. Moreover, we should never forget that we must be faithful with our task and do our best in order to gain prosperity. That is because God blesses those who are faithful. When we correctly understand the meaning of prosperity and when we use it according to the biblical teachings, the purpose of the coming of the Lord will be fulfilled.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. ([Lk. 4:18-19](#))

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