

**CAUSES OF PROSPERITY PREACHING AMONG THE MINISTERS OF GOD IN
OUR CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

By

Ogueche Ambrose Obodoeze Ojiakor Ph.D

Department of Christian Religious Studies,
Faculty of Religion and Philosophy,
Taraba State University, Jalingo.

Kibikiwa Alphred

Department of Christian Religious Studies,
Faculty of Religion and Philosophy,
Taraba State University, Jalingo.

Vontih James Dona

Department of Christian Religious Studies
Faculty of Religion and Philosophy,
Taraba State University, Jalingo.

ABSTRACT

The study assesses the impact of prosperity gospel on mainline churches in Adamawa State. Prosperity gospel maintains that the redemption in Christ is also redemption from financial poverty. Therefore, for a Christian to be in poverty is to be outside of God intended will, that is the person is living a Satan defeated life. They emphasize wealth and success as the only genuine marks of faith. Therefore, this research work examined the causes of prosperity preaching among the ministers of God in our contemporary Nigerian Society The study found out that prosperity gospel has changed the mode of preaching in mainline denomination because some Pastors in the mainline denomination have started preaching prosperity gospel and that prosperity gospel is responsible for the indecent dressing in mainline denomination in Adamawa State. The researchers used qualitative design as their methodology. The study recommends that it is imperative for the traditional theology to form one strong and united body which will continue to stand against the manner in which prosperity gospel is explaining the message to our fellow Christians. It is important therefore that the gospel is preached in its context, explained well, and the application of the message is in line with the actual text. Let us stand for the truth as it is stipulated in the Bible which is the optimal of all doctrinal matters

Keywords: Prosperity, Gospel, Theology, Mainline, and Churches

Introduction

Prosperity preaching is becoming the order of the day in the Nigerian contemporary society. Today's Christianity is suffering from the invasion of a new gospel that lays emphasis on

economic prosperity. Prosperity gospel represents a rather controversial strand of Christianity, and it cannot be labeled or bound up in a single definition. It is transformative in nature, adapting to contexts and travelling through history (Niemandt, 2018). We need to address prosperity gospel here in Africa because it has replaced the true gospel of salvation with a kind of gospel that is no gospel at all. Everywhere, especially on radio and television almost all you hear is this message about how God in Christ wants us to be physically and materially prosperous. You hardly ever hear sermon about sin and repentance. So salvation has now become deliverance from sicknesses and poverty. This erroneous teaching is filling churches across the continent with people who had no desire for true biblical salvation or godliness.

Moreover, a look at their special program and outreaches organized in the church you will discovered that the emphasis is not on salvation, righteousness or kingdom of God, instead, banners, posters, handbills and radio jingles proclaim “Unceasing Showers of Blessing, Stupendous Breakthrough, Financial Breakthrough and Miracles among others”. This is the result of several ungodly philosophers and movement which have pervaded in the last few decades especially the evangelicals in Nigeria. A new gospel is being taught which ordinarily looks like the gospel handed over to believers by the Apostles, but in reality it is a man-made doctrine. This gospel of prosperity is a fabrication which appears to be modeled after the teaching of scripture, but is totally opposed to the true gospel (Got Question.Org, 2018).

Prosperity gospel appeals so much to the sick in the sense that God never created chaos, pain, suffering and death. This so called gospel is also appeals to the rich because it tells them that they will become richer, it also appeals to the poor because it promises them that they will become rich. Prosperity gospel is convenient for justifying the wealth of the Pastor who has become rich at the expense of his congregation (Coleman, 2015).

The material success of some prosperity gospel preachers has created a kind of ministerial jealousy in the mainline churches. Some pastors in the mainline churches tend to copy the prosperity preachers lifestyles thereby living their lives above their means, some have started placing serious financial burdens on their churches while some are beginning to overemphasize tithing, seed sowing, first fruit and quality offering. Instead of stressing the importance of wealth, the Bible warns against pursuing it. Believers, especially leaders in the church (1 Tim 3:3) are to

be free from the love of money. The irreconcilable contradiction between prosperity and the gospel of our lord Jesus Christ is best summed up in the word of Jesus in (Matt 6:24) “You cannot serve both God and money (Got Question.Org, 2018)

The great commission Jesus gave the Church is in (Matt 28:19-20) “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even the end of the age” (NKJV). The Christian is promised the riches of Christ, the gift of eternal life; and the assurance of glory in the internal presence of the living God. The gospel of Christ offers salvation from sin, not a platform for earthly prosperity. If riches were a reasonable goal for the godly, Jesus would have pursued it. Jesus was obedient to God yet, he was not materially rich and he suffered more than anybody, preferring instead to have no place to lay his head (Matt 8:20) teaching his disciples to do the same. It should also be remembered that the only disciple concerned with wealth was Judas Iscariot. Jesus said in (Matt 6:33) “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you” (NKJV). Jesus never assures his followers absolute material abundance.

Prosperity gospel maintains that the redemption in Christ Jesus is also redemption from financial poverty. It says that every Christian is called to be rich in money. A favorite scripture in this regard comes from Apostle Paul (2 Corinth 8:9) “for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich”(NKJV). Prosperity gospel implies that poverty is a sin. Poverty is defined as a state of existence in an amount that is too small. Therefore for a Christian to be in poverty is to be outside of God intended will, that is, the person is living a Satan-defeated life. They emphasize that wealth and success are the only genuine marks of faith when prosperity is lacking; the explanation given is failure to pay tithes to the church or linked to demonic forces, curses and witchcraft.

Prosperity preachers mislead Christians, when we look at the Bible we will discover that prosperity gospel deviate in several ways from the gospel preached by our Lord Jesus Christ and the early disciples. The Lord Jesus Christ and Apostle Paul in several passages of the New Testament spoke vehemently against covetousness and unbridled wealth acquisitions. Prosperity

gospel is therefore, an instrument that Satan has used to infiltrate most mainstream churches, it is full of damnable errors and heresies. It is on the basis of this that the study is undertaken to assess the causes of prosperity preaching among the ministers of God in our contemporary Nigerian society.

Concept of Prosperity Gospel

Prosperity preaching, sometime referred to as the prosperity gospel, the health and wealth gospel, the gospel of success, prosperity Christianity, the faith movement, name it, claim it, or the seed faith) is a religious belief among some Christians who hold that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for them, and that faith positive speech and donations to religious causes will increase one's material wealth (Cohen, 2009). According to Pelle (2008), prosperity gospel is a religious teaching that emphasizes that God desires material prosperity for those he favors. Spencer (2009) opines that prosperity gospel is the assumption that God wants us to be rich. He went further that the blessings of the gospel are a guarantee of material and financial blessing here and now. Oyedepo (2005) conceived prosperity gospel as state of no lack. To him prosperity is not just having money but, it is a state of well-being which one enters into through the covenant of abundance. Sabo (2006) asserted that prosperity gospel is a teaching that emphasizes that God wants the Christians to be wealthy; hence poverty is an indication of personal sin or lack of faith. Iversen (2011) is of the view that prosperity gospel is the believe that God wants Christian to be financially rich. Prosperity gospel refers to situations, persons and scenarios in which the gospel is preached in a fashion of material gain (Eric & Selaelo, 2014).

Historical Development of Prosperity Gospel

According to Rusell (2015) and Dave (2017) the modern prosperity gospel originated in the Unites States. Its roots go back to the "New Thought" movement of the 19th century. According to Bowler (2013) prosperity gospel was formed from the intersection of two (2) different ideologists, Pentecostalism and New Thought. However, it was during the healing revivals of the 1950s that prosperity theology first came to prominence in the United State, commentators have linked the origin to its theology to the new thought movement which began in the 19th century.

Prosperity gospel was revived after the Second World War with strong emphasis on faith and healing. This theology has over the years spread to most part of the world and is been propagated by high-net worth ministers (Chinwe, 2012). Its preachers have exported this deadly virus to around the world to places such as Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. The prosperity gospel has spread to other countries through books, conferences, social media, and televangelism. It continues to spread globally (Rusell, 2015).

Prosperity gospel made its way into Nigeria in the late 1970s. This was a period characterized by post-civil war deprivations and increase spiritual quest for salvation and solutions to social and educated elite, the economic crisis of mid 1980s which resulted in the retrenchment of workers, high unemployment, social disorganization and economic meltdown. These situations fuelled the quest for spiritual solutions to peoples many problems. This new churches were founded by individuals in the late 1970s and 1980s and are now witnessing a runaway expansion as they are opening branches in many different countries of the world (Allan 2000).

In Nigeria, these groups of new churches emerge since 1970s through Benson Idahosa, the late Archbishop of Church of God Mission International. Currently, its main promoters include: David Oyedepo (Bishop of Living Faith Church World Wide aka Winners Chapel) Enoch E. Adeboye (The General Overseer of Redeemed Christian Church of God) (RCCG). Chris Oyakhilome (Christ Embassy aka Believers Love World) Chris Okotie (Household of God Mission) Ayo Oritsejafor among others (Chinwe, 2012).

Theology of Prosperity Gospel

The Abrahamic Covenant is a Means of Material Entitlement: the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22) is one of the theological bases of the prosperity gospel. The prosperity theologians recognize much of the scripture as the record of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. In other words, the prosperity gospel teaches that the primary purpose of the Abrahamic covenant was for God to bless Abraham materially. Christians are Abraham's spiritual children and heirs to the blessings of faith. Since believers are now Abrahamic spiritual children, Christians have inherited these financial blessings.

Jesus Atonement Extends to the Sin of Material Poverty: Prosperity theologians claim that both physical healing and financial prosperity have been provided for in the atonement. A favorite scripture in this regard comes from Apostle Paul (2nd Corinthians 8:9) which reads “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that you through his poverty might become rich.” (Russell & David, 2010). This may be a misunderstanding of the scope of atonement on the part of the prosperity preachers.

Prayer as a Tool to Force God to Grand Prosperity: prosperity gospel preachers often note “we have not because we ask not...” (James 4:2 KJV). They encourage members to pray for personal success in all areas of life. Certainly all our request should be made known to God and prayer for personal blessing are not wrong. But, prosperity gospel preachers turn prayer into a tool which believers can use to force God to grant their desires. Curiously, prosperity preachers often ignore the second half of James teaching on prayer “...you ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions” (James 4:3). God does not answer selfish request that can not honor his name.

Positive Confession: A principal theme in the prosperity theology is the principle of positive confession. It is called ‘faith without doubt’ the need to confess positively that prayer had been answered. The emphasis on positive confession and the power of individual faith has gradually established itself with a separate identity within the Pentecostal and Charismatic circles resulting in the profound emphasis on the ability of the believing Christian to effect control over his own situation by the level of his own faith (Goka, 2017). It is claimed that all positive confession is based on scriptures and is ordained by God. The believer is therefore enjoined to say it with faith and believe that he has received whatever he has pronounced whether it has happened or not. This position stands on the name it, claim it, and have it principle (Adeleye, 2011).

Seed Sowing: A major theme in the prosperity theology is that of seed-of-faith (seed sowing). One major thing tied to all these terminologies, is giving more money to receive more wealth. The more you give the more you received. Adeleye (2011) observes that Oral Roberts is the father of seed-of-faith principle, whose teaching is based on a thought that everything God did started with the planting of seed, and that it is only what you give gets multiplied back to the

giver. On the other hand, if one was to give nothing and God decided to multiply it, it would still amount to nothing.

Health and Wealth: It is taught within Pentecostal circles that divine health and material prosperity are the rights and privileges of every believer who will appropriate enough faith to receive them (Goka, 2017). Health and wealth among the Prosperity preachers are bound up together in this teaching. To be prosperous, one is expected to give liberally and sacrificially towards the progress of the gospel, or plant seed money or seed of faith, as some may call it. In addition God's friends (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) are like him, are also rich. God is God of the rich and his closest friends are very wealthy. Therefore, if you become one of the closest friends of God, you become very rich (Adeboye, 1989).

The Hundredfold Return: A mouth-watering concept trending within the prosperity preachers, is the hundredfold return on the promise of Jesus to provide a hundredfold return to those who leave everything for the kingdom (Goka (2017). It was observed that Copeland's one hundredfold teaching is based on their literal interpretation of (Mark 10:29-30) and is a distortion of Christ's promise. In interpreting this scripture, Copeland ignores to mention the persecutions and warning in verse 25 (Adeleye, 2011).

Features of Prosperity Gospel Churches: Prosperity gospel has some certain general signs that are common to them. These include:

Testimony: This is a feature in which believers testify to the manifestation of God's power. During church services or in theological books, believers relate their stories of how God answered their prayers in various forms, through their encounter with the Holy Spirit. Some testify of being healed, finding a husband, and getting a better job, new houses and so on. These blessings are attributed to the fact that the prosperity preachers during previous services for a successful material and spiritual life for complying with the preachers call to sow a faithful seed (Moyo, 2012). These testimonies and many more, are meant to sensitize other congregants not to take the prosperity preachers lightly, as he or she is the true representative of God. These testimonies are in the form of success stories. They portray that giving as instructed by the man of God has enabled them to progress and become successful (Moyo, 2012).

Miraculous Healing: this also form an integral part of the prosperity gospel. It is believed that through the working of the Holy Spirit God reward the faithful with spiritual and physical healings. This form of healing encompasses all the miraculous healings from physical illness, spiritual attacks, social and political problems and economic empowerment through a spiritual provision of Jobs(Jenkins, 2006), among others. Most often members of this movement recount their healing experiences in gatherings to portray Christ as a savior who listens to the plight of the Faithfull.

Deliverance: Another feature that is interchangeably used with healing in the prosperity gospel churches is deliverance. In this case, unforeseen circumstances that tend to hinder one's progress in life are link to evil forces that can lead to deliverance. Explaining the concept of good and evil Christians are made to believe that God would deliver them from all terror and heal them of all diseases. Deliverance are based on the interpretation of the letter to Ephesians "for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, the power of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm" (Ephe. 6:12).

Prophecy: Another feature of prosperity gospel is prophecy, revelation and vision. The prophet sometimes addressed some of his audience directly saying that God will bring their suffering to an end, and reward their faithfulness with wealth, health and happiness (Asamoah, 2005). The major element of these prophecies is the claim that if the audience give their money to God by giving to the church, their prayer will be answered and that their financial problem will be solved. These prophecies tend to stimulate the minds of their hearers to give their money to the prophet or man of God with the intention of being rewarded by God for their faithfulness (Eric & Salaelo, 2014).

Faith: prosperity gospel portrays faith as a medium or heavenly force through which a believer can bring success into reality. This movement regards faith as the supernatural force which a believer can use to get whatever success they desire in their lives (Coleman, 2000). It is an instrument which believers can use for self-actualization or achieving their dreams.

Speaking in Tongues: Similar to public confession is the speaking in tongues as a sign of being baptized with the Holy Spirit. Congregants or faithful children of God speak in tongues during

church services. The act of speaking in tongues usually occurs in a prayer session during worship services. (Hogues, 2010).

Flamboyant and Extravagant Life of Prosperity Gospel Preachers: Another feature of prosperity gospel is the glamorous lifestyle of their preachers. The lifestyles of these prosperity gospel preachers are corrupt and lavish. These men of God amass riches at the expense of the masses. These preachers live a luxurious life amongst the people whose survival seems impossible due to poverty (Jenkins, 2006).

Selling Books: Prosperity gospel is also lucrative for selling books. The Christian books fill the market for example, Osteen Joel; *Your Best Life Now* and *7 steps to Living at Your Potential*, sold over a million copies. Others include Lindsay Gordon; *God's Master Key to Prosperity*, Roberts Oral; *God's Formula For Success and Prosperity*, Wilkinson Bruce and Kopp David; *The prayer of Jabez*, Ziglar Zig; *Breaking through to the Blessed Life*, See You at the Top, *Born to win*, *Find Your Success Code*, *Better than Good*, *Creating a Life*, and *You Can't Wait to Live*, among others.

Causes of Prosperity Preaching among Ministers of God

Several factors are responsible for the causes of prosperity preaching among the ministers of God to include:

Desire for Materialism: One of the factors that lure people to prosperity churches is materialism. Materialism and financial success is the main focus of the movement. To an average Christian, a believer is supposed to be successful. The success must be experienced in all aspect of life, but primarily, it must be associated with financial or material wealth. If individual is lacking in any of this, it shows that the Christian is still outside of God's covenant of grace (Gifford, 2006). The people who are most vulnerable to this half-truth deception, are the poor who are desperate to escape the ravages of poverty (Piper, 2007).

Unemployment: This is another responsible factor. The struggle against unemployment among Nigerian youths pushes many illiterate and graduate alike into the pastoral schools where after a short period of training, they are ordained ministers of God. This is why there is large number of acclaimed men/women of God who disguise themselves to dupe millions of people. Because of

this trend, it is difficult for people to differentiate between those who are genuinely called into the ministry, and those who due to lack of tangible thing to do, call themselves into the ministry, in order to earn a living. (Chinwe, 2012).

Health: Health related problem is also a responsible factor. In Nigeria the tendency to run to God for succor in times of need and insecurity is a known fact. These prosperity preachers claim to have answers to these ailments. They promise instant remedies to ailments especially physical problems. Prosperity gospel churches usually ascribe all ailments to evil spirit and devils. Therefore these spirits must be cast out through exorcism. This is because the evil spirits are generally responsible for body aches, pain, and childlessness and so on. Many sick Christians and non-Christian youths alike visit these acclaimed healers for the solution to their problems. The exorbitant conventional hospital bills in Nigeria make it difficult for the poor to afford their services. The sick therefore is only expected to have faith in God so as to claim his/her miracle (Ndiokwere, 1994).

State of the Mainline Churches: Another factor contributing to the infiltration of prosperity gospel was the state of the mainline churches. These churches were liberal, greedy, lukewarm and static in there preaching and liturgy. They were been undermined by critical reading of the Bible, the theory of Evolution, the social gospel and comparative religious studies which relativized Christianity (Hathaway, 1998). The youths out of frustration, join prosperity centers to have their emotions aroused, because in the old generation churches, it is believed that they cannot be on fire for God (Sabo, 2006).

Retrenchment or Loss of Income: Retrenchment, loss of income through fire disaster can also push an individual into the hands of these fraudulent men/women of God. Instead of being taught the way out of their predicament through wisdom and hard work, the retrenched or displaced are promised quick and easy parth to prosperity. These men employ biblical texts such as Matt. 11:28 “come unto me all who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest” to lure people into their ministry (Chinwe, 2012). Luring people to Christ in order to get rich is both deceitful and deadly.

Dressing: The modern preachers do not see anything wrong with ladies leaving their heads open when going into the church. Sisters make different hair styles on every Saturday preceding Sunday service. When one casts a glance at some of them, it looks as if some are in church for fashion parade or beauty contest. Probably to woo more members to their fold

Conclusion

In the light of the scripture, prosperity gospel is fundamentally flawed. It is a false gospel because of its faulty view of the relationship between God and Man. Simply put, if the prosperity gospel is true, grace is obsolete, God is irrelevant, and man is the measure of all things. Prosperity theology has been criticized by leaders from various Christian denominations, including within the mainline churches who maintain that it is irresponsible, promotes idolatry, and is contrary to the scripture. Secular observers have also criticized prosperity theology as exploitation of the poor.

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