

How to Spot the Prosperity Doctrine

A Tale of Two stories

Story #1: Kyle

Kyle was busy living his life trying to get ahead, struggling on how to make his life better. No matter how hard he tried, things weren't going well for Kyle as he found himself constantly falling short of his goals.

One day, he heard a message about how Jesus died for him, was incomplete and discontent without Kyle, and that if Kyle would only believe in Him, Jesus could help him achieve his dreams, remove his pain and that offers him a victorious Christian life, making him as healthy and wealthy as he was able to believe.

Kyle began to pray bold prayers, "sowed seeds" by giving large sums of money and did his best to obey God's commands. He viewed sickness as a set back and suffering as a sin, inhibiting him from his very best life that God had promised him. As Kyle experienced blessings in life, he viewed them as his just reward for his bold faith and obedience.

Story #2: Kylie

Kylie was also busy living her life trying to get ahead. Like Kyle, she struggled to achieve her goals, stay healthy and to be the best person she could be.

One day, Kylie heard a message about how Jesus lived a perfect life, submitted to a death He didn't deserve and was raised from the dead ascending to the very right hand of God. She discovered that God, who is holy, perfect and complete, sent His Son Jesus out of love for her, and in doing so glorified the Father displaying His great mercy to all humanity. Yet she also learned of her sin and how she had fallen short of God's perfection and needed Christ's redemption to save her.

Kylie repented of her sins, turned from her ambitions and goals, and submitted to the leadership of Jesus Christ, seeking to glorify Him in all she did. Every blessing she experienced was met with humility and deep gratitude from her. Every hardship created hope that God was using it somehow to develop her and glorify Christ through her.

Where did the Prosperity Doctrine come from?

It came out of a combination of cultural events of the 1900's. WWII had just ended, sending our country in one of the most prosperous eras in our history. Tent revivals had changed from presenting the gospel to "healing/miracle" revivals. The economy roared making us one of the most powerful nations, creating the middle class in which most people now could experience wealth without having to be filthy rich.

Teachers and preachers began to emerge with a message fit for the times. Teachers like Robert Tilton, Benny Hinn Jim Bakker flooded the airwaves with their message of prosperity, taking advantage of the Trinity Broadcasting Network's huge television platform. The primary focus was on how to stay healthy through miracles, and how to obtain common possessions that defined the middle class: cars, homes, boats, etc.

Today, the message of the Prosperity Doctrine has taken on a new face. Instead of middle-class possessions, it promises the achievement of your dreams, living a victorious life and fulfilling your destiny. The new faces are high profile, popular personalities from churches, teachers like Bill Johnson, Joyce Meyer, Paula White, Joel Osteen, Steven Furtick, Brian Houston, Creflo Dollar.

"God wants us to prosper financially, to have plenty of money, to fulfill the destiny He has laid out for us." - Joel Osteen

"Our connection with God is obviously the source of prosperity and goodness in our lives. We make our way prosperous through obedience..." - Bill Johnson

"There's one thing that Jesus can't do. One thing the Son of God can't do. Even Jesus cannot override your unbelief. God's ability is limited by whether or not we 'activate' his power by faith." - Steven Furtick

"Begin to speak this morning about destiny definers, specific things that define the path and the destiny of your life." - Brian Houston

"If you want to change the direction of your life, change the declaration of your lips" - Steven Furtick

Along with their megastar popularity and vast reach of teaching materials, these pastors and churches have also produced award winning, chart topping worship bands, such as Hillsong, Jesus Culture, and the Elevation band. These worship bands from these churches are targeting millennials with a narcissistic, sensual brand of worship.

"Christians who are clueless to enemy strategies are sitting ducks," he warns, "and churches who can't confidently explain to their young people why they must avoid these types of conferences are unable to effectively keep watch over the souls of their sheep (Hebrews 13:17)." - Costi Hinn, Nephew of Benny Hinn

The Prosperity Doctrine not only has flooded the mind and hearts of Americans, but also have spread to other countries. An African Pastor once said that one of the greatest exports of America to Africa and the world is the Prosperity Doctrine.

What are the tenets of the Prosperity Doctrine?

1. Humanity is the center and climax of creation.
2. God is desperate and incomplete without you.
3. Faith is a self-generated spiritual force.
4. Bold prayers are a force that obligates God to bless you.
5. Material poverty and sickness are signs of sin in one's life,
6. Obedience and giving are means of obtaining material compensation from God.

The Prosperity Doctrine erodes the truths of the gospel, the nature of Christ, the place of humanity and the role of suffering. It creates an obligatory relationship with God, elevating the blessing over the Blessor.

How does the Prosperity Doctrine differ from the Gospel?

The basic tenets of the Gospel:

1. God is holy.
2. Humanity is sinful.
3. Jesus is our redemption.

2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Romans 6:23 NIV

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In a 2014 sermon, John Piper outlined six keys to detecting the prosperity gospel, such as the absence of biblical view of suffering, absence of the biblical view self-denial, and absence of exposition of scripture, church leaders with exorbitant lifestyles, a prominence of self and a marginalization of the greatness of God.

Differences between the Gospel has with the Prosperity Doctrine:

1. Humanity is commanded to repent and to be reconciled to God through Christ.
2. Our lives are to be lived in a way that is worthy of salvation and to glorify Christ forever.
2. Suffering is to be expected, used by God to build Christ-like character in us.
3. Faith is given to us by God and is defined as child-like trust in His promises.
4. Jesus is the climax of creation, the sole object of our worship, and will one day return to judge the living and the dead.
5. Blessings are giving according to God's free will without any obligation, manipulation or coercion.

Why is the Prosperity Doctrine so popular?

It appeals to the basic human need of wanting to be healthy and wealthy. It pampers our egos and stimulates our hopes for living the best possible life. Couple this message with very popular, high profile personalities and wrap it within a few Christian doctrines, you have one of the most dangerous heresies of our time.

The Deceptiveness of Heresy

- Heresy is not the same as a blatant lie.
- Heresy does not come from outside the church, but from within.
- Heresy contains many truths of scripture that surrounds obscure lies.

Galatians 1:9 NIV

"As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!"

Heresy has been one of the most effective tools of the Enemy leading Christians astray, and has plagued the church throughout her history:

2 Peter 2:1-3 NIV

"But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping."

Prosperity Doctrine and Your Ministry

Here are some ways in which the Prosperity Doctrine might create obstacles for you and your ministry:

- Recruiting - We will experience a struggle in recruiting others to serve in our ministry. They will have a selfish view of faith, not a sacrificial view that is so essential in serving Christ and His body.
- Criticism – We will experience criticism in our teaching or worship leading if we call them to repent, and don't provide an emotional experience that fits the popular narrative and elevates their feelings or magnifies their dreams.
- Church Hopping – We will experience a transient crowd that will come and go based on trends, events and quality of programs and services. They will have a low tolerance for working through the inadequacies and challenges every church faces.

- Falling Away – We will experience many abandoning their faith and disavowing Jesus when confronted with pain, hardship and suffering.
- Legalism – We will experience a rigid perspective they will have of God, obligating Him to bless them with good things whenever they show up to church, serve or give. Their involvement with our church will be “logged” in their minds as a fulfillment of their side of the bargain, expecting God to fulfill His someday soon.

1 Timothy 4:1-2 NIV

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”

1 Timothy 4:6-7 NIV

“If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.”

1 Timothy 4:16 NIV

“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”