**IS THE GOSPEL ALSO A GOSPEL OF PROSPERITY?**[[1]](#endnote-1)

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The prosperity gospel (a.k.a. the health and wealth gospel) "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."[[2]](#endnote-2)  While most Christians don't believe this type of teaching, we may subscribe to a version of it, which I call "prosperity gospel lite."

**Prosperity gospel lite is the idea that God materially rewards you for your faith or service.**  We tend to read Scriptures like this with an egocentric view:

*"… For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. - Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)*

Many latch onto the hopeful language, but fail to read the context of this promise.  We individualize the word "*you*" and read this to mean God has a prosperous future for everyone who follows him.  The "*you*" in the passage corporately refers to Israel.  Our "Western Eyes" tend to misread scriptures that refer to groups of people and apply them to individuals.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Even though God had mercy and good plans for his people, they were long-term plans.  Israel suffered through death, slavery, and subjugation for two generations to follow the Jeremiah 29:11 prophecy.

God eventually re-established the nation of Israel using Persian kings and leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah.  Did God love the people in the later generations more than those in the earlier generation?  I think not.

You may think, as I have, that if God has a good plan for his people collectively, then by extension, he has a good plan for me.  The problem is that our idea of a good plan typically includes material prosperity and worldly success.  God's plan for your life may or may not have those things in it.  Don't get me wrong, I do believe that God is working in our lives and wants to give us good things.  However, he does not prioritize our individual prosperity over our individual spiritual growth or his larger purposes on earth.

*If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. -1 Timothy 6:3-5 (NIV)*

Jesus doesn't promise his followers material prosperity or worldly success.  But because many of us have the prosperity gospel lite deep in our psyche, we can feel God is against us or doesn't love us when things don't go just right in our life.  It can warp our relationship with God and cause us to misunderstand what God is doing in our lives.  These misunderstandings can lead to bitterness and great spiritual harm.

This thinking also creeps into our mindset about giving at church. You may have heard it said that, "you can't out give God."  This saying implies that God will quickly repay you for your contribution and give you even more.  While God does reward us, we shouldn't expect God to give us material prosperity right back.  Where then would our reward in heaven be? This kind of thinking is unsound and ungodly.

Prosperity gospel lite subtly feeds into the larger idea that your financial well-being is a measure of your righteousness.  The thinking might go like this: if God materially rewards faithfulness and sacrifice, then you must be unrighteous if things aren't going well for you financially.  We need to reject these subtle beliefs and always have an open mind to what God is doing in our lives.

1. This is a section from Chapter 8 – “Riches and Righteousness,” from a yet to be titled book. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Wikipedia Contributors, “Prosperity theology”. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Richards, E. Randolph, and Brandon J. O'Brien. *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*. InterVarsity Press, 2012, pp. 192-193, 199-200 – similarly Romans 8:28 is also commonly misread.  [↑](#endnote-ref-3)