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Prosperity



Word of Faith - Steve Gregg

In this detailed analysis, Steve Gregg examines the concept of prosperity within the Word Faith teaching. By delving into biblical passages and quoting prominent prosperity teachers, Gregg evaluates the idea that prosperity is a result of the redemption from poverty and sickness. He explores various arguments and challenges the notion that wealth and material abundance are synonymous with spiritual abundance, emphasizing the importance of interpreting scripture in its cultural and contextual context. Ultimately, Gregg offers a thought-provoking critique of the prosperity teaching and invites listeners to critically examine its claims.

Transcript

In this final talk related to the Word of Faith teaching, we're going to look specifically at the aspect of the Word of Faith teaching that deals with the teaching on prosperity. And by prosperity we mean material financial prosperity. You'll recall that I said earlier that the Word of Faith teachers hold that when Jesus died and when he, as Paul says in Galatians chapter 3, when Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law, that that curse of the law from which Jesus redeemed us is poverty and sickness and death.

And we've spent a couple of lectures talking about the sickness aspect and healing. And we want to talk about this idea of Jesus having redeemed us from poverty and, or at least the claim that he has done so, and therefore translating that into a promise of personal prosperity. I would like to say first of all that in saying that Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law in Galatians chapter 3, it should not be thought that he is saying we have been redeemed from everything that the law said would come upon Israel.

I mean it may be so, but that's not what is being said by Paul. In Galatians chapter 3, in verse 13 it says, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. So that the blessing of Abraham, verse 14, might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Now there's two things in this passage. There's the idea that we've been redeemed from the curse of the law, which as I pointed out, they identify the curse of the law as poverty, sickness, and death. And then it says in verse 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon us.

And the blessing of Abraham, the Word of Faith teachers often say, was that he was rich. We can see simply by reading the Old Testament stories of Abraham that he was a man whose prosperity simply increased and increased even when he made mistakes. He got richer.

He lied about his wife and she almost got herself into trouble and when the king of Egypt found out about it in chapter 12 of Genesis, he returned her with a rebuke and gave Abraham a lot of fancy gifts so that he became even richer through that situation. And he got richer and richer all the time. So the blessing of Abraham, the riches that Abraham received were a blessing from God, they say.

And this indicates that the blessing of Abraham is supposed to come upon believers. So if Abraham was rich, then it follows that his blessing is to come upon us too. Now I would say that we would be safer, rather than taking those two verses all by themselves, it would be safer to look at the context so that we might get some idea of what Paul means by these words.

And you can see, for example, that if you look up at verse 5 in Galatians 3, it says, Therefore he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles to you, does he do it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Just as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Therefore know that only those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, In you all the nations shall be blessed.

So then, those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse. For it is written, Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.

And that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident. For the just shall live by faith. Yet the law is not of faith, but the man who does them shall live by them.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. In verse 14, that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Now, the reason I read that whole thing is because we have two things to discuss.

What does it mean, the curse of the law, from which we've been redeemed, and what does it mean, the blessing of Abraham? Well, the curse of the law is, in verse 11, that no

one is justified by the law. The law cannot justify a person, but rather it says, Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things that are written in the book of the law. So it condemns those who do not obey it.

Everyone who does not continue in everything the law says is under a curse. Which curse is the inability to be justified? Now, the blessing of Abraham, on the other hand, is the ability of being justified by faith. Because it says in verse 6, just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness, then verse 9, so then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

What blessing did Abraham receive by believing? He was counted righteous. He was justified by faith. And those who believe, as he did, are blessed with him.

In what respect? The same way he was. Justification. The curse of the law is that no one could be justified by the law.

The blessing of Abraham is that he was justified by faith, and therefore we've been redeemed by Christ from the curse of the law, that is, the curse of not being able to be justified, so that we would receive the blessing of Abraham, which is the blessing of being justified. The whole concern of Galatians chapter 3 has nothing to do with Abraham's wealth, or how many wives or children God gave him, or any of the other blessings. It has to do with a particular blessing.

It doesn't say that the blessings of Abraham, verse 14, might come upon us, as if everything God ever did to bless Abraham is to be repeated in our lives, but that the blessing, a particular blessing, which blessing is referred to in verse 9 and is spelled out in verse 7? That he believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. All scholars know that Romans and Galatians are parallel books. Most seem to think that Galatians may have been a sort of a rough draft for the Romans, sent to a different audience, of course, but if you look at Romans chapter 4, we find the same argument with some of the same kind of language here.

In Romans 4, verse 3, it says, but what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. But to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

Just as David also describes the blessedness, there's a blessing, a blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works, and he quotes from David. And then verse 9, does this blessedness then, or this blessing, come upon the circumcised only or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised, etc., etc.

Now, what I want to point out to you, there's a blessedness or a blessing here in this description. David described this blessedness in verse 6. The blessedness is attributed in verse 9 to Abraham. What is this blessedness? Well, in verse 6, it's the blessedness of God imputing righteousness to you apart from works.

That is by faith, which also is spelled out in verse 3. Abraham believed God, it was accounted to him for righteousness. You can see that Paul's mindset here has nothing to do with the physical or particular blessings given to Abraham or David, for that matter here, but rather to the blessedness or the blessing of being justified by faith. Galatians 3 and Romans 4 are quite parallel in this respect.

Both quote the same verse to make their point from Genesis. Now, having said that, I want to also say that even if the curse of the law were to be understood in terms of Deuteronomy 28, which the Word of Faith people say that it is. They say, well, what is the curse of the law? Well, if you go back to Deuteronomy 28, God said, if you don't keep all these laws, then cursed will you be in the city, and cursed will you be in the town, and cursed will you be in the field, and cursed will you be out in the country, and cursed will be your basket, your store, and cursed will be the fruit of your womb, and cursed will be your crops, and cursed will be your livestock, and cursed will be everything, blah, blah, blah.

And they say, well, see, if you go through all those curses, you'll find that there's essentially three things there. There's the curse of poverty, and there's the curse of sickness, and there's the curse of death. Well, that is entirely arbitrary.

There's a lot of curses in there. There's the curse of being banished from their land of Israel. There's the curse of being overrun by their enemies.

There's a lot of curses. To distill Deuteronomy 28 with all its curses down to this simple formula, poverty, sickness, and death, is artificial in the extreme. But furthermore, it doesn't even work well for the Word of Faith teaching, because if they say, okay, we've been redeemed from poverty, therefore God wants us rich.

We've been redeemed from sickness, therefore God wants us well and healed. And from death, the third item, does this mean God doesn't want us to die? Now, they would either have to say, well, that would be spiritual death for the believer. We've been redeemed from spiritual death.

Or else, we've been redeemed from death physical in the sense that we will be resurrected after we've died. But in either case, that becomes inconsistent. Because if we're going to say we're redeemed from spiritual death, well, then maybe we're redeemed from spiritual poverty and spiritual sickness too.

If we're going to spiritualize it, why not be consistent? Now, I'm not going to mess with

that particular claim of theirs much longer right now, because I'm just trying to show that they are arbitrary in their interpretation. They know what they want to believe. And so they superimpose what they already want to believe upon certain texts, which do not in any sense give rise to that belief.

They don't teach that belief. And this is what we call eisegesis rather than exegesis. Exegesis is where you read from the scripture, out of the scripture, what's there.

Eisegesis is where you read into the scripture what you want to find there. And that is, of course, what they must do. Now, there are some other scriptural points that are sometimes made by them.

But let me just read to you some quotes from prosperity teachers so you'll see exactly how they understand prosperity. Robert Tilton said, quote, Not only is worrying a sin, but being poor is a sin when God promises prosperity. John Avenzini, another prosperity teacher, made this statement.

He said, I don't know where these goofy traditions creep in at, but one of the goofiest ones is that Jesus and his disciples were poor. Now, there's no Bible to substantiate that, unquote. Fred Price says that he's trying to, quote, get you out of this malaise of thinking that Jesus and his disciples were poor.

The Bible says that he has left us an example that we should follow his steps. That's the reason why I drive a Rolls Royce. I'm following Jesus' steps, unquote.

That's Fred Price. The other quote was John Avenzini. Another prosperity teacher, Kenneth Hagan, whose ideas are more definitive of what the word of faith is, since he's the father of the movement.

He made this statement. If I can find it here. Oh, it's over here.

Kenneth Hagan made this comment. He says, God didn't, he was talking about an unbeliever who prospered by using the laws of faith. You see, remember, the faith teachers believe that prosperity is not just a benevolent blessing from God.

The prosperity is the result of you manipulating properly laws of faith, which anyone can, just like a scientist, whether he's a Christian or not, he can work with the laws of physics and they will work for him. So a person, believer or not, can work equally successfully with the laws of the spiritual realm, which include prosperity. And here's what Kenneth Copeland said.

Let me, before I quote Kenneth Hagan, Kenneth Copeland made this statement and it's very typical. He says, we must understand that there are laws governing every single thing in existence. Nothing is by accident.

There are laws of the world of the spirit and there are laws of the world of the natural. We need to realize that the spiritual world and its laws are more powerful than the physical world and its laws. Spiritual laws gave birth to the physical laws.

The world and the physical forces governing it were created by the power of faith, a spiritual force. It is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function. This same rule is true in prosperity.

There are certain laws governing prosperity in God's word. Faith causes them to function. The success formulas in the word of God produce results when used as directed.

Now Kenneth Hagan gives an example of a non-Christian who actually prospered by using these faith formulas. And Hagan said this, God didn't bless him because he was a sinner. He received God's blessing because he honored God.

An unbeliever honored God. For God has a certain law of prosperity and when you get into contact with that law and those rules, it just works for you, whoever you are. When you come into contact with God's laws, they work.

Now you can see that what this means is that prosperity and they'd say of course the same thing about health and healing. These things come to you without reference to your relationship with God, without reference even to the will of God necessarily because you ask what you will and if you confess the right things you'll get what you want. And this being so, anyone, even a non-Christian can manipulate these laws if they confess the right things.

So this becomes obviously the metaphysical cult of prosperity and healing. And that's because it teaches there are metaphysical laws that you can use. It doesn't matter your relationship with God, the will of God, these things are irrelevant.

What you need to know is how to work the laws, work the system really. A couple of quotes here. This is from Kenneth Hagan.

He says, quote, God wants his children to eat the best. He wants them to wear the best clothing. He wants them to drive the best cars and he wants them to have the best of everything.

Nothing is too good for king's kids. And Fred Price, another faith teacher I quoted in one of our earlier lectures, he said, if the mafia can ride around in Lincoln Continental town cars, why can't king's kids? On the contrary, king's kids ought to ride in Rolls Royces, unquote. Now this is the kind of thing that you'll hear frequently from these teachers.

And you know what it suggests? I mean, Tilton said you're in sin if you're not prospering. If you're poor, poverty is a sin because God wants you to be rich. And this obviously

places the stigma of sin, or at least of little faith, on the poor.

I read a few quotes there that denied that Jesus was poor or that the disciples were poor. This is very common. I read Kenneth Copeland's book back in 1977, I think it was.

It must have been, 1977. It was a reasonably new book at the time. And in it he basically had a whole chapter trying to point out that Jesus was not poor.

He said Jesus had a lot of money. He even had a treasurer. That's what they always say.

They quote him. And to me that was so outrageous to hear somebody who I didn't, I was not that familiar with Kenneth Copeland before reading that book. I just thought this thing marks this guy as a heretic, right? Just that one statement.

To try to remake Jesus into the image of the cultural image of the teachers who are teaching prosperity. These men are rich. It certainly looks like it works for them.

And it makes their testimony seem credible or their doctrines seem credible. But let me just say this. People can get rich with or without the prosperity doctrine.

That's the amazing thing. Is that there are some of the richest people in the world never did get rich by confessing prosperity. If indeed these laws of prosperity are so universal, then we would expect that only such people who have employed these laws have gotten rich.

And those who neglect to use these laws will not get rich. Because these laws are what govern whether you're rich or not. And yet these laws state that you have to believe it, you have to name it, you have to lay hold on it, you have to confess it.

You have to hold fast your confession. You need to make sure no negative confession ever slips through your lips. These laws are the only way people should be able to be well or be prosperous.

But everyone knows there's people walking around who don't love God, don't have any faith in God, don't confess right things. And yet they're well and many of them are wealthy. It's interesting that Christians sometimes do prosper.

Wesley complained that it was hard to keep a good Christian spiritually minded because he said as soon as a person becomes a good Christian, he'll become frugal, he'll become hardworking, he'll become honest. And because he's frugal and honest and hardworking, he will probably do reasonably well financially. I mean, those are the kinds of things that lead to financial prosperity, is working hard and being honest and being thrifty.

And he said once that happens, they prosper and then they become worldly minded. And he said it's kind of a vicious circle he complained about, that when he got people saved, they started living right, and when they lived right, they often prospered. And when they

prospered, their hearts began to sit on riches.

And it is a hard thing. The Bible does indicate in Proverbs quite a bit that if you work hard, you'll probably do well financially. Now what we call rich and what the Bible calls rich may not be the same thing.

In biblical times, people were fortunate if they just owned the land they were farming and nothing else. Even some of the people of the poorer sort in our society are richer than probably what the average person was in biblical times, except for the slaves, of course. Slaves didn't own anything.

But we need to be careful about thinking that because riches come to us, that this is somehow our birthright. The prosperity teaching doesn't work in the poorer parts of the world where money just isn't available. God seems to be limited by the availability of cash in the economy, apparently, to keeping his promises.

If these promises are to be taken to be proof that one is to be rich if they're faithful, if they have enough faith. I want to give you some of the arguments. These are ones that I got, first of all, from Copeland's book, *The Laws of Prosperity*, and then I found them repeated in many, many other prosperity teachers.

I want to tell you what arguments they have from Scripture, as well as what arguments they come up with from human reasoning. There are two kinds of arguments that are always appealed to. There's a little bit of Scripture and a little bit of human reasoning, and together they make a very little case for the prosperity teaching.

But the idea is if you confess that you're rich, you will be rich. If you confess that you're poor, you will be poor. One of the great scriptures that is often brought up on this is 3 John, verse 2. We saw this also in an earlier lecture, but this mentions prosperity.

3 John, verse 2 says, Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. Now, John wished for his reader, whose name was Gaius, to prosper in all things and be in health. Now, there you have prosperity and health, health and wealth.

And this is said to be, well, since this is the word of God, the Bible is the word of God, after all, therefore God is stating that it's his desire for every believer that they would prosper and be in health. Now, I need to say, first of all, that prosper in the Bible doesn't always mean what we would mean. If we speak of a prosperous person, we usually are speaking of his financial conditions.

But in the Bible, the word prosper has the general meaning of to succeed at something. Paul said in Romans, chapter 1, that he hoped that he might have a prosperous journey to Rome, meaning that he hoped he'd succeed in getting there. Prosperity, or prosper, if you look up the Greek word, has the general meaning of success.

And whatever Gaius might have been endeavoring to do, John wished him success. This does not necessarily translate into financial riches, unless Gaius was intent on getting rich. And we have no reason to accuse Gaius of this, since the Bible says that those who would be rich fall into many hurtful lusts and snares and drown their souls in perdition.

It's a slander to suggest that this godly man had a desire to be rich. As a matter of fact, all we know about this man's character, from John's own statements, is that he was generous. That he actually provided hospitality for traveling ministers and so forth.

Now, he might have been well off. He might not have been. We have no indication of that.

But he was involved in ministry. He was involved in hospitality. He was involved in giving.

And John wished him success and health. Now, is this wish of success and health, does that translate into a promise of God for all believers, or a statement that God wants everybody healthy at all times and prosperous? Well, you've got to take into consideration the personal nature of the epistles. John is making this as a personal wish for his friend.

And most people would wish such things for their friends. I point out to you that in the closing words of this epistle, he says, I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and inks, but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Now, this obviously speaks of John's personal plans to come and see this man, Gaius, to whom he is writing.

It does not in itself prove that every Christian can claim this, that John is going to come and speak face to face with us soon, and that he didn't want to write any more than this to us. This is written to an individual. You might say, well, if it's just written to an individual, what good is it to us? That's why we have it in the Bible.

Well, that takes a very shallow view of Scripture. Obviously, many of the things Paul said to the Corinthians or the Galatians or to the Philippians or to any of his readers were personal. When he told the Galatians that they had received him as an angel of God or even as Christ when he had come to them in infirmity, does that apply to me? Has he come to me in infirmity? No.

Did I receive him? No. He's talking personally. What we find is that the epistles convey value to us insofar as they give examples of normative patterns for the Church or they give instructions that are normative to all, but they do not lack the personal element.

When Paul says to the Corinthians that he heard from those of the household of Stephanus about the divisions in the Church, that doesn't mean he heard from Stephanus about the divisions in our Church in the 20th century. He's talking about

situations that are relevant to specific cases. When he writes to his friend Gaius and gives a traditional greeting, a very common way of greeting, I hope that you're doing well, hope you're healthy, is essentially what he says, this does not mean that there's never any time when God would have a man not be healthy or not be wealthy.

And I remember reading the seed faith book of Oral Roberts when I was a teenager, and he said it was this verse that showed him that God wants us always to be well and always wants us to prosper. It's a frequently quoted verse, but it doesn't make the point. It does not prove that point at all.

Now there's another verse that is often quoted by those who believe that God wants us rich, and that's found in John chapter 10. In John chapter 10, verse 10, Jesus said, The thief does not come except to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.

Now there's two things here. One is that if you are poor, then somebody is robbing you of the prosperity God wants you to have. Now Jesus doesn't rob you, the enemy comes to rob you, the thief comes to steal and to kill and to destroy, they say.

Therefore, if you lack material wealth, you're being ripped off by the devil, and you need to rebuke him and release those funds and tell him to get his hands off your money and get it into your hands. This is the way they talk. The thing is, A, John 10, 10 is not talking about the devil, it says the thief.

In the context of the good shepherd, which is the context this falls in, the thief is anyone who comes and tries to steal the sheep. False teachers, false shepherds. He says anyone who doesn't come in by the door is a thief and a robber.

And therefore, the thief is not the devil in this. He says in verse 8, All whoever came before me are thieves and robbers. The sheep did not hear them.

And so, this idea of applying this statement about the thief to the devil himself is mistaken. And it's in the context of someone stealing sheep. It's not someone stealing something from the sheep.

The thief isn't moving into a suburban sheep home and stealing all their goods. He's stealing sheep from the shepherd. That's what a thief does.

That's what's in this context. This has nothing to do with the devil, A, and it has nothing to do with stealing things from Christians. It has to do with Christians being ripped off and no longer being in the possession of Jesus, being stolen.

Sheep that are rustled. The thief is a sheep rustler. And there's a lot of them.

All who came before Jesus fall in that category. Anyone who comes in any other way

than through the door, that person is a thief and a robber. So, let's keep that in mind.

That's what he said, by the way, in verse 1. It says, Most surely I say to you, He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. So, Jesus already has defined who the thief is in this story. So, people ignore the context.

The thief is not the devil. The thief is a false teacher, a false shepherd that comes along and doesn't come the proper way. Now, what about this part? I am come that they might have life and they might have it abundantly.

It's a shame that Americans are as shallow. American Christians are as shallow as they are to interpret everything in light of our own culture. Abundance to us, when we look around at the abundance that most Christians have around us, it's mainly financial abundance.

We don't see very much spiritual abundance. We don't see much spiritual prosperity. But Jesus said, He came that we might have life and that more abundantly.

So, the easiest way to interpret that for the modern American Christians is that He must want us to be prospering like we are. This abundance, we call it the abundant life, which to many people just means the rich life, the affluent life. However, there is no possible way that Jesus' words can be meant that way.

For two reasons. One, He did not say, I came that they might have life and they might enjoy abundance. He said, I came that they might have life and they might have it more abundantly.

What? Life more abundantly. The abundance is not abundance of possessions. The abundance is an abundance of life.

And if you want to cross-reference that with a very relevant statement by Jesus in Luke chapter 12, you'll see, if anyone tells you that I'm supposed to be rich because Jesus said He came that I should have life abundantly, take them over to Luke 12, 15. For Jesus said, Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses. Now, put those two verses together.

I came that they might have life and that more abundantly. But a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he has. Life is different than things.

An abundance of things is not the same thing as an abundance of life. And therefore, to use that John 10, 10 verse, is wrong every which way. It totally misunderstands the context.

It totally misunderstands the words used, the sentence structure, and everything.

There's not one thing about that verse that's relevant to the proving of the prosperity doctrine, though it is used again and again and again as if it proved the point. Let me just say this.

When any theological system has to resort to this kind of perversion of Scripture, they do themselves more harm than good because the assumption that a thinking person looking on will make is if this is the best they can do, then they're really off base. I mean, if this is how they have to treat the Scripture to get their results, then they're self-refuting. I mean, just the very use of those kinds of arguments proves that if they have to resort to such arguments, there must not be any valid arguments because these are so wildly off base.

Look at 2 Corinthians chapter 8. I've heard this one used to prove the prosperity teaching. 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 9. It says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich. Okay? Now that last line in particular, that you through his poverty might become rich.

Here's how Kenneth Copeland argued from this verse. He says, well, listen, it can't be talking about spiritually rich because when it says that Jesus became poor, certainly he didn't become spiritually poor, so it cannot be that he came to make us spiritually rich, but must be materially rich. He shoots himself in the foot by using this verse, though, because he also argues in the whole chapter that Jesus was not materially poor, but now it says that Jesus through his poverty would make us rich, and he insists it must be the same kind of riches, so if Jesus wants to make us materially rich, then Jesus must have been materially poor.

But thinking logically and consistently is not a requirement in this movement. In fact, to be incapable of thinking logically is a requirement in the movement, and this is obviously what is being done here. Now, what does Paul mean when he says that Jesus, though he was rich, he became poor, that through his poverty we might become rich? It is not necessary that poor and rich have to be exactly in the same sense.

I can make myself physically poor, sending my kids through college, so that they can have a wealth of knowledge. If I think that that is good for them, I frankly will not do such a thing, because I don't think that would be good for them, but people do that kind of thing all the time. They give up something in one kind of currency in order that someone else can benefit in some other kind of currency.

I don't mean financial currency. I am saying that riches and poverty are really things that can be measured in a broad way. I have become more materially poor so that I can be more rich in another sense.

For instance, my wife and I, we have always never even considered her going out and

getting a job, because we have children. She stays home and she educates the children, and we would rather be child rich than money rich. And that is a trade-off.

But I could say we have become poor so that we can be rich. Now, in saying something like that, that doesn't mean that we have become poor and rich in exactly the same respects. We have become poor in one respect to be rich in another.

Jesus can become poor in one respect in order to make us rich in another. What kind of riches does Paul believe that we are supposed to have? We might consider that whatever riches he thinks we are to have, he would have. And yet we read throughout Paul's writing, especially in this very epistle in 2 Corinthians, frequent references to his own poverty.

Just one example would be in 2 Corinthians chapter 4. I'm sorry, 1 Corinthians 4. There are statements in 2 Corinthians also, but I want to turn you to 1 Corinthians 4, which was written not very long ago from the 2nd epistle. Paul describes his own circumstance in 1 Corinthians 4, 11. He says, Even to this present hour we, meaning he and his companions, both hunger and thirst, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless.

Now this is Paul's own lifestyle. He lacks adequate food. He is poorly clothed and he is beaten and he is homeless.

It does not sound as if he has convictions that a person ought to be wealthy. What's more, he makes a distinction between himself and the others. As we go on further in verse 12, 1 Corinthians 4, And we labor, working with our hands, being reviled we bless, being persecuted we endure, being defamed we entreat, etc., etc.

I do not write these things to shame you, verse 14 says, but as my beloved children I warn you, for though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you have not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. So he indicates that his lifestyle is to be imitated.

He's not one who is a special case, who for, because of extremely special calling, that he has to be poor and everyone else should be rich, he gives his own example as one to be imitated. In fact, in verse 8, he's sarcastic, talking about how the Corinthians live so differently than he does. He says in verse 8 of this chapter, You are already full, you are already rich, you have reigned as kings.

But he says, without us. And indeed I could wish you did reign, because that we also might reign with you. Now what he means by that is, you're already living as if you've gone to heaven.

You're reigning as kings already, but we aren't. You've gone on ahead without us. And he says, that's all ironic, that's all in sarcasm, because he then says, seriously, I really wish that you did reign, I wish it was time for that, because then we'd be reigning too.

When Jesus comes back, we'll all reign, but you've run ahead of schedule here, and you're already living like you're supposed to be reigning, and rich, and all that stuff. But he describes himself, as I said in verse 11, he's hungry and thirsty and poorly clothed and beaten, and we should imitate him. Or at least the Corinthians are told to do so.

So if Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 to the same audience, that Christ became poor so that you through his poverty should become rich, and he meant physically, materially rich, he was contradicting himself. Furthermore, at 2 Corinthians 8, just a few verses earlier, we can see that he is not talking about the church being materially rich. He says in the opening verses of the same chapter, 2 Corinthians 8, 1, Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia, that in the great trial of affliction, and the abundance of their joy, that's an abundant life, they had abundance of joy, and their deep poverty, they abounded in the riches of their liberality, that's generosity.

Were these people rich or poor? Well, they had an abundance of joy, and riches of generosity. They were rich in terms of generosity, but their physical circumstances, they were in deep poverty. There's a poor church in deep poverty.

He does not say these people were not living up to their privileges as Christians. These people were failing to cash in on the law of prosperity. He indicates these people were a good example.

That's why he tells of it. He wants you to know of their example and follow it. And he says in verse 7, But as you abound in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, that's the abundant life, there's abounding, but not in money, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us, see that you abound in this grace also.

What grace? Generosity. The same grace as the Macedonians had. Now these Macedonians were in deep poverty, but they had an abundance of joy, and they had riches of generosity.

They were rich in character and in spiritual values. And then when he says that Jesus became physically poor so you could become rich, it hardly could mean that he became physically poor so you become physically rich. It means that he took on a physically poor lifestyle, so that you could, following his example, become spiritually rich like these Macedonians, who are really in poverty like Jesus was, but nonetheless rich in another sense that matters more.

Another scripture that is thought to prove the prosperity doctrine, and sometimes brought up to do so, is that which is in Mark chapter 10, and it has parallels in Matthew and Luke. But Mark chapter 10, verses 28 through 30, Then Peter began to say to him, See, we have left all and followed you. So Jesus answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife

or children or lands, for my sake and the gospels, who shall not receive a hundredfold, now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

Now, the idea here is the hundredfold blessing. If you make any kind of sacrifice for Jesus, you get a hundredfold back. This is the basis of Oral Roberts' seed faith idea.

You need money, give money. You'll get a hundredfold back. It's interesting that he didn't practice that himself, back when Jesus allegedly appeared to him and told him that if he didn't get eight million dollars by a certain date, which he knew that he would die.

And instead he goes out and makes impassioned appeals for people to send gifts to him. It seems like if he really believed this seed faith thing, if he needs eight million dollars, he'd better start doing some vigorous giving, rather than asking people to send to him. It's obvious that the faith teachers don't really believe that if they give to others, they will be rich, but they certainly want you to believe that if you give to them, you will become rich.

But the argument is this. It's a promise of Jesus. It's a written guarantee.

You can count on it right there. That if you give to Jesus, you give to God, then he will give you back a hundred times as much. Now, that simply isn't true, necessarily, in the sense that they mean it.

It's not the case that if you need a hundred dollars, you put a hundred dollars in today's offering at church and in the coming week you'll get a hundred dollars in the mail. Or if you need a million dollars, just put ten thousand dollars in the offering plate and you'll get a million dollars back for that. Now, of course, if we're not going to put a limit on the time frame for realizing the return, then no one could ever prove this to be wrong, because if I gave a thousand dollars today and I haven't seen a hundred thousand dollars come back, they could say, well, wait, you just haven't waited long enough.

It'll come in God's time. I don't know, maybe they'd say that. But the fact is, that's not what it means.

Jesus does not say, if you put a dollar in the offering plate, you'll get a hundred back. He says, if you've left houses or lands or family. He's talking about people who've left everything.

It's in the context of Peter saying, we've left everything. What shall we have? In other words, are we going to be left without anything? Are we going to be left without the things we need? We've forsaken everything to follow you. He says, no, those of you who've made these major sacrifices, those of you who left all to follow me, like you, Peter, you'll receive more than you think.

You'll receive a hundredfold, along with your persecutions. But the fact is, a hundredfold is not to be taken as a, it's not to be taken as a statistic. I know this because if you'll check the various parallels, although Matthew chapter 19, which also says a hundredfold, Luke's parallel actually, let me see here, where's the verses? I'm trying to figure out where the Luke parallel is.

Luke's parallel, what is it? 18, yeah, Luke 18, thank you. 29, he says manyfold, many more times. Luke 18, 30 is the verse.

Instead of saying you'll receive a hundred times more, Luke 18, 30 says you'll receive many times more. Now what that means, of course, is Luke is helping us understand the idiom. You'll receive a hundred times more.

It's just another way of saying you'll receive many times more. It's not a statistic. It's just a hyperbole.

Like if you said I've told you a million times. Well, you haven't told anyone anything a million times, but you may use the expression for emphasis, and if you said you'll receive a hundred times more than what you've given up, you think you've given up a great deal, Peter? Ha, you haven't given up anything compared to what you're going to get back. You're getting a hundred times more back.

Well, Luke understood that to mean many times more. You're going to receive back a lot more than what you gave up. Now, how did Peter receive this back? Did Peter, before he died, did he have a hundred houses? You know, one in the French Riviera, one in Syria, one in Jerusalem, one in Capernaum, a hundred houses all over, because he became a wealthy preacher? No, that doesn't appear to be the case.

But we can say this, and I think most commentators would say that this is the meaning, and it certainly makes more sense than the nonsensical prosperity. That is that if you give up everything for Christ, you are not going to go without. In fact, what you will receive from him will be far more than anything you gave up.

He will not be your debtor. You'll receive far more back. But in what form? How will you receive a hundredfold lands and brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers? I mean, those are the things he said you'll receive a hundredfold more of, not just money.

If someone wants to be literal about it, well, you get a hundredfold money back. Well, what if I give up my father? Do I get a hundred fathers back, a hundred mothers back? Well, Jesus said so. What he's saying is this.

He's not being absolutely literal. What he's saying is this. You leave your family.

You'll get a much bigger family for what you've left. The body of Christ is a huge family. You have a lot more brothers and sisters and moms and dads in the faith, in the body of

Christ, than anything you ever gave up to be in it.

The houses, you keep your house and you've got one house. You give up your house and the house of every Christian is your house, in a sense. Peter could go anywhere and find hospitality in a hundred different places or more.

And people would take him in. I've found this myself. There are over a hundred places in this country, although I own a house now.

But for years, I didn't bother to own a house. Eventually, I'm not going to own this one either. But, I mean, for the kingdom of God, if you give it all up, there's over a hundred places in this country I could stay if I needed to.

A place I could have a roof over my head if I needed it. And that makes me pretty rich, although I don't own these houses. I don't have to.

I've received them in another sense. This is a more reasonable way of seeing it, because otherwise, Peter's later history doesn't make sense. On the day of Pentecost, or shortly after that, when he was going into the beautiful gate of the temple, and there was a beggar there, in Acts chapter 3, he said to the beggar, Silver and gold, I have none.

Well, this was years after he'd left his wife and children and father and mother and houses and lands and so forth. He'd left all the follow of Christ. And here he is years later, the leader of the biggest church, the only church, and he says, I don't have any silver or gold.

In other words, I don't have money. His returns were not in the form of personal holdings that were given back to him. That's not what Jesus was promising.

In fact, he couldn't be. If you look at the very context of the statement in Mark chapter 10, if you look back at verse 23, Mark 10, 23 says, Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God. Does that make it sound like it's a blessing to have riches? Anything that makes it hard for you to get into the kingdom of God is not a blessing, it's a burden.

Or it may be a blessing at one level that has become a burden. Verse 25 says, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. For him to be saying to his disciples then, Therefore I'll make you rich.

You give up everything and I'll make you rich. If they were listening to him a few minutes ago, they should have said, No, thank you. Keep it to yourself.

I don't need that kind of burden. I don't need that kind of handicap. If it's harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, that sounds like a tremendous handicap in terms of spiritual life and salvation.

And it's just unthinkable. Well, let me put it this way. Apparently it's not unthinkable that Jesus meant what the prosperity teachers say because they think he meant that.

So it's not unthinkable. But it is not defensible. There are certainly better ways of understanding that passage than the way that they try to press it.

Other scriptural examples they give to prove the prosperity doctrine are that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Job and Joseph and David, these men were rich. They were blessed by God and they were rich. And if we are to have the blessing of God in our life, we should expect to see it take the same form.

Now, there are several ways to refute this. One of which is to show that even in the Old Testament times, and I'm going to make some contrast between the Old Testament and the New Testament, but before I do that, even in the Old Testament times, when these men lived, and when they were rich, there were many godly people who weren't rich. If you look at Hebrews 11, Hebrews 11 is, of course, talking about all the Old Testament characters who had faith.

And since prosperity comes through faith, according to the faith teaching, these people should have all been prosperous since they all had faith, and that's in fact what's being celebrated in this chapter, their great faith. And he says, of some, in verse 35, in the middle of Hebrews 11, 35, and others, that is, others besides the ones mentioned earlier, who included David and Abraham and these people who were indeed prosperous, says, others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, of chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were slain with a sword, they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, not the best clothing, being destitute, that means owning nothing, being poor, as poor as you can get, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains and dens and caves. These are Old Testament saints.

Didn't they have enough faith? Well, it says in verse 39, all these having obtained a good testimony through faith, just like the ones who were mentioned earlier, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, the guys who were in fact rich. These others who were not rich, who were destitute, wearing sheepskins and goatskins and living in caves and dens of the earth, these people of whom the world was not worthy, they had faith too of the same sort, they just didn't have the same circumstances. Now, if anything can be gleaned from Hebrews 11, and many things can be, but certainly one thing that is unmistakable is that faith does not dictate a particular standard of living.

You may have faith and be rich, you may have faith and be poor. In fact, James said that God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, in James 2.5, which we'll look at

again later on. But God has chosen the poor of this world, I mean physically poor, to be rich in faith.

So, richness in faith and poverty in money seem to go together. Not richness of faith and riches of money go together, which is of course what prosperity teaches. Now, there's other reasons to dispute this whole argument for Abraham and David and Job and Joseph and these rich men ruling and so forth.

There's the blessing of God, we should be like that. Well, in addition to the fact that that's not the whole story, that's not the whole list of godly men in the Old Testament. You can pick out whichever list you want.

I could argue the same thing, you have to be poor to be blessed by God because of some of the poor people you could name, wandering about sheepskins and goatskins. But the ironic thing is that the very men that are mentioned, especially in cases like Joseph and David and Job, who are frequently mentioned as examples of rich men because God blessed them, those same men were very poor and faithful at other times. David, who once reigned as king, prior to that lived in caves and dens of the earth, owning nothing, living as a refugee in poverty and in fear of his life for an extended period of years.

Yes, in a different period of his life he reigned and was rich because of the special circumstances of his being king, but he was no more a man of faith when reigning than he was when he was running. As a matter of fact, if you read the story of David, you might get the profound impression that becoming king kind of ruined him spiritually. That when he was running from Saul, he had a good heart, he had a pure heart, he was doing what was right, he was uncompromised.

When he was king, he made many, many serious spiritual mistakes. I'm not saying that being king isn't okay, I'm just saying that one cannot argue that David was a more spiritual, faithful man as king than in the time when he was not king, when he was poor. Likewise with Job.

Job was rich at the beginning of the story and rich at the end of the story, but he was very poor in the middle of the story. And yet, he was not ungodly at the time he was poor any more than when he was rich. And therefore, Job's circumstances can prove either thing.

You can be godly and poor or godly and rich. Likewise, Joseph. Yes, he reigned as king, or not king, but grand vizier of Egypt, but he also spent a lot of time in jail, owning nothing.

Was he more faithful? Did he have more faith when he was grand vizier than when he was in jail? I don't think so. You read the story, I don't think so. It seems to me that the very examples that are brought up is proof that God wants people rich.

If you just look at a different period of the same people's lives, when they were every bit as full of faith as later, these people were poor and yet had faith. All this proves by looking at their lives is that having faith may involve you in either riches or poverty depending on God's call and God's special dealings in your life. So, there's certainly no reason to argue that way.

I do want to make a contrast between the Old and the New Testament also, because in the Old Testament, God gave people a physical land. Our promised land is a spiritual one. God promised the Jews physical deliverance from their enemies if they were faithful.

He promised us spiritual deliverance and salvation. He promised the Jews physical blessings, but he promised us and has given us spiritual blessings in heavenly places according to Scripture. In the New Testament, we have what we call the antitype.

The physical circumstances and blessings and promises and so forth to Israel, in many cases were types and shadows of the spiritual reality that is in Christ. They were offered long life if they were godly. We're offered eternal life, but that's spiritual.

In other words, we don't necessarily live physically long lives if we're Christians. We might die young like Jesus did or like Stephen did or like many apostles or godly people did in the Bible. They died young, but they have eternal life.

The type and the shadow of that in the Old Testament is the promise of a long life to those who are faithful. We do not, in other words, cash in on the promises God made to Israel across the board without any modification. It's true that all the promises of God in Christ are yea and amen, but Christ has modified the way that they are experienced or the form that they take.

And it is not the case that simply because you can find some men in the Old Testament who are godly and rich that that becomes the model standard of living for all godly men. Now, there are in addition to these seeming scriptural supports for the prosperity doctrine, none of which really is valid as I've tried to point out, there are some other arguments people often use to support the idea that we should be rich. One is that if we are not rich, who will ever reach the rich? The rich people have to be reached with the gospel.

What if all Christians were poor? How in the world then would we reach the rich? Well, this argument actually is terrible. First of all, it doesn't prove that all should be rich in any case, and that's what the prosperity doctrine teaches. Everyone should be rich.

If it were true that we had to have some rich Christians reach rich non-Christians, then it wouldn't take all of us being rich. That wouldn't make sense. But of course the whole argument is fallacious from the beginning.

Jesus was not rich. Paul was not rich. We can establish that beyond question by appeal to

Scripture, notwithstanding the denials of the prosperity teachers.

And yet Jesus and Paul reached some rich people. Jesus reached Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Paul converted the ruler of a part of the island of Cyprus, and other wealthy people were saved through the ministry of Jesus and Paul who were not rich.

And that's because the gospel calls people away from their selfishness. And if the ministers of the gospel are themselves rich, what is the message that they will be communicating to the rich? If they're trying to reach the rich by being rich, certainly the message will be you don't have to give up anything to be a Christian. You can be just like me.

You can be as rich as you are now. Although Jesus told the rich young ruler, sell what you have and give to the poor. And it's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The message is tainted by rich Christians reaching the rich, because the rich can say, oh good, I can become a Christian. I just tack on Jesus unto my life, go to church, and continue to be rich just like this evangelist is. But Jesus wasn't.

Paul wasn't. There were no rich Christian leaders in the early church. And that is because Christianity calls you to deny yourself and take up a cross and follow Christ.

It does not call you to affirm yourself and take up your bank book and follow Forbes or whatever. Basically, what we are to do is to be like Jesus. And if the rich men do not accept it in large hordes of rich men coming in, that is not because we have failed to approach them as rich Christians ourselves.

It is because the message of the cross is too costly for them. It does not appeal to them. But amazingly, even some rich people do, when presented with an uncompromised message, respond and obey.

People who say, well, we've got to be rich so we can reach rich people for Christ, you might want to ask them, how much of your riches are you using to reach rich people for Christ? How much of your affluence, of all those toys you have, how much of those are really being used to reach rich people for Christ? Or is this just a phony, baloney excuse for indulging yourself and having everything you want, and saying, well, we've got to do this so we can reach rich people. Well, why aren't you reaching any? Why don't you use these riches to reach rich people, or any people for that matter? You'll soon find that this excuse is not valid. It's not even honest.

Another human reasoning that is sometimes used to prove that we should be rich is that if we don't prosper, we can't help the poor. Now, this is one of the ways that they argue that Jesus was rich because he helped the poor. Well, yeah, I guess Jesus may have helped the poor.

Copeland deduces that Jesus frequently helped the poor because when Judas was leaving the room, and when Jesus said, what you must do, do quickly, the other disciples didn't understand what was going on there, and they mistakenly thought that maybe Jesus was telling Judas to go out and buy some things for the Passover, or to make some contribution to the poor, the Bible says. And that being the case, Copeland says, well, it must have been customary for Jesus to give to the poor, because the disciples thought that Judas was maybe going out to give something to the poor. And therefore, if Jesus gave to the poor, he couldn't have been poor himself, he had to be rich.

But we've already seen in 2 Corinthians 8 that the church of Macedonia, out of the abundance of their poverty, gave generously. It does not follow at all that people have to be rich in order to help the poor. As a matter of fact, the rich people probably do less to help the poor than other poor people do, but in my experience at least, and that is not universal, but it certainly is reasonably widespread, it seems to me like the people who have very little are the least covetous.

The Christians who are living with little are the ones who are giving the most to others who have need. The ones who are the wealthiest are making the smallest sacrifices and are the more clinging to their money. The Bible does not indicate that anyone has to be rich to help the poor.

We don't know that Jesus regularly gave to the poor. He may have. We know he fed multitudes, but he did that by a miracle, not by pulling it out of his money bag.

There's no proof from this, certainly not even a hint, that Jesus was rich because he helped the poor. But Jesus did help the poor, but not necessarily by being rich. It says through the abundance of his poverty, you might be made rich.

He helps us in the way that really matters. And of course the next question to ask them is, are you really using your wealth to help the poor? These wealthy Christians who are excusing it by saying, well who will help the poor if no one is rich? I say, okay, well you're rich, how many poor are being helped by you? Are you interested in seeing that? Not that it's any of my business, but if you're going to use that argument, I think I'd be interested in knowing whether it's sincere. Another argument that is used, it's already come up in some of the quotes that were given, is that we're king's kids.

If we are king's kids, God's a king, we're his kids, so he's a king and we're king's kids, then it follows that we should live as it were royal. Royal lives, I mean what kind of king would let his children wear rags and drive a Volkswagen, an old Volkswagen at that? I mean that would disgrace the king for his children to be that way, so they argue. And therefore we bring more glory to God when we live wealthy.

The world looks on and sees what a generous and glorious king is our father. Now there are several arguments against this. One is that the quintessential king's kid was Jesus.

And Jesus didn't ride around in a Rolls Royce or even on a fancy white horse or chariot. Jesus lived as poor. We haven't yet demonstrated that from Scripture, but anyone who reads Scripture knows it, and I will give you some Scriptures to prove it in a moment.

But Jesus was poor and he was a king's kid. And he happens to be the king's kid who is the example for the rest of us. Furthermore, the king and the kingdom that we participate in is not of this world.

And therefore the benefits and the blessings and the wealth of the kingdom is not wealth of this world. It is wealth of another coin than of this world. Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world, and because it is not of this world, my servants didn't fight.

Now they don't conduct physical warfare. They are in a spiritual kingdom. Their warfare is of a spiritual sort.

Likewise, their wealth is of a spiritual coin, not physical. We are king's kids, but that does not necessarily translate in the need to be wealthy or even in the legitimacy of it. Paul said in 2 Timothy 2.3, endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

And this is a very important thing to remember. If someone says, well, we are king's kids, we should be prospering. We are king's kids, but his kids are in the battlefield right now.

We are in the trenches. It is wartime. All of his soldiers are his kids, and all of his kids are his soldiers.

And in wartime you live on hardship rations. When the war is over, we go live in the palace. We'll have time to prosper.

We'll have time to be comfortable for eternity, but it is not what we are called to do now. We are at war. We are to endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

The king is at war, and his children must be prepared to endure all the hardships of those who are engaged in war. 2 Timothy 2.3 Another argument that sometimes is heard from prosperity teachers is there is no virtue in poverty. There is no virtue in poverty.

Well, okay, no virtue necessarily. Obviously a person can be poor and be wicked. There are wicked poor people just like there are wicked rich people.

I would agree there is no virtue in poverty. By that we mean that being poor does not make you a virtuous person. But there is an advantage in poverty if the Scripture is to be believed on the subject.

Let me turn you to several Scriptures that give that impression. Very strongly. Luke 6. The opening words of the Sermon on the Mount as Luke records it.

Luke 6, beginning with verse 20. Then he lifted his eyes toward the disciples and said, Blessed are you poor. Now these were the disciples, his twelve, and they were poor.

He said, Blessed are you poor. For yours is the kingdom of God. Now the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, according to Romans 14, 17.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and revile you and cast out your name as evil.

For the Son of Man's sake, rejoice in that day and leap for joy. For indeed your reward is great in heaven. Your reward is not here, your reward is in heaven.

For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets. But look at verse 24. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you.

Listen. Blessed are you when you're poor, hungry, abused. Woe to you when you're rich and full and everyone speaks well of you.

Does that sound like Jesus is promoting affluence as a desirable lifestyle for disciples? He indicates there's a blessing in being poor. Blessed are you poor. It doesn't mean you're virtuous just because you're poor, but you can be blessed in that state definitely.

And in chapter 16 of Luke, we have Jesus telling the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus, of course, a beggar, was saved. The rich man was in hell.

And in that place, when the rich man asked Abraham to send some relief to him, he received this answer. Luke 16, 25. But Abraham said, Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things.

And likewise, Lazarus, evil things. Meaning you were rich and comfortable in your lifetime. Lazarus was not.

But now he is comforted and you're tormented. Now this is the only answer this man receives why he's not going to be relieved. He doesn't say you were a wicked man.

He doesn't say you earned this by blaspheming God. He says you received your consolation in your lifetime. Lazarus didn't.

So of course you're not going to receive consolation now. Don't you want all this in heaven too? It makes it sound as if you've got a choice. A friend of mine in the ministry once said this.

He said, everything has its price tag. You can have Jesus or the world. If you take Jesus, it will cost you the world.

If you take the world, it will cost you Jesus. This is the answer that Abraham gave in the parable that Jesus told. You had your consolation.

Jesus said, woe unto you rich, for you have your consolation. Do you want consolation now or will you sacrifice that now to have it later? That's the question. Do you want your reward in heaven or do you want to have your reward now? That's the teaching of Jesus.

James confirms this in James 2. In James 2, verse 5, it says, listen, my beloved brethren. Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not rich men oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do not they blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? Now, what he's saying is you Christians have a tendency to honor the rich and to dishonor the poor, but God chooses to honor the poor and make them rich, not in money, but in faith.

And this is such the opposite statement of what the word of faith would teach. The people who are rich in faith, that is, who have an abundance of faith, also will, because of that, have an abundance of wealth. But James says, no, no, the poor have more faith.

Why? Because they trust God more. They have to. You have money.

Some of your faith is going to be in your money. It's virtually inevitable. I don't know that there's no exceptions, but I don't see how you could have money and not in some measure trust in it.

I lived as a poor preacher without much income at a poverty level for many years as a single person. And then I got married and my wife was killed, and I received an insurance settlement. When she was killed, she was hit by a truck, and within a few days, the company that insured the truck that hit her and killed her was at my door offering me a check for an amount of money that was very large, and I took it.

I mean, why should I turn it down? I said, sure. I mean, put a gift horse in the mouth. And at that moment, I received more money than I thought I'd ever see at one time in my life.

By today's standards, say this many years ago, it wouldn't be worth quite as much, but it sure seemed like a fortune to me at the time. And I decided that I didn't want to allow this money to interfere with the life of faith that I've been living. I decided I would... I knew that people who have money sometimes stop trusting God, so I determined I'm going to keep trusting God just the same, even though I have this money.

I put it in the bank, and I determined I'm going to give myself one year to liquidate it all.

I'm going to give it away. I'm going to buy necessary things.

I'm going to just make sure I don't have any of this a year from now. And I met that goal. I gave it all away, or I bought a few things I needed, moderate things, and then I gave the rest away.

And it took about a year, and the reason I gave myself a year was I didn't want to just do something stupid and run off and write a big check to the first organization that made an emotional appeal for money. I wanted to do a little research to make sure I was giving the things worth giving to, since I figured I'll never have this much money again. You only get to do this once, and it's a great joy, but I want to make sure that after I'm done, I don't have any regrets for what I did with it.

So I took a year, but during that year, I found that although I didn't love money, and I still wanted to live by faith day by day, I couldn't trust God for all the same things as before. And the reason was simply this. Before I had any money in the bank, I had to trust God every month for rent.

I had to trust God every month for my phone bill. I drove an old beater of a car that might break down at any time, and I didn't know how to fix it. I didn't have any money to fix it.

I had to trust God to get me from point A to point B on a regular basis, and if something would happen to my car, I had to trust Him to get it fixed. I had to trust God all the time. My whole life was a life just of total dependency on God.

And that money in the bank, although I was not generally using it for myself, it was there, and I knew that I could draw upon it if necessary. It was in the back of my mind that if my car broke down, I could fix it. I don't have to wonder whether I'll be able to pay the next phone bill or how God may provide it.

It's not that I gave up my faith in God. It's just that there was very little I had to trust God for. And when I had no money, I had to trust Him for everything.

And those who have never been destitute, and I have been many times destitute, and I don't complain about that. That was a life choice. I have no regrets, and I wouldn't regret being there again.

Those who have never been destitute do not know to what degree they are trusting in their financial holdings, trusting for things that they might otherwise trust God for. Now, I'm not saying that it's wrong to have money in the bank. I didn't feel guilty about that.

I'm just saying I sensed a different dynamic in my walk of faith, knowing that that was there. It gave me something else to rest, just be secure about, instead of just being secure in God. And I'm not making that out to be a sin.

I'm not saying that people who have money are sinning. I'm saying, though, those who are poor are richer in faith. Why? They have to be.

They have nothing else to trust in but God. But the rich have a much more difficult time really trusting God for everything, for the simple reason that they don't have to. There's no compulsion upon them to do it.

That's why it's difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Because the more rich you are, the more you get the feeling you can take care of everything yourself. What do you need God for? Another place in James, this is very important, James chapter 5, verses 1 through 5, it says, Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you.

Your riches are corrupted, your garments are moth-eaten, your gold and silver are corroded, and your corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped treasure up in the last days. Indeed, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the reapers have reached into the ears of the Lord of Sabbath.

You have lived on earth in pleasure and luxury. You have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the just, and He does not resist you.

Now, the rich men, they said their riches are going to consume them as fire. Now, some would argue, well, these were not righteous rich men, these were wicked rich men. They murdered the just and so forth.

True, that's true. But He doesn't, He takes a long time to get around to that particular crime. His main rebuke to them is that they have laid up treasures in the last days.

They have lived in luxury and comfort on the earth. This is not apparently consistent with the Christian lifestyle as James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem in his day, saw it. And he based a lot of what he said, of course, on what Jesus said.

The Bible certainly indicates there is no shame at all in being poor. It does not say there is a virtue in being poor. But there is certainly no shame in being poor.

There is nothing about being poor that should make it a necessarily undesirable state for the Christian. In Proverbs 19.1, Proverbs 19.1, it says, Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips and is a fool. If you are poor but you have integrity, you are better off than a wicked man regardless of his financial circumstances.

In Proverbs 15, verses 16 and 17, it says, Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble. Better is a dinner of herbs. Of course, this is referring to herbs as an inexpensive meal compared with what it goes on to say.

Where love is than a fatted calf with hatred. This is not advocating vegetarianism necessarily. What it is saying is, if you have to settle for an inexpensive plain meal, that is better if you have love there than to have a feast and have strife.

There are some things more important than wealth. Better a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted calf with hatred. Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble.

In chapter 16 of Proverbs, in verse 8, it says, Better is a little with righteousness than vast revenues without justice. There are more verses of this type in Proverbs. We don't have time to go into it.

Certainly the Bible does not teach there is any shame in being poor. Certainly not for the Christian. Jesus was poor.

I have been saying that all along. But how do I know Jesus was poor? Well, for one thing, Paul said so. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that through his poverty you might become rich.

Now, his poverty, Kenneth Copeland himself said that can't be a reference to spiritual poverty, because Jesus was spiritually well off. It has to be physical poverty. But then he turns around and says that Jesus wasn't physically poor in another place, not realizing he had made that argument earlier.

But the fact of the matter is, Paul tells us Jesus was poor. If we didn't know it otherwise, we could know it from reading the Gospels. But in retrospect, Paul can tell us what Jesus had lived like also.

Jesus was born in a poor family. We don't know that his circumstances ever rose above poverty. He was born in a poor family, we know, because when he was born, his parents took him to offer the traditional sacrifices associated with the birth of a firstborn son.

And it says in Luke 2, verse 24, they came to offer a sacrifice according to what was written in the Law of Moses, or the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. A pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons was an alternative sacrifice. It was supposed to be a lamb, but if the parents were too poor to offer a lamb, they were to offer a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.

We're told that Mary and Joseph offered the special offering that was for the poor to offer. Therefore, Jesus is known to have been born to a poor family. Did he ever rise above poverty? We don't have any record of it, if he did.

In Matthew chapter 8, verse 20, Jesus said, Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. That means he didn't own any home. Even the animals of the field were cared for and had their own place, but Jesus

didn't.

And he said that in the context of when someone said, I'll follow you wherever you go. He said, well, you better count the cost. I don't have any place to live.

Do you? Is that how you want to live? Do you want to not have anywhere to lay your head? That's what he's implying. In chapter 17 of Matthew, Jesus told Peter in verse 27, Nevertheless, lest we offend him, this is with reference to paying the temple tax, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money.

Take that and give it to them for me and you. Now, this is both of their tax money, Peter's and Jesus'. It was 50 cents per person.

It was not a very burdensome tax. But Jesus didn't say, Peter, go talk to Judas. Get some money out of the treasure and we'll pay our taxes out of that.

He said, go, better go catch a fish. I owe 50 cents, you owe 50 cents. Better go fishing.

You know, we don't have that kind of money around here, obviously. Also in Luke chapter 20 and verse 24, when they asked Jesus is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not, it says in Luke 20, 24, it says, show me a denarius. He didn't even have one.

A denarius was the coin that a person, a common laborer received at the end of the working day. It was a day's wages. Comparable today for a laborer, let's say, making minimum wage today, what would that be? What would minimum wage for a day be? About 40 bucks? 30, 40 bucks, something like that, between there? Okay, so Jesus didn't have a coin of that value.

His opponents had to show him a coin like that. Now, Jesus had his disciples around. Judas, holding the bag, too.

Apparently, there wasn't a denarius available in it. His enemies had to present the coin because he didn't have one. Now, these things in themselves prove that he was poor, but Paul said that Jesus was poor.

And you certainly have nothing in the Bible to counteract the impression given in these passages. Jesus had nowhere to lay his head. He had to send Peter fishing to pay a really minimal amount of tax.

He just didn't have money. Money was not his thing. He wasn't into it.

Americans are, and that's why the prosperity teaching is so popular among Americans. It appeals to what we already selfishly want and tries to affirm that that's okay. Now, as far as the disciples, were they poor? They were, of course, poor.

Luke 6.20, we already read, Jesus said to his disciples, Blessed are you poor. His disciples were poor. He said so, Luke 6.20. In Matthew 19, in verse 27, Peter said, Lord, we've forsaken all to follow you.

How can you forsake all and not be poor? In Acts 3.6, I've already mentioned, Peter said, Silver and gold I have none. Acts 3.6. We already looked at 1 Corinthians 4.11, where Paul said, even in this present hour, we are hungry, we're thirsty, we're poorly clothed, we're homeless. That's Paul's lifestyle.

In 2 Corinthians, that was 1 Corinthians 4.11, but in 2 Corinthians, Paul again speaks of his lifestyle. And he says in chapter 6, verse 10, he says, He is as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as poor, yet making many rich, as having nothing, yet possessing all things. Now here, Paul says, I am poor, but I make many rich.

Does he mean that he's spiritually poor? No. Is he making people materially rich? No. It's the same kind of issue as chapter 8, verse 9. Jesus became poor so that we, through his poverty, could become rich.

That is, he became physically poor so we could become spiritually well off. So did Paul. Paul was poor, yet he made many people rich.

He certainly didn't make them materially rich. He made them rich in the sense that Jesus makes people rich, which has nothing to do with finances. In chapter 11 of 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 11.27, It says, In weariness and in toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness.

Nakedness means he's inadequately clothed. In hunger and thirst means he's inadequately fed. He's describing his normal pattern of life.

The disciples were poor. They said so. It is declared so.

Jesus was poor. The disciples said so. Jesus himself said so.

Why would anyone want to say otherwise? Except to support a notion that is unbiblical. Now, Jesus taught several things about wealth, but let me just real quickly summarize. We won't look at the scriptures on these.

I'll tell you scriptures for them, but I can't look them up right now because of the shortage of time. Jesus said not to lay up treasures for yourself on earth. He said that in Matthew 6, verses 19 and 20.

Jesus told his disciples to sell what they had and to give to the poor. He told the disciples that, not just the rich young ruler, but he told the disciples that in Luke 12, 33 and 34. He also said that when you give, do not do so expecting repayment.

And this is, of course, different than the seed faith idea. You need money? Give money.

You get something back.

More back. Then you give with the motivation to give back. Jesus said give expecting nothing in return.

In Luke 6, verses 30 and 35. Also he said that in Luke 14, verses 12 through 14. Invite people to your feast who can't pay you back, so that you can be paid back in the resurrection.

Don't invite people who will pay you back. Jesus made it very clear you should be generous and give, not to receive back, but simply so that God will be pleased and that you'll bless others. Jesus said to take no thought about what you should eat, drink, or etc.

So you shouldn't be motivated by the desire to get rich. In Luke 12, verses 22 through 31. Furthermore, the teaching of scripture generally in the New Testament is that you should be content with such things as you have.

Jesus didn't make that exact statement. Luke 3.10 through 14 has John the Baptist telling the soldiers to be content with their wages. But Hebrews 13.5 exhorts Christians to be content with such things as they have and let their lives be without covetousness.

Covetousness is the desire to acquire things. It's greed. And we need to be careful about covetousness.

Jesus said, beware of covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses. William Law, a Puritan writer, wrote this in his book, Christian Perfection. Quote, even the necessities of life must be sought with a kind of indifference.

How much do Christians generally vary from this ideal? Christianity commands us to take no thought, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink? Yet Christians are restless until they can eat sumptuously. They are to be indifferent about raiment, but they are full of concern about fine array. They are to take no thought for the morrow, yet many of them think they have lived in vain if they are not able to leave largest states when they die.

It must not be said that there is some defect in these doctrines or that they are not plainly enough taught in the scriptures simply because the lives and behavior of Christians are so contrary to them. This is from his book, Christian Perfection. Let me read something from George Mueller.

George Mueller said, quote, it ill becomes the servant to seek to be rich and great and honored in this world where his Lord was poor and mean and despised. Unquote. A.W. Tozer, I don't know if I have time to read this whole quote.

I think I'll go ahead and try. Tozer made this statement about false teachers. There are a lot of things in the Bible about false teachers, including 2 Peter 2, 1-3, which says that false teachers will appeal to the covetousness of their listeners.

And that's certainly what the prosperity doctrine does. 2 Peter 2, 1-3 talks about them using covetousness. Tozer says, by offering our hearers a sweetness and light gospel and promising every taker a place on the sunny side of the bray, we not only cruelly deceive them, we guarantee also a high casualty rate among the converts, one on such terms.

On certain foreign fields, the term rice Christians has been coined to describe those who adopt Christianity for profit. The experienced missionary knows that the convert that must pay a heavy price for his faith in Christ is one that will persevere to the end. He begins with the wind in his face, and should the storm grow in strength, he will not turn back, for he has been conditioned to endure it.

By playing down the cost of discipleship, we are producing rice Christians by the tens of thousands right here on the North American continent. Old timers will remember the Florida land boom of some years ago when a few unscrupulous real estate brokers got rich by selling a big chunk of alligator swamp to innocent northerners at fancy prices. Right now there's a boom in religious real estate on the sunny side of the bray.

Thousands are investing, and a few promoters are getting rich. But when the public finds out what it has bought, some of those same promoters are going out of business, and it can't happen too soon." And that is certainly a fair assessment of the prosperity teachers. Some of them may be moderately sincere, but it's hard to believe that they are.

I mean, when they read the scriptures and have to twist them and contort them beyond recognition to defend the prosperity doctrine, it seems unlikely that anyone could do that with sincerity unless they simply are self-deceived deliberately. But the prosperity doctrine is not true. A person can be rich and faithful, but it's harder than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, according to Jesus.

But there's certainly nothing wrong with being poor, and the poor of this world God has chosen to be rich in faith. Therefore, Christians of wisdom will easily find it easy to make the right decision of whether to seek prosperity or to be content with such things as we have. Well, we're going to have to stop there for lack of any more time.