

# Integrity: Prosperity Gospel by Femi Adeleye

by Femi Adeleye

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*Femi Adeleye critiques the prosperity gospel, highlighting its misinterpretation of scripture and negative impact on the poor while calling for repentance and a return to Christ's teachings.*

**Duration:** 11:31

**Scripture:** Isaiah 1:17, Matthew 13:22, Luke 6:38, Luke 12:15, Luke 16:9, John 10:10, 1 Timothy 6:10, James 2:5

**Topics:** "False Teachings", "True Worship"

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## Description

This sermon addresses the dangers and misconceptions of the prosperity gospel, highlighting how it can lead to materialism, misinterpretation of Scripture, and a focus on personal gain rather than true worship and service. It emphasizes the need to discern false teachings, prioritize the needs of the poor, and return to the simplicity and compassion of Christ in our lives.

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## Transcript

On a Sunday I asked my cousin why he had not gone to church. He answered by telling me that in response to his pastor's preaching, he had donated his Volkswagen to his church, expecting God to give him a Mercedes-Benz car in return. After some months of waiting and not seeing his miracle car materialize, he thought God had disappointed him, so he stopped going to church.

I told him that God had not disappointed him, rather he had been misled. My cousin had been attending a prosperity preaching church. The prosperity or health and wealth gospel is one of the fastest-growing different gospels today, cutting across denominations.

This gospel asserts that believers have the right to the blessings of health and wealth, and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions and the sowing of seed faith. Although the Bible affirms that God cares enough to provide for the needs of his people, and although there are legitimate ways of working to have those needs met, this gospel makes the pursuit of material things and physical well-being end in themselves. You can learn much more about the prosperity gospel in the multiplex this afternoon.

For now, I'll just highlight some of its features. The gospel focuses primarily on material possessions, physical well-being, and success in this life, which mostly includes abundant financial resources, good health, clothes, housing, cars, promotion in business, as well as other endeavors of life. The extent of material acquisition is often equated with God's approval.

Scripture is often interpreted or manipulated to promote the main emphasis of this gospel. For instance, Luke 6 38, which says, give and it will be given to you, good measure, press down, shaking together, and running over, be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you, is often used to motivate or mobilize people to give during collections at church.

This verse, however, is often quoted out of context and abused. It is found in the context of Jesus' teaching on love and mercy, and how we should relate to and treat other people. The full paragraph begins with verse 7, which says, judge not, and you shall not be judged.

Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Following in God's example, believers should be hesitant in judging others, and realize that God will treat them in the same way as they treat others.

The passage is about relationships, not treating others or judging them in the way we do not want to be judged or treated. The text is, therefore, not about giving to God financially, nor expecting returns for what we give. This has, however, been twisted to indicate that God will return in double or in a hundredfold whatever one gives in offerings.

Now, very few people using this passage as a basis for collecting offerings refer to the unusually strong words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the same chapter. For in Luke 6, 24 to 25, the Lord Jesus Christ says, but woe unto you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full, for you shall hunger.

Several other scripture passages are easily misquoted or quoted out of context and misinterpreted. Other shortcomings of this gospel include the tendency to distort the mission of Jesus Christ from primarily coming to save us from our sins to coming to make us rich. While some preach that Jesus has come both to save us from sins and to make us rich, it is very rare to hear preaching on repentance or salvation from sin in prosperity gospel circles.

This different gospel fails to see that all forms of giving to God are primarily acts of worship. Instead, it teaches that tithing or giving to God is an investment that must yield results or returns. Importantly, this gospel distorts the person of Christ and misleads people by teaching that Jesus was materially rich.

Furthermore, the prosperity gospel often feeds on the greed of its teachers at the expense of the needs of their followers. One thing is certain, Jesus neither preached nor teach prosperity gospel. All that Jesus taught about earthly possession, as we've been reminded, come to us as warnings.

For example, in Luke 12 15, it clearly says, take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things it possesses. In Matthew 13 22, Jesus also warned against the deceitfulness of riches, which he refers to as the unrighteous mammon in Luke 16 9. The hermeneutics of this gospel raises more questions than it answers. For instance, does it affirm and point people to the cross of Christ? Is the lifestyle of those who benefit from it consistent with the life of Christ? And more importantly, is the gospel good news to the poor? While the prosperity gospel often wears the mask of advocacy for the poor, it is hardly good news for the poor, since in most situations, it is the leaders and the pastors who wear better suits, who drive better cars, and who acquire bigger homes.

There is a deep sense of injustice and immorality to all this, when one considers that in most of our contexts, the plight of the poor is severe. Some of those who keep swaying to the prosperity gospel can

hardly afford regular meals or other basic essentials, such as shelter or paying school fees for their children. Why should any follower of Jesus support a gospel that tends to align much more with celebrity culture in depriving the poor of the dignity and the respect they deserve, rather than appreciate their endurance of living often in subhuman conditions or working to alleviate their situation, some preachers connive with popular culture to dangle on realistic shortcuts to prosperity.

I want to submit to us this morning that the prosperity gospel is nothing less than a seduction into false delusion. It contradicts biblical teaching on work by offering shortcuts to material success. How do we respond to this gospel? First, I suggest that we need to recognize that the prosperity gospel is primarily about money and that it contradicts both the life of Jesus and the purpose for which he died on the cross.

The French theologian Jacques Ellul, in his book *Money and Power*, argues that money is power, a spirit, a would-be God, a rival master. Money does not merely tempt, it engulfs, it spins its web around people, forcing them into its service. Secondly, I suggest that we need to take the plight of the poor seriously enough to reject this gospel and work at better and alternative ways of meeting the needs of the poor than offering shortcuts that do not work.

Finally, and not least, I suggest that in whatever way we ourselves have aligned with this gospel, we need to repent. Even if we have not preached it, in whatever way we have used the gospel or Christian ministry to idolize material things or acquire more things than we really need or twisted scripture to justify affluent lifestyles, we need to repent and return to the simplicity and the compassion of Christ. Uncle John Stott has suggested that our lives is in fact a pilgrimage between two moments of nakedness, so we should travel light and live simply.

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