

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Prosperity Gospel Loves God's Gifts, But Ignores God Himself

MIKE MCKINLEY & SEAN DEMARS

1

Think about the last time you gave a gift to someone you really care about. Maybe it was a Christmas present for a friend, an anniversary gift for your spouse, or a birthday present for your child. Whatever the circumstances, it's likely that you intended that gift to be an expression of your care and love for that person.

A few years ago, my (Mike's) wife made me a blanket out of a bunch of my favorite old band t-shirts. Every time I see the blanket in my office, I'm reminded of how much time and care and effort went into making that gift. I really treasure the gift—not just because it's the perfect size and weight for a blanket, but because Karen made it for me as an expression of her love.

What if I loved the blanket but never connected it back to Karen in my heart? What if I enjoyed the gift whenever I was reading a book and my office was a bit chilly, but I never thought of her and her kindness and love? Would you think that the purpose of the gift had been fully achieved? On one level, the blanket keeps me warm, so there's that. But it was meant to do more than that; it was meant to remind me of my wife's love.

It's the same way with the gifts God gives us. When the apostle Paul was speaking to the people of Athens, he told them that God "gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" for a reason. "That they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him" (Acts 17:25b, 27a). In short, God's gifts are meant to lead our thoughts and our hearts back to him the way that a stream leads back to its spring.

It's fair to say that the prosperity gospel (PG) strongly emphasizes receiving, maintaining, and even maximizing the good gifts of God (health, wealth, favor, power). And yet, there's relatively little emphasis on God himself. Now, we want to be fair—no PG preacher that we know of would nakedly state that people ought to love God's gifts *more* than they love God. And if you asked them, they would surely deny that this is what they teach. But we're talking about emphasis and priority. When you see a church or ministry that talks about God's gifts but spends relatively little time talking about God's character or our need to respond to him in repentance and faith, then you can be pretty sure you're dealing with the PG.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Here's one example from the ministry of Benny Hinn. He writes,¹

We have many instances of the wealth transfer in Bible history, including Israel's. Remember the great Old Testament superpower called Egypt? The nation had more gold and silver than any other on the planet. Yet Moses was in exile in the desert while the children of Israel toiled in slavery. Everything kept going as it had been for years, but suddenly things began to change. God spoke to Moses from a burning bush and told him to go back to Egypt. Not only did He promise to deliver His children from slavery, but He said, 'When you leave you will not go empty-handed.'

It's not that what Hinn is saying is false, but he puts the emphasis in all the wrong places. Yes, the Lord blessed the people of Israel materially as they left Egypt, but that's hardly the point of the story. God's people got a lot more out of the deal than some gold and jewels. The headline isn't "God Transfers Wealth from Egypt to Israel" but "God Keeps His Promise and Powerfully Delivers His People From Their Enemies." Over and over again, the Bible points to Israel's deliverance from slavery as the Old Testament's clearest picture of God's salvation. The exodus event was a shadow of the coming deliverance that Christ would bring (see Exodus 20:1, Isaiah 11:16, Luke 9:30–31). In the exodus, God's power and love are on full display, and it ought to make his people worship him. To reduce these events to little more than a transfer of wealth is to miss the point. It's to value the gift over the giver.

If you want to see what it looks like to get the whole "gift-giver" thing right, look no further than Asaph in Psalm 73. After confessing that he was tempted to be envious of the ways that other people prospered (particularly the wicked), he concluded:

Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:25–26)

Asaph wrestles through the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked, but finally consoles himself with the reality that ultimately his greatest treasure is not God's gifts, but God himself. The psalmist has found something that resolves his frustrations and alleviates his suffering: he has found true joy and pleasure in God.

In the PG, however, God is spoken of primarily as a means to an end. It treats a relationship with God like marrying someone for their money. You don't really love

¹ <https://www.bennyhinn.org/enewsletter/greatest-wealth-transfer/>

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

them; you just love them for what they can give you. But coming to Jesus as a way to get something else isn't worship, it's idolatry of the thing you're trying to get.

If you're in a church and you're wondering whether or not they're influenced by the PG, simply pay attention to the sermons, the Bible study during group discussions, and the prayer meetings throughout the week. If your pastor—or Sunday school teacher, favorite author, et. al.—spends a small amount of time talking about what God is like, but a lot of time talking about what God can give you, then you're probably face-to-face with the PG.

* * * * *

Editor's note: This article is taken from *Health, Wealth, and the (Real) Gospel* by Sean DeMars and Mike McKinley, ©2022. Used by permission of Christian Focus Publications.

© 9 Marks, April 14, 2022. Retrieved April 16, 2022.

<https://www.9marks.org/article/the-prosperity-gospel-loves-gods-gifts-but-ignores-god-himself/>