

Commenting On Prosperity Preaching

Does God promise that if you will become a Christian, you will also become rich and have great health?

Many popular religious speakers and writers say "Yes!" Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, Creflo Dollar (yes, his real name), Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, T.D. Jakes, among others, teach this. Their claim is, as a believer you put yourself in position for material goods, health, social position, career heights and debts paid. This popular religious movement has spawned sound bites that promise almost anything you want, like: "Say it; do it; receive it; tell it," (Kenneth Hagin).

First, this is based on misquoted and partially quoted passages in the Old Testament, presented without regard to context. Over and over these advocates of prosperity quote passages from the Old Testament (examples: Deut. 29:9; 30:5; 1 Chron. 22:13). Look closely at those, and see if the context bears out the promises they are making. God did promise prosperity and land to His people, the nation of Israel. God formed this nation from the offspring of Abraham, and maintained a unique relationship with them to bring Christ from them. That covenant and the associated material promises cannot be claimed by everybody today.

Second, prosperity preachers impose a materialistic purpose on the death of Christ. A favorite passage is Isaiah 53, where the claim is made that Jesus died to heal us of all our diseases (spiritual, physical, financial, emotional, etc.). By opening up this promise beyond the context of spiritual benefit, they may attract the masses but they have to ignore the New Testament fulfillment, announcing that He died for our sins.

Third, they routinely generate excitement that is primarily emotional and temporal. The televised showmanship of these preachers works on the emotions and temporal desires of their listeners. The appeal is to excitement that is emotionally shallow, spiritually empty and deceitful (many of their listeners remain in poverty, or do not recover from their illnesses). Prosperity preachers eventually tell people, they can command God: "As a believer, you have a right to make commands in the name of Jesus. Each time you stand on the Word, you are commanding God to a certain extent because it is His Word." Kenneth Copeland (*Our Covenant with God*, 1987, p. 32)

Isn't it clear, religion has been commercialized, marketed and televised for audience appeal, often with a stunning profit motive? The leaders of these movements often live sumptuous lives of excess, funded by people they say are deficient in faith (thus poor and sick). If you want to know what God has to say, read His Word. He speaks plainly, and it is not about fame and fortune, it is about faith and forgiveness.

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." (Colossians 3:1)

- by Warren E. Berkley

A Hairy Reminder

A person between the ages of 20—30 has about 615 hair follicles per square centimeter. A person 50 years of age has around 485 hair follicles per square centimeter. Typically, most people have somewhere between 100,000—150,000 hairs on their head. By the way, the average hair loss for an individual is 50—100 hairs per day. As a result, there is no way you can tell accurately how many hairs you have (in fact, unless you are going bald, most of us don't really care). But God knows.

Jesus said: "*Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows*" (Matt. 10:29-31). This passage reveals three interesting truths.

First, God knows more about us than we know about us. That is a humbling thought. When we sometimes feel like no one understands us or grasps our situation, we forget that God does. God knows your personality. God knows your strengths. God knows what motivates you. God knows when you stumble. God knows the real you. Therefore, when God declares something worthwhile, He knows what He is talking about. When God warns about danger, He knows what

He is talking about. When God tells us that we should do something, we need to do it, because He knows us better than we know ourselves.

God is a God of detail. How insignificant are hairs and sparrows to us. Yet God is aware of them. He is a God of details. The motives, attitudes, and heart behind our actions are as important to Him as the actions themselves. It does little good to give, if you have left out the detail of being a cheerful. Singing fails if we neglect thankfulness in our heart. Let us be a people of details, as God is.

God cares about you. This is why Jesus referred to sparrows and hair. Christ was not sent to save the whales, the environment, or the endangered species, but mankind. Stress and worry often make us wonder if God cares. These two simple illustrations remind us that He does.

- by Roger Shouse

“You Have To Pick Your Battles”

We hear an expression fairly often these days: “You have to pick your battles.” That concept is applied in politics, in business matters, in personal relationship situations, etc. While there may be some fair applications in those realms, we are seriously concerned when we hear folks saying this about religious issues. Even some of our own brethren are picking up this faulty notion.

The expression ‘pick your battles’ suggests that on some things you have to compromise. Perhaps it’s not what you really want or think is right and best, but sometimes you just have to let the other fella have his way. What about this idea?

First, if it is a doctrinal matter, there is no ‘picking’ for us to do. God has already revealed the truth on the subject and faithful Christians cannot choose to ignore a situation where others are violating His will. If it is an issue of truth and righteousness, we must follow the pattern set by the apostle Paul. When false teachers attempted to push their error, Paul said *“we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you”* (Galatians 2:5). We ought to do likewise – the battle is engaged already – there is no ‘picking’ for us to do.

When the issue is not doctrinal, but rather an opinion or judgment matter, there’s no ‘picking of battles’ here either -- because there should be no battle at all! In this sort of scenario we ought to *“be subject one to one to another, and be clothed with humility”* (1 Peter 5:5). So many church problems could be avoided if all had this attitude.

“You have to pick your battles”? – no, not in service to God. There is no place for that approach here. Think!

- by Greg Gwin