Historical Examination of the Theology of Wealth and Poverty Gospel in Nigerian Christianity

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Abstract

The theology of wealth and poverty gospel is spreading like wild fire and have gained worldwide attention due to the increasing number of Pentecostal preachers and Christians who have planted churches in, schools, town halls, uncompleted houses in several metropolis of Nigerian cities in particular and Africa in general. They preach unbiblical messages which give hope to their adherents without concomitant effort on hard work. The teaching of the theology of wealth emphasizing that, what God has planned for His children has nothing to do with their profession; career or family background. They uphold that the word of God is the access into the world of wealth. For this group an encounter with the word is what makes someone a commander in the realm of wealth. This paper is "Historical-Theological" in nature and adopts theological content analysis method based on the principles of God's word. The significance of the work lies in the sense that this paper, will be of benefit in the field of church and mission studies which will enable the gospel ministers and theologians of various denominations understand the historical and

theological concept of wealth and poverty message. The paper finds out that these theological teachings violate the principles of hard work and biblical teachings of God's word. The study discovers that this teaching put the lives of many Nigerian and Africa Christians at risk of accepting that wealth could only be obtained by faith. This is unacceptable because God the creator of the universe is interested in the wellbeing and prosperity of humanity. The paper calls for sound biblical teachings and interpretations of the passages of the Bible that deals with wealth and poverty. The paper concludes that by upholding the principles of teaching the undiluted word of God in various churches and theological schools around the globe, we can work towards correcting the erroneous theological teachings as we encourage Christians to have a rethink and believe that wealth and poverty are sacrosanct in the history of man.

Keywords: Examination, Historical, Poverty, Prosperity gospel, Wealth

Introduction

Prosperity Gospel is also known as Faith Movement, Prosperity Gospel of Faith, Prosperity Theology, Word of Faith, Health and Wealth, Name It and Claim It, Blab It and Grab It, Seed Faith Movement and Prosperity Preaching. It has been identified as a current religious phenomenon that has gained and sustained existence in many Christian churches around the globe over the years. Also, it is a global phenomenon which has drawn the interest of many Christian groups, the government and the church and society in general. In Nigeria today, prosperity gospel has not become the characteristic of Pentecostal churches only, it has spread among some Catholic and Protestant churches. Most Christian churches in Nigeria in the recent past misuse the biblical teachings of the gospel by giving less emphasis on doctrinal issues related to soul-winning, salvation, desire for the kingdom of God and good moral (Fatokun 1999). The prosperity movement emphasizes faith, healing, deliverance, wealth, physical well-being and empowerment of believers both spiritually and economically. However, some Churches in the Nigerian society do not preach the biblical concept of the gospel correctly. Many of these prosperity preachers have turned the biblical concept of the teaching round for monetization, commercialization, lust for materialism, exploitation of their congregants and brainwashing them with inappropriate teachings and celebration sermons. Consequently, the hearts of many Nigerians

have so much been corrupted in the struggle to pursue wealth at the expense of the things of God which has eternal values as a result of inappropriate presentations of prosperity preaching. It is in the light of the above that this paper examines the historical and biblical trajectory of theology of wealth and poverty gospel in contemporary African Christian Church in general and Nigerian Society in particular. This paper provides a general overview of Prosperity Theology. It begins with a brief conceptual clarification, traces its historical development, presenting the key teachings and techniques of Prosperity Gospel and showing its effects on Nigerian citizens in particular and Africa in general.

Conceptual Clarification

The Lausanne Theology Working Group (2010) defines Prosperity Gospel as the teaching that believers have right to the blessings of health and wealth and they can obtain these blessings freely through positive confessions of faith and the sowing of seeds through the faithful payments of their tithes and offerings. For Mumford (2012), it is a Christian theology whose signature teaching is that God wants believers to be rich and enjoy good physical health. Ayantayo (2010) holds that prosperity gospel is a strong teaching that requires Christians to be prosperous while on earth. The definition of Ayantayo above means that, the emphasis of Prosperity Gospel is actually placed on material acquisition, which could be manifested in possession of expensive cars, costly houses, fantastic bank accounts, cash at hand, quality expensive clothing, abundance, prosperity and success in all endeavorus. These declarations of prosperity blessings are common in most churches in Africa and especially Nigeria. Peter (2009) sees it as a gospel of human possibility which is covered in the name of Jesus. The proponents of Prosperity Gospel believe that poverty characterizes the work of the devil and is inimical to productivity (Mate 2002). This means to them that the true Christian must not be poor because God at creation endowed humanity with wealth, health and victory at all times. It is argued that since Christ came to reclaim humanity's legal right to wealth, health, and success, which had been surrendered to Satan at the inception of sin, the redeemed now take their place in Christ and through faith actualization of the legal rights is made possible. Arising from Traditional Pentecostal view, Prosperity is viewed as a function of repentance and renewal of a relationship which had been broken by sin and pollution, it is also a sign that healing has occurred (Kalu 200). For the purpose of this paper, the author defines prosperity

gospel as a gospel of human ability to reclaim the lost wealth and riches which was lost by humanity as a result of disobedience of God's law. It does not mean that once one is a Christian that such person will automatically become rich without hard work or would not experience hardship or poverty.

Historical Development and Origin of Prosperity Theology

History and origin of global influence of Prosperity Theology has been attributed to several sources including Essek William Keenyon, A. A. Allen, Kenneth Hagin, Knneth Copeland, and Fredrick K.C. Price. Some of these proponents were greatly influenced by Oral Roberts, who is regarded as by many as the father of Prosperity Theology (Silva 2014). For Nwaomah (2020) Kenneth Copeland attended a program organized by Oral Roberts in 1967 in his University. It was there that he first witnessed the ministry of Roberts, and learned from him. Kenneth Copeland later became one of the disciples of Hagin in subsequent years and was greatly influenced by his theology. Nwaomah (2020) posits that Price credits Hagin as the greatest influence in his life and ministry. Hagin claimed that the Lord Himself taught him about prosperity. He claimed not to have ever read about it in any book and upholds that he got it directly from heaven (Hagin 1985). Roberts and Allan both of them had already been preaching the message for not less than ten years prior to 1959 when Hagin claimed to have received his divine revelation. There is also a brand of Pentecostal preachers who emphasize "health and wealth". According to Sarles, (1986) "the gospel of prosperity consists of healing from sickness, casting out of demons, and deliverance from material poverty" (p.22). Kenneth Hagin reports that prosperity gospel is summarized in preaching a four-part formula which is the basis for receiving God's promises. According to him, the four-part formula is "Say it, do it, receive it, and Tell it" (Hagin 2009 p.2). This prosperity gospel formula has greatly influenced some Pentecostal preachers and advocates, such as Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Joel Osteen, Charles Nieman, Hobert Freeman, Joyce Meyer, Bill Wiston, David Oyedepo, Obike Ihechiluru, Emma Okorie, Vincent Okorie, William Kumuyi and T.B Joshua. It is within this teaching that Creflo Dollar explains that God wants His people to be financially prosperous, as well as be materially blessed with good health and good marriages. He further reveals that prosperity teaching upholds the belief that God empowers His people to benefit from His promises as outlined in the Bible (Dollar 2009). In this sense, therefore, prosperity gospel proponents uphold that Pentecostals have

access to God's blessings and that enables them to become financially wealthy. Copeland explains that, prosperity gospel is validated by the teachings of the Apostle John who said "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 2). Copeland (2009) affirms that "as the seeds of prosperity are planted in your mind, in your will and in your emotions… they eventually produce a great financial harvest" (p.4). In the light of the above instances, the end-time church is programmed to grow and prosper materially and exceedingly. However, the church has a great need for the blessings of God which would make this promise obtainable (Copeland 1984 p.4). For Bishop David Oyedepo, who established the Living Faith Pentecostal Church (Winners Chapel), prosperity gospel is expressed in this statement: "It's not, O God, just give me something to eat and to drink." He further adds that "God wants to make you a blessing, and the people of the earth will see it… plenty is our heritage" (Oyedepo 2007 p. 10). He believes and teaches that God's plan for the Pentecostals has nothing to do with their profession, career, or family background. Rather, it depends greatly on their obedience to the voice of God. He quotes Deuteronomy 28:9-11 to buttress his points: "if thou shall hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God and walk in his ways… and the Lord shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground…" He asserts that "whether one is a Carpenter, a firewood seller, water seller, a medical doctor, lawyer or engineer is irrelevant, the covenant alignment is the issue" (Oyedepo 1997 p. 11).

Prosperity Gospel Preachers referencing Luke 6:38 in favour of their teachings as Roberts taught and argued by Mumford (2012) that whatever a Christian desires, he or she needs to sow it first and God would give in abundance in response and in proportion to the seed sown. He further explains that if love is needed, love must be sown. If it is time that is needed, time must be sown. If money is needed money must be sown, and should be expected immediately the seed is sown. The prosperity theology proponents also teach that Christ's atoning death does not free believers from sin. It only frees them from physical disease (Isaiah 53:5). The adherents are required to maintain this freedom through effective and marathon prayers, regular fasting and positive thinking which enables one believe that the healing has taken place if such person is sick. If someone is prayed for but does not receive healing, then it is such person's fault because according to the Prosperity

Gospel preachers they lack faith and conceal un confessed sin. The Prosperity Gospel preachers unequivocally place emphasis on the need to clear all generational sins committed by one's parents or grandparents and all kinds of social, economic and political misfortunes. For this reason, there is a need for deliverance. According to the prosperity gospel (theology), a person needs deliverance not just from the generational sins of the parents or grandparents, also from the myriads of evil spirits. The use of the 'blessed' and 'anointed' objects for healing is common. These include but not limited to oil, water, handkerchiefs, and food products. In all Church gathering, these objects are sold in the Churches at different prices to individuals seeking healing and deliverance. Some prosperity gospel preachers preach that poverty is a spiritual evil that must be confronted headlong through aggressive prayer. Indeed, others would claim that God has promised to transfer the wealth of the wicked into the bank accounts of the righteous. Others would add that the Old Testament is full of people who enjoyed abundant wealth such as Adam and Eve before the Fall, Abraham and King Solomon. However, wealth does not come unless one adheres to some rules. One of the key rules is faithfulness in giving directly to the preacher or church leader even more than giving to the church for God's work. In this situation faithfulness according to the Prosperity Gospel Preachers means one sows or gives abundantly in order to reap in abundance (Malachi 3:10 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

Methods used by Prosperity Gospel Preachers in Nigeria

Nigeria and Ghana within West Africa rank high in the reception of the teachings of the prosperity Gospel. It is in this context that Gifford (2007), Alala (2012) and Nwaomah (2012) identified Enoch A. Adeboye and David O. Oyedipo as major proponents of this theology in Nigeria. However, in Africa one of the earliest promoters and preachers of this gospel was the late Nigerian Archbishop (Asamoah-Gyadu 2007). In Ghana major advocates of Prosperity Gospel are Eastwood Anaba, Mensa Otabil, Duncun Williams, and Agyen Asare. Through the teachings, techniques and publications of these promoters among others, there has been a tremendous attractions and acceptance of the prosperity Gospel messages which has attracted them to Pentecostalism in Africa. According to Akper (2007) many of the congregants see their miracles and healings as validation of the word of God and have been greatly persuaded to become Christians. There is no doubt that Pentecostal which is mostly African initiated Churches (AIC) are the fastest

growing congregation in Africa. Some of them have expanded their branches to America, Asia and Europe. For Asamoah-Gyadu (2009) the New Pentecostal Churches (NPCS) of Africa emphasize more on prosperity of all kinds such as wealth, health, success, and ever-soaring profits in business which is coveted, cherished, and publicly flaunted as signs of God's favour. In his argument in this new kind of Christianity, success and wealth are the only genuine marks of faith. Prosperity preachers use different techniques or methods to inculcate and brainwash their members with prosperity mentality. They organize crusade, boast of having power, good networking, mentorship and intimacy, and use of effective media and publication of books and sermons. They organized crusade from time to time with tags and labels associated with prosperity. There are many lists of crusade title in Nigeria that are used by prosperity preachers. One can see this in both rural and urban cities in Nigeria such as 2021 year of glory to glory, 2022 year of breakthrough, 2025 year of liberation and unstoppable blessing, hour of unlimited blessing, freedom from financial challenges and bondage, deliverance from generation curses, from poverty to prosperity, and many more. These crusade titles are not just tags. They are backed with biblical quotations illustrating the need and desire for prosperous life (Ayantayo 2010).

The prosperity preachers claim of having power to make a person rich. As a result, they introduce series of techniques which have manifested in manipulation and playing upon the intelligence or ignorance of their congregants. For example, they ask them to position themselves as those who are rich. That Christ suffered for them to be rich. At times they instruct them to donate money in other to be a beneficiary of God's blessing which could be cars, houses, passport, overseas visa, job, double promotion, success in business, journey mercy and success in overseas trip among others (Dada 2001). Again, they introduce quite a number of offering in which the preachers put a limit to what one can offer depending on the value and wealth of the individual audience. This involves a kind of try your luck method because the preachers ask the first fifty (50) wealthy lucky members of the audience to donate ₦200, 000, until it gets to the least lucky person who may be asked to donate ₦ 50,000.00 or ₦ 30,00.00. The officiating ministers often quote biblical passages such as 2Corintians 9:7 which says" God loves a cheerful giver", or Galatians 6:7 which states, "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked. A man reaps what he sows." The pastors regularly ask the congregation to sow in a big

way so that they may reap bountifully. In the light of this, they brand some offerings such as offering that opens the windows of heaven for blessings, offering that eliminates poverty from one's life completely, and offerings that bring abundant and unstoppable success in all earthly endeavorus. To accompany these, the prosperity pastors sell anointed water, perfume, candle, oil and handkerchiefs to the willing members of the audience declaring that their use will open the way to all round and everlasting success. For example, they tell the audience by using anointed handkerchiefs, a person will get to anywhere he/she desires in life without stress. Majority of audience are carried away by these methods, including educated people, business men and women among the audience. Those who did not participate in the worship, the prosperity preachers give them opportunity to buy tape and video cassette of the worship. Today we have many anointed handkerchiefs, oil, water, books and magazine of prosperity messages on sale in the churches and bookshops and on streets. Bishop Oyedepo a renowned prosperity preacher has written copies of motivational books on issues related to prosperity such as: "Commanding the Supernatural", "Bible Sense of Financial Fortune", "Covenant Wealth" Success Buttons", "Breaking Financial Hardship", "Understanding Financial Prosperity", "Exploring the Secrets of Success" (Ayantayo 2010).

Good Networking, Mentorship and Intimacy are a common practice and method used by prosperity preachers in Nigeria. The well-established prosperity gospel churches are good at building networks and mentorships. Seminary training is one of the ways of building their networks. A good number of the rich prosperity gospel preachers have their own theological college and seminary. They also connect well with all who attend church services through phone calls, emails, newsletters and the social media. As regards to mentoring, the senior leaders tend to allow the younger and upcoming leaders to use the name of their church or ministry. In terms of intimacy, most prosperity gospel preachers know how to navigate on-screen and off-screen to capture the interest of their members. In attempt to inculcate prosperity mentality on the wider audience, a good number of the well-to-do prosperity gospel preachers use media and publications effectively and skillfully. Televangelism which became prominent from the 1960s has flourished since then. Most of the rich prosperity gospel preachers own radio and television stations of their own and have a publishing house that publishes

the books authored by the Prosperity Gospel preachers. The less rich often buy slots on television to broadcast pre-recorded church services. Billboards are mounted and leaflet are placed and pasted at conspicuous places for audience attraction. The preachers often make good money from their publications including books, CDs, DVDs and other material. Some time, they often employ the services of professional advertising agents who are good in the choice of word such that will be catchy enough to win the attention of public. Those on radio and television are aired intermittently, while those in billboards, leaflet are placed and pasted at conspicuous places for the audience to see. It is important to note that the common practices, methods and techniques involved in putting across prosperity gospel to the public and the much emphasis on the subject prosperity tend to affect Christian churches in Nigeria negatively. It turned people away from the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus during his earthly ministry warned his follower to seek his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33). Additionally, Gifford (2007) was right when he identified that Prosperity Gospel preachers use theme of success which is seen in an explicit power packed sermons on prosperity gospel according to which God has provided all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, and every Christian needs to share in Christ's victory over sin, sickness and poverty. He explains that the blessings which can be obtained by a confession of faith. This means that the Prosperity Gospel is invariably linked with ideas of seed faith or with the biblical image of sowing and reaping, tithe and offerings has been very instrumental to prosperity gospel.

The Theology of Wealth and Poverty Gospel in the Context of Prosperity in Nigerian Christianity

Prosperity theology remains a Christian religious belief that has its origin in America. This teaching centered on the notion that God provides material prosperity for those he favours. Piedra (2005) was right when he noted that, prosperity theology basically eludes more to an emphasis on material well-being as a blessing from God than a school of religious thought. According to him, prosperity theology is part of a neo-Pentecostal religious package born in United States. It gained strength in Latin America beginning in the 1980s. He explains that it includes doctrines such as, spiritual warfare and discipleship of the twelve, to the restoration of worship and aggressive activities of church growth. Prosperity

theology is most commonly found within the Pentecostal tradition of Christianity although it is not exclusive to these traditions. Copeland, quoting Hagin (1985) explains that it is the will of God that "the Christian Church will eventually take possession of all the money in the world". Schuller (1983) posits that only stupidity can make people, for humble motives, decide to choose poverty instead of prosperity, small gains instead of great successes. This indicates that many within this theology are sure that material prosperity is what God offers now. Piedra (2005) points out that the ideological underpinnings of prosperity teaching are bound up in the North American of the 19th Century. He explains further that its formal origin was developed in the United States, primarily in the 1950s. In the vein, Pilgrim (1994) notes, that by 1950s the teachings of Oral Roberts were essential and quickly popularized by Robert Tilton. He adds that Robert Tilton is now one of the most respected proponents of the teaching of prosperity gospel. The author of this study agrees with Timm (2014) that the major teaching in Prosperity theology remains that material blessings are the ultimate intention of God for all Christians and that through the performance of certain determined practices, the Christian would attract these material blessings in abundance. Consequently, the Evangelicals have criticized adherents of Prosperity Gospel. Again, The African Chapter of the Lausanne Theology Working Group has examined the theology and teachings of Prosperity Gospel Preachers and summarized it as a 'false gospel'. *To them,* it is a gospel that completely distorts the Bible and induces some practices that are "unethical and unChristlike, while the impact of many denominational and churches is pastorally damaging, spiritually unhealthy, and not only offers no lasting hope, but may even deflect people from the message and means of eternal salvation" (Lausanne Movement 2010 p.99). Timm (2014) strongly argue that prosperity theology distorts many Christian beliefs and practices. It could be said that some of these distortions may be seen in areas of God's character, human existence, teachings of Christ and Christian obedience to the biblical truth.

Distinction between Prosperity Theology and Biblical Teachings on Prosperity

Prosperity theology is based on the promise of God to believers to be in good health and prosperity in business, academics, Christian life and society. According to Piedra (2005) prosperity theology refers to a contemporary theological teaching which stresses that God always blesses his people materially with wealth and

health as well as spiritually when they have a positive faith and are obedient to him. It is interesting to note that prosperity theology is formulated on the earthly blessings promised in the scripture. Piedra (2005) further reports that the Koreans took another step when they discovered that the biblical concept on prosperity requires that wealth be associated with relief for the poor and the weak. Also, other proponents of prosperity theology advocate that the reign of God preached by Jesus looks to the total restoration of humanity and the environment. However, the saving power of the kingdom of God which Jesus has brought manifests itself in the restoration of individual wholeness, social, and ecological health as God's people live by the principle of Kingdom ethic. Piedra (2005), citing Kim, notes that it is easy to see how the lives of God's people lived in obedience to Jesus double command of love for God and neighbour would promote a fair distribution of wealth, preventing the suffering of the materialistic dehumanization on the aspect of wealth. He explains that the suffering of hunger on the part of the poor and how it could lead to social justice, freedom and peace are important. He explains that the salvation of the kingdom of God is real which could remove the existential sufferings of man. This means that, the salvation of the kingdom of God that Jesus has brought includes deliverance from oppression, poverty and illness. To Hanegraaff (1993) Christianity is in crisis because Christians have turned their gazes to transient earthly fantasies, instead of upholding eternal heavenly treasures. This is true because this world is not the final habitation. Christians are simply sojourners on the way to heaven. Prosperity theology disagrees with this proposition, adducing that the church needs to recover the biblical focus on material blessings that God promised to his children here on earth. Piedra (2005), quoting Yamil Jimenez, upholds that God did not destine you to misery, scarcity and need. "God called you to bless you. You should know it. It is essential that you should know it" (p.340). He attributes the ignorance in this area, on the other hand, to the bad influence of a religion that can only offer goods on the other side of death and life on earth.

Hanegraaff (1993) sees prosperity theology as a "gospel of avarice" (p.10) that is misleading the multitudes and corrupting the Bible. Ward Gasque reveals that prosperity theology is a swindling of the sectors of society that seek to get out of their material misery. He strongly points out that: Sadly, many of the poor people who are frequently in the audience of the prosperity evangelists are being offered

false economic hopes, just as mainly invalids and physically handicapped people are offered the false hope of perfect health by some of those same preachers. Many people have been turned away from God by the failure of their financial dreams that were implanted in their minds by the preachers of prosperity to materialize (Gasque 1996, p. 45). Biblical teachings on prosperity are based on interpretation of certain Biblical concepts. These include: material possession, wealth and prosperity. The biblical teaching on material possession is based on the fact that God blesses his people. This teaching is supported by interpretation of the following Bible verses: "So he humbled you, allowed you to hunger and fed you with Manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know, that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 8:3)."A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked" (Psalm 37:16). "Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labour; and this was my reward from all my labour" (Ecclesiastes 2:10). "Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising loving-kindness, Judgment and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight, says that the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:23, 24). The biblical teachings on the above Bible passages suggest that material possession of comfort and security is not the chief end of life.

Also, the biblical teachings of wealth and prosperity are based on certain Bible verses such as: "With your wisdom and your understanding you have gained riches for yourself and gathered gold and silver into your treasuries. By your great wisdom in trade, you have increased your riches and your heart is lifted up because of your riches" (Ezekiel 28:4, 5). "When they had pasture, they were filled, they were filled and their heart was exalted; therefore, they forgot Me" (Hosea 13:6). "Now in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved" (Psalm 30:6). "The rich men's wealth in his strong city; the destruction of the poor is their poverty" (Proverbs 10:15). "He who trusts in his riches will fail but the righteous will flourish like foliage" (Proverbs 11:28). From the above biblical verses wealth and prosperity are inherently dangerous and they breed a false sense of security. However, true righteousness always expresses itself in an obedience which

concerns itself with the well-being of the poor – Exodus 23:6, Job 30:25; Psalm 40:6-8; Proverbs 3:27-28; Jeremiah 7:3-7, 21-23; Ezekiel 16:49, 33:31-32; Amos 5:4-24 and Zechariah 7:8-10.

The biblical teachings on wealth and prosperity in the New Testament are not a sign of righteousness, nor are poverty and hardship indications of God's displeasure (Acts 20:22-24; 21:10-14; Luke 19:2) (Zacchaeus was wicked and wealthy); II Corinthians 8:9 Christ was poor; II Corinthians 11:16-12:10 (Paul was often destitute and suffered much as a direct result of his faithfulness). Prosperity theology has been criticized by some within the Christian community as antithetical to traditional biblical teaching and more generally as exploitative of its adherents, with its financial excesses and lack of financial transparency in its leadership. According to the biblical teaching, faithfulness to God and his commands tends to lead to earthly prosperity. It is also a true fact that, because God made the world and the laws by which it operates, following his laws normally results in doing well for oneself (Proverbs 12:21). God has also demonstrated his special approval of his people by giving them great wealth (Genesis 26:12; I Kings 3:13). To these people of Israel, God promised prosperity for obeying him and threatened curses for disobeying him (Deuteronomy 28). In many cases, faithfulness to God leads to earthly prosperity. However, scripture and experience show that sometimes contrary to the normal pattern, wicked people prosper, while righteous people fall on hard times. This does not seem right to us, but it happens all the time (Psalm 73:1-10). Also, being a Christian does not guarantee that someone will be well off in this life. For example, the millions of poor Christians in the world who are poor are also Christians. This means that rich people and poor ones will always remain yet; God has promised that He will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory. According to Jesus, no servant is greater than his master (John 15: 20). If the Lord himself was homeless (Mathew 8:20) and was persecuted, then His disciples will experience the same. This does not nullify the general connection between faithfulness and prosperity, but acts as a check against presuming upon the Lord's earthly blessings for the prosperity gospel preachers. The biblical teaching on prosperity that "all hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty" (Proverbs 14:23), there is a direct connection between laziness and loss. However, if Christians neglect their responsibilities, they should not be surprised to find themselves poor. Also,

it is a fact that many wicked people live in affluence. Prophet Jeremiah cried out, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" (Jeremiah 12:1). God, in His infinite wisdom, allows some wicked people to enjoy riches in this life even while promising to judge their actions on the last day (James 5:1).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the historical examination of the theology of wealth and poverty gospel. The paper concludes that the Bible presents a balanced view of theology of wealth and prosperity gospel. In both general and specific terms, the theological concept of prosperity gospel is harmonious and consistent but has been distorted by the Prosperity Gospel preachers. Thus, correct teaching, presentation and interpretation of Scripture is sacrosanct in establishing a strong biblical basis for life and practice of faith in Christian churches. On the other hand, Genuine prosperity comes from God who gives both the blessings and power to be prosperous, yet it does not come effortless. This is why believers in Christ are urged to work hard and earn their living (Eph 4:28; Thess.3:6-12). The paper maintains that true Christian may experience material blessings or poverty. So, neither material blessings of prosperity nor poverty is to be used as a standard for measuring the believers' relationship or faithfulness to God. Finally, the paper submits that the theological teachings of most Prosperity Gospel Preachers in Nigeria violate the principles of hard work and biblical teachings of God's word. The paper recommends that erroneous theological teachings should be eschewed by the Prosperity Gospel Preachers while Christians should be encouraged to have a rethink and believe that wealth and poverty are sacrosanct in the history of man.

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