

CURRENT CULTURE

A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONSE

REGULAR BAPTIST PRESS

The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

Alex Bauman, Editor

Current Culture: A Biblical Understanding and Response

Adult Bible Study Student Book

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Preface

Should I be scared of global warming? What is Islam? Is there hope for substance abusers? Should our nation go to war? Does God approve of a free market economy? What is a good strategy for personal purity? Does God promise me health and wealth? Does God care if I gamble? Does God hate homosexuals? How should I respond to immigration problems?

Questions like these need answers. They arise as we are confronted with culture every day in both our private and public lives. We can't escape culture, and we should not try to ignore it. We are wise to consider cultural issues through the lens of the Word of God. That is what this study will help you do.

The topics are widely varied, but all of them affect us all in some way. As you study these lessons, remember that the Bible has all the answers for our questions about culture. We must be very careful not to let culture tell us how to answer our questions.

The Bible is timeless. It addresses today's culture as if God had recently inspired it. Keep that truth in mind as you learn. Seek to know God's Word when you are confronted with Current Culture.

Behind the Veil of Prosperity Theology

Scripture Focus

Deut. 8:10–14; Job 1:1; Ps. 119:71, 75; Luke 12:13–21; John 9; Rom. 8:22, 23; 1 Cor. 11:17–34; Gal. 1:6–8; Phil. 2:25–30; 1 Tim. 5:23; 6:6–10

Theme

God considers prosperity theology as destructive and as veiled hedonism and materialism.

Memory Verses

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”
(Matthew 6:20, 21).

GETTING STARTED

That God rewards faithfulness with good health and material wealth has quickly become one of the most captivating messages in churches across North America. The impact of this movement transcends racial and denominational lines. Advocates such as Joel Osteen of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas; T. D. Jakes of the Potter’s House in Dallas, Texas; Frederick K. C. Price of Crenshaw Christian Center in Inglewood, California; and Creflo Dollar of World Changers Ministries near Atlanta, Georgia, all expound messages that promise much but deliver little.

1. Why do you think prosperity-gospel preachers are so popular?
2. Have you ever been drawn to their messages? Explain.

This study will help you understand both what the prosperity preachers believe and what the Bible actually says about health and wealth.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Prosperity preachers claim to give the *full gospel* by adding health and wealth to it. In reality their message is what God condemns as being *a different gospel*. Their ideology is a disease that maligns the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ and distorts the true message of His gospel.

3. Read Galatians 1:6–8. How serious is the matter of keeping the gospel unadulterated?

Paul makes it known that *another gospel* is in reality *another gospel of a different kind*, and therefore not the true gospel.

Health Gospel

The prosperity-gospel's philosophy on the subject of health was greatly influenced by the metaphysical Mind Science groups such as Christian Science, Unity School of Christianity, and Church of Religious Science. Benny Hinn, one of the movement's most outspoken preachers, believes God's healing power is already in us and that God's highest desire is for His church to be perfectly healthy.

Supporters of this teaching believe that any acknowledgment of sickness opens the door to satanic control and that medicine is a crutch for the spiritually immature. They also claim that physical healing is in the atoning work of Jesus Christ and that all diseases are healed by Christ's spiritual atonement in Hell, not His physical death on the cross.

4. Read Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 8:17; 1 Peter 2:24. Why might a person conclude that these passages teach Christ died so people might be healthy?

This movement teaches that when sickness does occur in one's life, it is a matter of one's lack of faith.

5. What might a terminally ill person conclude about his faith in God according to the prosperity-gospel movement?

Closely connected to healing is *positive confession*. *Positive confession* is based on the idea that words have creative power and that what people say determines, to some extent, everything that happens to them.

In positive confession, success is generated by right thinking, right believing, and right confession. It is supposed that people are not getting healed because they are thinking wrong. Three reasons are given to support this conclusion: (1) sickness and disease are spiritual, not physical; (2) a true believer should never be sick; and (3) negative confession produces sickness.

Positive confession advocates use the phrase *and he is the saviour of the body* from Ephesians 5:23 as justification for their claim. They teach that our bodies ought to be made whole since Jesus Christ is the savior of the body. Christians receive healing by positively confessing that Christ is the savior of their body. So worrying or complaining about an illness forfeits a believer's right healing through Christ.

6. What might a sick believer conclude about Jesus when the believer's positive confession doesn't work?

Wealth Gospel

Economic wealth is the second major focus of the prosperity-gospel proponents. They apply God's promises to Abraham to the church today. They essentially believe that God has promised to make all believers rich. This wealth is initiated by faith, demonstrated by Christ's incarnational example, and activated by seed planting.

Prosperity-theology supporters argue that wealth is the divine right of all Christians but that the wealth is accessible only in proportion to their level of faith in God. A believer's faith connection to Abraham puts all the

spiritual and physical blessings promised to Abraham at that believer's immediate disposal. T. D. Jakes, a prosperity-gospel leader, exclaims that faith is what motivates God to transfer His wealth to believers.

Not only is faith essential to prosperity proponents, but their hermeneutic (method of interpreting Scripture) is essential as well. Several verses of Scripture are used as proof texts for their belief system. For example, prosperity-gospel advocates believe the primary purpose of 3 John 2 is to teach that God wants everyone to be healthy and wealthy. But they have missed the writer's intent.

7. Read 3 John 2. Determining a writer's intent is important in interpreting and applying Scripture correctly. What would you say is the writer's intent in this verse?

Nowhere is this movement's heresy more apparent than when it comes to the incarnation of Christ. Many of the movement's followers present a Jesus Who looks remarkably like themselves. John Avanzini, for example, said on his Trinity Broadcasting Network program that he presents a Jesus that wears designer clothes, resides in a big house, and is so flush with money that He needs a treasurer.

8. Does needing a treasurer necessarily mean a person is rich? Explain.

Frederick K. C. Price, another supporter of this teaching, embraces the hypothesis that since Jesus was financially wealthy, believers should be wealthy as well. In defending his assumption on his TBN show, he said that believers should stop thinking Jesus and His disciples were poor. Jesus was wealthy, and believers are to follow in His footsteps by being wealthy too. Price drives a Rolls-Royce as a way of following Christ's example.

The idea that Jesus was rich is fabricated. The Bible never presents Jesus as wealthy. He was born into a modest household and lived in a modest city. He even warned a man that was eager to follow Him that He

had no permanent place to lay His head at night (Matt. 8:19, 20).

Prosperity theology thrives on the idea that wealth is gained, not only in proportion to one's faith, but also in accordance to one's giving to like-minded ministries. This is referred to as seed planting. The more *seed faith* money a person gives, the greater the return. Promoters of this teaching believe that when a person sows his seed money by faith, God creates an atmosphere of perpetual blessings for that person. This teaching feeds upon an already prevailing covetous mentality.

9. Describe your level of trust in televangelists who ask for viewers' cash donations while promising that God will pay them back more than they gave.

Biblical Truth Regarding Physical Health

The prosperity movement has swept across our nation like a hurricane, leaving in its path broken hearts, broken dreams, and distrust in God. It appears the only ones profiting from this movement are the prosperity preachers. Is there a Biblical answer to those who preach such rhetoric? Absolutely! God's Word, when examined carefully, clearly refutes prosperity theology.

Prosperity-gospel proponents believe Christ offers complete healing to humanity in this life based on His death. But the belief that physical health is guaranteed by Christ's atoning work lacks Biblical merit.

Most Christians agree with the prosperity movement's teaching regarding the origin of sickness and death. Due to Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, mankind has been inflicted with a curse.

10. Read Romans 8:22, 23. How widespread is the curse?

Some sickness is directly related to personal or corporate sin. The apostle Paul reminded the church at Corinth that their misplaced values, pride, and unconfessed sins were the reasons for their present condition.

Some of the Corinthians had a flippant, self-centered attitude regarding the Lord's Supper.

11. Read 1 Corinthians 11:29, 30. To what degree did the Corinthians' sins affect their bodies?

Attending the Lord's Supper fellowship with unconfessed sin brought severe judgment upon the guilty parties. God's solution to the demoralizing condition of the people was that they should examine themselves for sin before partaking (11:28). The alternative would be God's discipline in the form of sickness and perhaps even physical death.

The Bible contains several references to godly men who suffered with sickness or diseases. This should be a wake-up call to all who claim it is God's will that no Christian ever be sick. Job, who is affirmed by Scripture as a great man of faith (Job 1:1), was covered with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head (2:7). The apostle Paul reminded the Galatian believers of a bodily illness he had (Gal. 4:13). Timothy, Paul's son in the faith, suffered from frequent stomach problems. Instead of telling Timothy to *positively confess* his healing, Paul gave him some practical advice.

12. Read 1 Timothy 5:23. What did Paul tell Timothy to do?

Paul left Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20), while Epaphroditus fell ill and nearly died (Phil. 2:25–30).

13. Read Philippians 2:25–27. Why did God allow Epaphroditus to get better?

There is no mention of positive confession in Paul's letter to Philippi. Epaphroditus, however, is praised for his willingness to put his life in

danger for the cause of Christ (2:30).

God has also used affliction for His glory. In Psalm 119, the writer declares that experiencing affliction was not for his benefit alone.

14. Read Psalm 119:71, 75. What did the writer of Psalm 119 exclaim about his affliction?

In the healing of the man born blind, Jesus stated emphatically that the man's blindness was not due to inherited or personal sins. Rather, his blindness and subsequent healing were for the glory of God (John 9:3). God used the healing of the blind man to put His glory on display.

Obviously the health of humanity is not God's primary goal in this age. Accomplishing His will for His glory is a higher priority. This priority sometimes demands that believers experience illness.

Biblical Truth Regarding Wealth

The idea that God desires all His children to be rich is not supported by observation of the world today. The obvious impoverishment of faithful believers in developing countries is a strike against such a belief.

Many Christians in Ghana, West Africa, for instance, are genuine in their faith, exuberant in their worship, and hungry for God's Word. Yet the overwhelming majority of them live in abject poverty. Observing their lives, one must conclude that their poverty has absolutely nothing to do with their lack of faith.

15. What might be some reasons poverty-stricken believers are not usually considered as evidence against the prosperity gospel?

While there is nothing inherently wrong with wealth, it can become sinful when we pursue it as an object of our affection. Prosperity theology proponents make pursuing money their goal. The Bible reveals at least three dangers of pursuing money.

The first danger of pursuing money is taking one's focus off God. All

material blessings are the result of God’s mercy and grace. People forget God when they emphasize the blessings of wealth over the Giver of wealth.

16. Read Deuteronomy 8:10–14. What did God warn His people not to do once they were in the Promised Land enjoying the richness of the land?

We cannot pursue money without also serving it and loving it. And loving money makes it impossible to also love God (Matt. 6:24).

The second danger of pursuing money is that it breeds covetousness. In direct response to an extremely covetous man, Jesus educated His audience by giving them a stern warning (Luke 12:13–15).

17. Read Luke 12:15. Why are people tempted to act as if life consists of the things they possess?

To illustrate the truth that life doesn’t consist of things, Jesus told the story of a farmer who worked hard and realized a plentiful harvest (12:16). This material prosperity generated within the farmer a self-absorbed, insensitive spirit (12:17–19). The rich man died having no regard for God or others. God called the man a fool for pursuing goods and pointed out to him that he had left of all his possessions on earth for someone else to own (12:20). The man was spiritually bankrupt (12:21). Pursuing money breeds covetousness that results in a pointless, worthless life with no eternal value.

The third danger associated with pursuing money is that loving money produces snares and temptations.

18. Read 1 Timothy 6:9, 10. Why is the love of money at the root of all evil?

As shoots grow out of a root, all things that are bad or evil may in fact grow out of a love for money. This desire for more money is so strong that those captured by it are tempted to sin in other ways (e.g., lying, stealing, cheating) to get more things. And there is no satisfaction to be found in things. So the temptations to sin to get more money grow even stronger.

19. Read 1 Timothy 6:6–8. Why is contentment a key ingredient in realizing true gain in life?

Pursuing a relationship with God is far more valuable than pursuing money. The value of a life lived for God lasts forever (Matt. 6:19–21).

RESPONDING TO CULTURE

20. Why would a good understanding of God's Word keep you from falling prey to false teachings such as the prosperity gospel?

21. How will you strengthen your understanding of God's Word?

God wants you to have faith in Him that He will accomplish His will in His time through you. Your faith would be misplaced if you expected God to align Himself with your selfish desires.

22. How might a person know if his or her faith is selfish? Add to the following answers.
 - The person's prayers show little or no concern for others.
 - The person is discontent most of the time.
 - The person doesn't seek to know God's will in God's Word.

23. Talk to God about any selfishness evident in your faith. Seek to know God and to do *His* will.