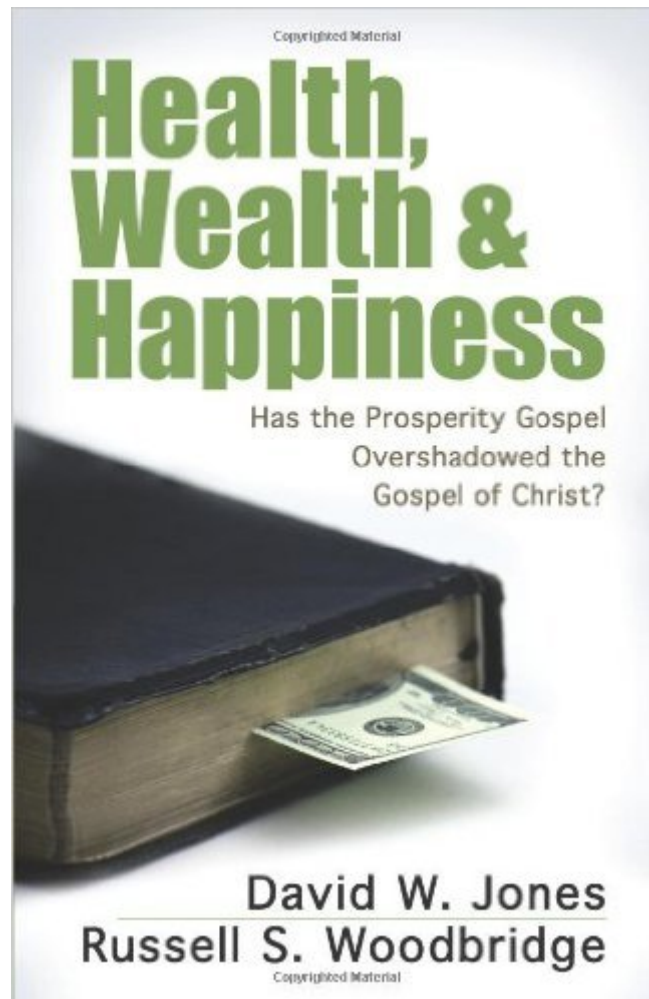


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# Health, Wealth & Happiness: Has The Prosperity Gospel Overshadowed The Gospel Of Christ?



## Synopsis

The desire for a thriving, healthy, and productive life is as strong as ever, especially in tough economic times. As people become more disillusioned at the state of the economy, they also become more susceptible to the lure of the prosperity gospel and its teachings of health, wealth, and happiness for the faithful. But what happens when the promise of prosperity overshadows the promise of the real gospel--the gospel of Christ?Â Believing that the prosperity gospel is constructed upon faulty theology, authors David W. Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge take a closer look at five crucial areas of error relating to the prosperity gospel. In a fair but firm tone, the authors discuss the history and theology of the prosperity gospel movement to reveal its fraudulent core biblical teachings that have been historically and popularly misinterpreted, even by some of today's most well-known pastors. After an introduction and assessment of the movement, readers are invited to take a look at Scripture to understand what the Bible really says about wealth, poverty, suffering, and giving. Theologically sound but accessible to all readers, *Health, Wealth & Happiness* is sure to become a trusted resource for laypersons, pastors, and Christian leaders.

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## Customer Reviews

At last someone has peeled back the Christian veneer of the prosperity preachers and exposed the false teachings they espouse! Jones and Woodbridge have written a slam-dunk critique of the so-called "prosperity gospel" still being promoted (post Jim Baker & PTL) by many of the biggest names in religious publishing/media. This is no over-generalized, innocuous critique of the health,

wealth, and happiness crowd. Backed by impeccable research, the authors name names and supply the reader with more than ample evidence to demonstrate the fundamental falsehood of the teachings espoused by Meyers, Copeland, Osteen, and others. Beyond critique, though, Jones and Woodbridge offer a solidly biblical alternative to the prosperity message--one that offers genuine hope and comfort in the stuff of real life. The chapter on suffering is more than worth the price of the book. Well written and accessible to readers in all walks of life, the authors' research is more than sufficient to stand up to the rigors of scholarly scrutiny. A must read. Kudos to Jones and Woodbridge!

Show me the moneyThe authors of *Health, Wealth & Happiness: Has the Prosperity Gospel Overshadowed the Gospel of Christ?* argue that this "theology" is a dangerous movement with damning consequences for believers. Some of the biggest names in televangelism and mega-churchland have not only distorted the Word, the writers claim, often they have totally ignored Jesus and treated the Cross like an ATM machine. In a well-reasoned critique, the authors, one with a doctorate in financial ethics, the other a former derivatives trader with Salomon Brothers, take on so-called prosperity theology and the preachers who have benefited so handsomely from it. But it hardly takes specialist training in finance to follow the case they build against these profiteers. From the beginning, the authors make their own biases known. Says David W. Jones: "Prosperity theology is a corruption of His self-revelation, a distortion of His plan for redemption, and an idea that can ultimately lead to a reckless view of the material world." As for Russell S. Woodbridge, he says: "I learned that the purpose of life is not about accumulated money, health or a great career - it's about knowing God." With those beliefs as their springboard, the authors set out to answer this question: "How did the modern church arrive at a place where otherwise orthodox Christians would come to view God as a way to achieve personal success and a means to attain material prosperity?" Almost 200 pages later, that question seems sufficiently, perhaps definitively, answered. First of all, the prosperity "Word" is highly attractive to a self-centered world. Second, some of it contains elements of biblical gospel. And third, many adherents are easy pickings as they have little familiarity with the Bible to begin with. Prosperity theology, if it can be graced with that label, is heir to 200 years or more of philosophizing. Much of it stemmed from educated men, a number of whom cogently made their points, though their writings often were mystical and suffused with Eastern thought - particularly Hinduism. In some detail, Jones and Woodbridge trace today's prosperity teachings back to the 18th Century musings of Emanuel Swedenborg, then forward to the New Thought movement of the 19th Century. The authors call Swedenborg the grandfather of the

New Thought movement. His own writings often deal with the notion that the human mind can control the natural world and that one's works can lead to self-salvation. For their part, proponents of New Thought pioneered notions of so-called mental healing. Their works contain elements of today's prosperity philosophy: "speaking the right words, invoking a universal law of success with words, and having faith in oneself." The first of the book's two parts is a critique of the prosperity gospel, the second, appropriately enough, is titled "Correction." One needs no seminary training to grasp the point made here: the prosperity gospel is the child of age-old heretical thinking and continues to be at odds with the biblical gospel today. Money and material goods are the chief blessings sought, of course, but good health is a major attraction as well for those who fall for this line of preaching. According to this warped theology, the authors say, if adherents just "repeat positive confessions, focus their thoughts, and generate enough faith, God will release blessings upon their lives." The similarities with *The Secret*, the astoundingly successful book by Rhonda Byrne, are striking. That compilation of writings from inspirational writers and motivators vends a feel-good philosophy based on the so-called law of attraction. As someone has remarked, it's religion without religion. Nevertheless, this inspirational twaddle is pure gold, having reportedly sold more than 19 million copies around the world. Jones and Woodbridge are not shy in the least about naming names. Along the way, they criticize Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Frederick Price, Creflo Dollar, Kenneth Hagin Jr., Robert Tilton, Charles Capps, Eddie Long, Paula White and others. Reaching back a bit, they chastise Norman Vincent Peale as overly influenced by New Thought and metaphysical teachers, and wonder just how that happened to a man whose church was heir to Calvinist tradition. Some evangelicals have developed a fondness for Joyce Meyer, T.D. Jakes and Joel Osteen, and they may be a bit annoyed to see this pantheon of TV evangelist gods lumped in with some of the more overt money chasers. To be fair, the authors view these three, at least, as "soft" advocates of this gospel. In other words, not hucksters but preachers whose messages often steer clear of orthodox Christian views. But that is precisely the danger repeatedly warned against in *Health, Wealth & Happiness*. An excerpt from a 60 Minutes interview with Osteen is illustrative. Reporter Byron Pitts summarized the preacher's message this way: "To become a better you, you must be positive towards yourself, develop better relationships, embrace the place where you are. Not one mention of God in that. Not one mention of Jesus Christ in that." The response of the spiritual leader of what's said to be the biggest church in the U.S.? "That's just my message ... I mean, there's a lot better people qualified to say, 'Here's a book that is going to explain the Scriptures to you.' I don't think that's my gifting." It's good for a preacher to come clean, but it is a bit shocking to hear one say he really isn't up to explaining the Bible. Is it any wonder followers of the

money ministers are stumbling in their walk? To be fair, the writers acknowledge the danger in broad-brush criticism. The prosperity movement is so diverse it isn't possible to comprehensively sum up everything these leaders espouse. And people like Osteen and his "soft" colleagues do mix a little Jesus in their messages. If this "theology" were contained in a small box, perhaps the authors would have taken little or no note of it, but it is growing well beyond the bounds of the charismatic movement. It is reported to be on the rise not only in the home of the dollar but in Africa, South America, India and Korea. Is that something to be concerned with? Really, what's so wrong with this so-called gospel? So what if it advocates self-help and a positive attitude? Is there really anything wrong with that? There isn't, and the philosophy isn't without a "grain" of biblical truth, say the authors, although one greatly distorted. Success and health are not sinful and neither are desires for them - unless they supplant one's desire for God. But instead of noting that Jesus makes reconciliation with God possible, the writers say, prosperity preachers have tied Him to the wagon of sinners' material wants. Jesus isn't the Way so much as the drayman that hauls you to some fantasy land of milk and honey. Not the sinless Son of God but the servant of sinful wanna-be successes. One can make too much of some foolish comments, but in truth it's difficult to disagree with the authors after reading comments attributed to some of these preachers. And in a perverse sort of way, this jaw-dropping exegesis is actually kind of fun. Here's Kenneth Copeland: "I was shocked when I found out who the biggest failure in the Bible actually is .. God." Hmm. The appositely named Creflo Dollar: "When you go to the Scriptures, there's no way you can conclude Jesus was poor." Another bon mot from Dollar: "The Word of God is your highway to the world of wealth." (Any thoughts on the kind of car the parson drives?) Or this from Paula White: "God is not magnified when you are broke, busted or disgusted." So, chapter by chapter, Jones and Woodbridge take on what they perceive as twisted notions of what the biblical gospel says, of faith, the atonement, God's covenant with Abraham, prayer and - no surprise here - giving. Their conclusion: If the prosperity preachers have it right, then grace is obsolete, God is irrelevant and man and his mental faculties are supreme. "The prosperity movement seeks to turn the relationship between God and individual people into a financial quid pro quo transaction." Approvingly, they quote scholar James R. Goff: God is "reduced to a kind of cosmic bellhop attending to the needs and desires of His creation." So what to do about all this? The second part of the volume, "Correction," presents a point-by-point exegesis of Scriptures relating to suffering, Jesus's (and others') attitudes toward wealth and poverty, and giving. These views are entirely consistent with orthodox evangelical teaching. Because of their familiarity, many will be tempted to skip them, but that really would be a mistake. A refresher course is highly recommended if only because prosperity theology often

closely tracks the orthodox; it's good then to get an accurate rendering of the Word on these topics. In the end, the prosperity gospel may be nothing more than a modern repackaging of ancient heresies. But the light Jones and Woodbridge bring to bear shows it to be a highly attractive, if not seductive, presentation. - StrangersHomeMinistries.org

If you have ever been up late at night and found yourself watching Christian television programming for some unexplainable reason like I have, or felt that there was something just not quite right with the teachings of guys like Joel Osteen, T.D Jakes, Kenneth Copeland, and others, you need this book. Jones and Woodbridge take a look at the modern prosperity gospel movement and set out to examine it through the lens of Scripture. Throughout the book, they show that though the message of the prosperity gospel might be appealing, who doesn't like the idea of God wanting to give them lots of money and make their life as comfortable as possible, it is a message that is just not found in the Bible. Before reading this book, I thought I had a good grasp of what the prosperity gospel movement was all about. As it turned out, I knew very little, particularly about its history. Jones and Woodbridge do a good job of tying the movement to its roots which helped make sense of a lot of their teachings. They effectively showed that the prosperity "gospel" is not based in the Christian gospel at all, but in obscure new age movements along with hints of Hinduism and Oriental philosophy. A "Christian" movement not based in Scripture is not Christian. The format of the author's argument is quite effective. They begin with an analysis of the roots of the prosperity gospel, the New Thought Movement, which any reader could easily recognize as non-Christian. Then in the following chapter, using writings of current prosperity gospel advocates, Jones and Woodbridge effectively demonstrate how their teachings, though cloaked in biblical language, are no different than that of their pagan predecessors. The current teachings of the modern "Christian" prosperity gospel are really no different than their anti-Christian forerunner, the New Thought movement. If you want specific teachings of prosperity gospel advocates examined in the light of Scripture, then get this book. Even if you are not particularly interested in learning about the problems of the prosperity gospel, there is still great value to be found in this book. The three chapters on the biblical teaching on suffering, wealth and poverty, and giving should be read by every believer. The authors have done a great job of formulating brief, extremely biblical accounts of these important topics. As great as the book was overall, these three were the highlight for me and were alone worth the price of the book. I definitely plan on recommending this book in the future to anyone who has questions about suffering and money in the Bible. Health, Wealth and Happiness is a well written short read and is appropriate for anyone who is interested in the truth about the

prosperity gospel or is just interested in the Bible's teaching on money in general. I highly recommend it.

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