

# What is the real Gospel?

A sermon preached by Henry Dixon  
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## Introduction

Today we are going to be thinking about the question, “What is the real Gospel”? In the last forty years or so there has been an explosion in the popularity of a new version of the Christian message, which has been variously termed, “The Health and Wealth Gospel”, “Name it and claim it teaching”, “Positive confession” or the “Prosperity Gospel”.

The essence of the “Prosperity Gospel” is to state that it is God’s purpose that people should be healthy, wealthy, and successful in every area of their lives. It is claimed that when Jesus died on the Cross, all our diseases were placed upon him, and so now full healing is available for all who believe.

The focus of this teaching is very much on this world. This teaching sees the purpose of religion as being to enable us to have happy and prosperous lives in this life. Some of those who advocate this teaching do mention that Christ has died for our sins and that we need to be saved, but the main focus is very much on what you can obtain from God here and now.

According to those who promote this teaching what they call “faith” involves having and believing positive thoughts about yourself and the future, and repeating these positive thoughts out loud. Teachers of this “Gospel” say that you should say to yourself again and again “I am healthy, I am successful, I am prosperous” and that as you make these “positive confessions” so these things become true for you. Those who teach this encourage their followers to imagine in detail the thing that they want, to set their hearts on it, and to keep repeating to themselves that it will be theirs. They say that we can be like God. They say that just as God spoke and brought things into being by his word, so we can bring about changed situations by speaking. They say that we can be “mini-gods” or “mini-Christ”. God, for these teachers, is someone who has made a world where people can exercise spiritual powers through

the mind. They teach that God has to do what people demand from him when they exercise what they call “faith”.

Those who put forward this teaching claim to be Bible-believing Christians. They say that they accept the Bible as the Word of God. They claim to believe in Jesus. They say that they believe in the Cross of Christ. They say that they have been born again. They claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Many of the teachers also claim to have supernatural powers and to be able to perform great miracles. Many claim to hear instructions directly from God, and to be able to bring “words of knowledge” from God. Many seem to have the power to put people into a trance-like state when they lay hands on them in what they call “prayer”.

Many of those who teach this “Prosperity Gospel” embody in their own lifestyles the prosperity that they claim that their teaching brings. Having encouraged their people to give very generously to the churches they run, many of these teachers live in mansions, fly around the world in private jets, get driven around by their chauffeurs in limousines, wear Rolex watches, have personal body guards, and live like celebrities. They say to their followers that this fabulous wealth can be theirs as well if they follow their teaching, and put into practice the principles that they advocate.

The question that I want us to consider this morning is whether this so-called “Gospel”, this “Prosperity Gospel” is the real Gospel, or whether it is, in fact, a false gospel that does not save from sin, and causes a great deal of misery for those who believe it. The way I plan to do this is by sketching for you some key truths that the Bible teaches about God, man, our great need, sin, heaven and hell, what happened when Jesus died on the Cross, the Christian life and the future. As I do so, I think you will see how patently false the “Prosperity Gospel” is. If you are a Christian already, I hope that what I say will strengthen you and help you to see through the errors of the “Prosperity Gospel”, and strengthen you in your service of God. If you are not a Christian, I am hoping that God will use what I say to bring you to true faith in Jesus.

I have ten propositions to put to you:

## **1. God is the creator and Lord of all things**

There was a time when the apostle Paul spoke to a group of philosophers in Athens. He said these words to them about God, which are recorded in the book of Acts chapter 17 and verses 24 to 26:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

God is the one who made everything that exists. He is the one who has all power. He is the one who is the Lord of all things. He gives life to all men. He is the one who decides when we are born, and he is the one who decides when we will die. He rules over our movements. He rules over everything that happens to us. In other words, God is God.

God is not a genie who is at our beck and call to give us what we want. He is the Lord God. If he chooses, and if it is his will, he will hear our prayers and give us what we ask of him. But if he has other purposes, or if there is a reason why he chooses not to listen to our prayers, for example because of our sin, then he will not give us what we ask.

## **2. Man is dust**

The account of the creation of the first man, in the book of Genesis chapter 2, and verse 17 says, "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." When Adam sinned, God said to him that because of his sin he would work by the sweat of his brow until he returned to the ground, "for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3.19).

We should never forget that we are dust. It is true that we are made in the image of God, but that only means that, when we were originally made, we were morally like God, not that we have supernatural power like him. Yes, those who are saved become the sons of God by adoption, but we are still, in and of ourselves, dust. We have no supernatural powers over the creation. We are not mini-gods or mini-Christ. Such a suggestion is blasphemous. Those who say that we can be like God are repeating the temptation that the devil made to Eve, when he said that if she ate of the forbidden fruit she would be like God.

### **3. This life is very short and uncertain**

The Bible tells us in many places that our lives here are very short and uncertain. For example, in Isaiah chapter 40 and verses 6 to 8, we read,

All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands for ever.

We know this from our experience. Life rushes by. We are growing old very quickly. Friends who only yesterday seemed in the prime of life are no longer with us, having quickly passed away.

Hence it is utter folly to make it your aim to be rich in this world. You spend all that effort to accumulate wealth, and then in a moment it is taken from you. Job wisely said, on the day he lost all his wealth, as recorded in chapter 1 and verse 21 of the book named after him, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart."

Jesus told a story of a rich fool, which is recorded in Luke chapter 12 and verses 19 and 20. Jesus said that there was a rich farmer, and one year he had a bumper harvest. He thought to himself that he would tear down his barns and build bigger ones to store all his crops, and then he would say to himself "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" He was a fool, because all his energies were devoted to making himself rich in this world, but he had failed to remember that at any time his life could be taken from him. He had made no provision for the life to come. His priorities were all wrong.

Given that life is so short, it is vitally important that we take the opportunity, while we are still alive, and as soon as possible, to find peace with God. After we die, it will be too late.

### **4. Our biggest problem is sin**

Everybody in this world has problems: health problems, relationship strains in their families, difficulties and stresses at work, and clashes with their neighbours. All these things can be very grievous, and can cause much distress and pain. But the Bible makes it clear that by far

and away the worst problem that we have is our sin. The Scripture says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We have not loved God as we should have loved him, and we have not loved others as we should have loved them.

The thing about our sin is that it leads to terrible consequences, not just in this life but also in the life to come. The problems that we have in this life are temporary, because this life will not last for ever. But sin, and its consequences, last for ever, for all those who have not been saved from sin. Sin does terrible things to us in this life, bringing misery upon misery. But it also leads to terrible consequences in the life to come, leading to eternal misery in hell. So the biggest problem that each one of us has is our sin, and the things which flow from our sin.

## **5. Greed is a very serious sin**

Many people accept greed as a normal part of life, and think that it is quite acceptable to indulge it, as long as you do not steal from others. But the Bible says that greed is a very serious sin. Just before telling the story of the rich fool that I mentioned a little while ago, Jesus said, as recorded in Luke chapter 12 and verse 15, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Paul says in Colossians chapter 3 and verse 5 that greed is idolatry. When we are greedy we are treating our possessions as gods, and not worshipping God as he should be worshipped. Greed leads to terrible misery in this life, and to many sins. The apostle Paul warns in 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verses 9 and 10

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

## **6. Our sins are leading us to hell**

Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verses 9 and 10,

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Those who persist in sin, including the sin of greed, will not inherit the Kingdom of God. And those who do not inherit the Kingdom of God will go to hell. Jesus said about hell that, there, the “worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9.48). We learn in the book of Revelation, chapter 14 verse 11, that for those who are in hell the “smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night” for them.

## **7. Jesus died to save us from hell**

The word “Gospel” means good news. The heart of this good news is that although we are terrible sinners, who deserve hell as a just punishment for all our sins, God has provided a Saviour, Jesus, who died as a substitute for those who trust in him.

700 years before Jesus came into the world, the prophet Isaiah spoke very clearly about Jesus’s death. In chapter 53 of his prophecy, verses 4 to 6, we read,

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus died as a substitute for sinners. The sins of those who believe were placed upon him, and he was punished for them. The phrase “by his wounds we are healed” is latched onto by “Prosperity Gospel” teachers and taken to mean that through Jesus’s death on the Cross not only forgiveness of sins is available, but also healing from all diseases. But when the verse is read properly in context, it is clear that the “diseases” that are being spoken of are the diseases of the soul, our sins, which otherwise would cause us to go to hell.

The great good news is that God has placed upon Jesus all the sins of those who trust in him. They will not be condemned for their sins, because Jesus was condemned in their place.

## **8. To be saved, we must repent and truly believe in Christ**

This salvation that God has provided is not given to all automatically. We must repent of our sin – including the sin of greed – and put our trust in Jesus. John chapter 3 verse 16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” True faith is not having positive thoughts about your life. That so-called “faith” is merely expressing confidence in yourself. True faith is dependence upon Jesus, the Son of God, who became a man, lived a perfect life, died on the Cross and was raised from the dead. It is depending upon him, and him alone, for salvation. It involves abandoning confidence in your own works or religiosity to get you into heaven.

## **9. Even after we are saved we will suffer in this world**

Christians suffer just as much as non-Christians from the effects of the fall. Christians get ill, have accidents, suffer financial hardships, and often have work problems and relationship difficulties. On top of these things, we have additional suffering which comes to us because we are Christians, since we live in a world which is hostile to God. Jesus said, as recorded in John 16 verse 33, “In this world you will have trouble.” He also said, as recorded in Matthew chapter 16 and verses 24 and 25, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”

But the good news is that God is ruling over the sufferings of believers for their good. Paul says in Romans chapter 8 verse 28, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (ESV). The suffering that we go through is not pleasant, but is used by God to help us to grow to be more like Christ in this life, and to give us a greater reward when we get to glory.

## **10. At the resurrection we shall be perfectly healthy, and fully satisfied**

God has promised that for those of us who are saved, there is a glorious future awaiting us. When Jesus comes again we shall be raised from the dead. Those who are saved will have glorious new bodies which

will be completely free from suffering. "God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21.3 – 4). Those who are saved will inherit the new world, and jointly own it with all the rest of God's people. They shall reign with Christ, and be glorious. All their needs will be fully satisfied. The greatest thing of all is that they will see God in all his beauty and glory face to face, and know him perfectly. They will never sin again. All the effects of sin, including disease, will be done away with forever.

It is in this hope those of us who are Christians are saved. Our bodies are not yet redeemed. In this present life we have to wait for the redemption of the body which is coming to all true believers. But one day, and soon, the Lord will return, and the sufferings of all those who have trusted in Jesus will be over.

## **Conclusion**

I have brought before you ten propositions, and have shown how these propositions are backed up by Scripture. There are many other Scriptures that I could cite to back them up further. Any person who honestly handles the Scriptures must agree that these ten propositions are in line with the teaching of the Bible.

All ten propositions contradict the teaching of the "Prosperity Gospel". The "Prosperity Gospel" says that God is a being whose arm can be twisted to do what men tell him to do, whereas the Bible says that he is the sovereign creator of all things, who does he himself has already decided to do to bring about his sovereign purpose. The "Prosperity Gospel" says that man is godlike and can give orders to the material world, whereas the Bible says that we are dust and have no supernatural powers. The "Prosperity Gospel" says that we should make it our aim to be as rich and healthy as possible in this world, but the Bible says that life in this world is very uncertain and short, and that we should live for the life to come. The "Prosperity Gospel" says that our biggest problem is poverty, but the Bible says that our biggest problem is our sin. The "Prosperity Gospel" says that greed is good, but the Bible says that greed is a terrible and dangerous sin. "Prosperity Gospel" teachers hardly ever talk about hell, but the Bible warns constantly about it, and says that those who sin without repentance will go there. The "Prosperity Gospel" says that it was our diseases that were put on Jesus on the Cross, but the Bible says that it was our sins



that were laid upon him. The “Prosperity Gospel” calls us to believe in ourselves and to say positive things about ourselves, whereas the Bible calls upon us to see our sinfulness before God and to put our faith in Christ, to save us from our sins. The “Prosperity Gospel” says that, if you believe, you can have a life that is free from suffering, but the Bible says that the more you believe and seek to serve God, the more you will suffer in this world. The “Prosperity Gospel” says that perfect health and satisfaction are to available now, whereas the Bible says that perfect health and satisfaction will be ours, if we believe Christ, only at the resurrection.

We must conclude then that the Prosperity Gospel is a pack of lies. Do not believe it! Stick to the real Gospel. If you are a Christian, do not worry about being rich in this world. Fix your attention on the life to come, and seek to be spiritually rich, through serving God, living for the life to come, and by giving away your wealth. Let me ask you this question, if you are a Christian: Is greed lurking in your heart? Are you a secret idolater? Are you pining for a more comfortable life? It may be that you have seen through the errors of the “Prosperity Gospel”, but are you, in fact, guilty of the same sins that you decry in others, only in a more subtle form? One tell-tale sign of greed is lack of contentment, and grumbling about the circumstances of your life. Do you find yourself saying, “Oh, if only this was different about my life; if only I did not have this problem; if only I could afford to make this improvement to my home; if only I could afford nice holidays like others”? Do you look on in envy at others who seem to have everything comfortable and happy in their lives? Then, perhaps without realising it, greed is lodging in your heart. Repent. Turn to God. Learn to be content with what you have. Believe that God is ruling over the circumstances in your life for your good. Look forward to heaven, when all your sorrows will be over.

Finally, I must urge us all to examine the most fundamental question of all: are you yet a true Christian? Have you been saved? Have you ever seen yourself as a sinner who deserves hell? You may claim to believe in God. You may perhaps have seen what you believe to be answers to prayer. You may have been baptised, and be accepted as a member of the church. But have you ever seen yourself as a hell-deserving sinner? If the answer to that question is “no”, then this almost certainly means that you are not, as yet, a true Christian, and are still on your way to hell. Ask God to show you how bad you are. If the answer to that question is “yes”, and you do know that you are hell-deserving sinner, have you ever asked Christ to save you? If you answer that question, “No, not yet”, I say to you, do not wait a moment longer.

Come to Christ. Turn from your sins. Confess them to him. Ask him to forgive you and to give you eternal life. Trust him that his death pays for all your sins.

*This booklet contains the edited notes of a sermon which was preached by Henry Dixon. A recording of the actual sermon that was preached may be found at*

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/saplayer/playpopup.asp?SID=102217716424>

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