

WEALTH
Positive Confession
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We're looking again this evening, the teaching theme, the second in a two part series, on the positive confession teaching: health or heresy. Two weeks ago we looked at the theme of health. Tonight we're going to look at the theme of wealth.

There has been concern that I have had over even speaking on the subject of the positive confession movement because my goal is always to emphasize the areas where I can agree with someone rather than disagree with them. I think so many times the body of Christ has been wracked by needless controversy and needless divisions. That's why for example I am perfectly comfortable being in a kind of relationship with other teachers of the word that may not see eye to eye with me on every issue. Because we have found that in Christ was have a common identity and we can agree to disagree on certain matters.

I find myself though needing at this point to speak concerning the positive confession teaching for two reason. One is it seems to me a clear pattern of violation of the scripture which brings with it a distortion of God's nature. I think that's such a cardinal concern that what I see emerging in the positive confession teaching is more than some kind of differing view which Christians can elect to disagree on. But I see the movement as beginning to project an understanding of God's nature, which is different, than that held in the scripture itself. That's a concern.

Second concern I have is that I see this teaching as doing a lot of harm in people's lives while at the same time I grant that some have benefited from the emphasis.

I must begin tonight by centering my remarks on here I see the scriptures as agreeing with the prosperity teaching. I find myself very warm in spirit at the emphasis of the positive confession teaching on wealth.

One is that there is no blessing upon poverty for poverty's sake. Many people are poor because of their mental attitudes, because of their stingy nature, because of their own laziness, because of their failure to be generous, or because of uncontrolled appetites, which lead to debt. Positive confession teaching is addressing these areas rightly so. I am glad for many persons who have somehow grown up in an atmosphere of Christian legalism and negativism that have now been given a massive dose of PMA – positive mental attitude – toward their life situation. I think there's been some definite benefit to persons in that regard.

There's also been definite benefit in terms of some of the attempts to address uncontrolled appetites, which lead to debt. A very clear statement by many of the positive confession movement that we should not be in debt, not enter into debt.

We know from the New Testament that some of the early Christians were people of means. There was no guilt placed upon them that you cannot be a person of means. Lydia was such a person for example in Acts 16. We find her as the first convert in Europe and in her home she hosted the pastors that began the Philippi church. Paul and the three companions with him. I would suspect that from that kind of position hosting four persons in her house that she had more

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than a one room utility apartment. Scriptures tell us that she was a seller of purple, which was very expensive kind of clothing in those days. She had a sales position that would have equaled that of a regional sales manager for the state of California in a major product line. A person of means.

Cornelius also appears to be a person somewhat of means. Philemon was a person of means. And others could be given that. There was not a blessing on poverty for poverty's sake.

That would be an area of agreement with the scripture.

A second area I find the scripture agreeing with positive confession teaching is that when you read the literature, especially Ken Copeland's book on the Laws on Prosperity, he gives a really proper priority usage of money. Very unequivocal in saying the first of your income belongs to God. The ten percent, the tithe. It is to be committed to God's work. I find myself not understanding how any person who claims to be a committed Christian can withhold from God their tithe. I must confess I'm baffled that the commitment to God would not have legs on it. And that what is a clear scriptural teaching, supported in the New Testament is not obeyed in some people's lives. Ken Copeland goes on to say that if you're in a church where you're not being fed or where it's dead, find a live ministry to support and give your money there. My concern would be that if you are in a church fellowship that you are not receiving light from then by all means get in one that you can. Let your presence and your contribution to the Lord's work be together rather than being schizophrenic. The tithe belongs in the storehouse.

The second principle that Copeland says is an absolute priority use for money is the giving to the poor. The development of a generous spirit. The concern for those who are in need.

The third concern that Copeland gives as a priority usage for money is investing over and above tithe in the spread of the gospel. The ability to learn proportional giving as a believer. Going beyond the minimum that is looked for and attempting to see not how little you can give to God but how little you can really use for yourself and invest the rest in the kingdom of God.

The fourth thing it seems to me the scriptures agree with is sometimes there is giving sometimes a praise to God as a testimony of our love for God. No problems with that emphasis.

A third thing was a minor point and was meant by Copeland as a minor point that I really enjoyed and appreciated was his statement that we ought if we're serious about Romans 13 about giving allegiance to the high powers ought not to give our taxes begrudgingly. But when we send that check off to IRS or the state government or the like, though we may have distinct political views about the way money is spent we ought to with that money send our prayers for the people who have been under the opponent of God through his process of election and placed in positions of leadership. We ought to see our money not as a begrudging exaction but as a privilege that also gives us an opportunity to give renewed prayers for our country and its leadership.

I think it's biblical to start out attempting in any teaching to commend what can be commended. And to be peaceful in spirit rather than warlike. If these are the commendations what are the problems?

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The problem with positive confession teaching in respect to wealth is its two major assumptions. One, God wills financial prosperity for every one of his children. Therefore, by virtue of that truth, to be in poverty is to be out of his will. If you are in poverty you are leading a Satan defeated life. Because it is God's will for you to prosper. That's the number one tenant.

Number two tenant and it may not be stated quite as clearly or forcefully as that but nevertheless because we are God's children we should go first class. So the biggest and the best ought to be marked by the sons and daughters of God. It gives glory to God if you can live in wealth. Because people look at you how can you live in a house like that, drive a car like that, dress in clothes like that and you can say to them, Because God is good to me.

Those who teach this matter of positive confession as it relates to wealth continually say that they base their teaching upon the word. Just take the Bible for what it says, is what they're saying over and over again. Don't try to explain it away. Take the word. It is at this point, the point they regard as their greatest strength that is simultaneously their greatest weakness because when their teaching is compared to the word and the word in its wholeness and entirety, the claims are not supported by the word.

In fact one of the frustrating things in reading through their literature is the desire that comes up from the depths of your heart that somebody would help these brethren understand basic laws of biblical interpretation. Such as the New Testament interprets the Old Testament. The didactic or teaching sections of the New Testament interpret the historical incidental passages. Clear passages interpret obscure passages. Fundamental principles like this that seem to be wholesale ignored as though those fundamental principles that are used in Christ's ministry and the apostles ministry were not even perceived at all. Most heresies or most groups that go astray throw away fundamental interpretation of scripture. The scripture itself must be the interpreter of scripture.

We know this when the devil came to Jesus. The devil gave Jesus a scripture verse. How did Jesus deal with it? He had a principle of interpreting the scripture so that scripture answered scripture. Jesus also says the scriptures cannot be broken. That is you cannot tear the scripture apart and set it against itself and elevate one phrase out of context to mean something more than the whole of scripture would have it to mean.

I could give case by case example. This sermon really has two major parts. First major part in rebuttal to these two theses I've given. In rebuttal I want to look at the key passages which the positive confession people use to build their two assumptions from. I want to show you how consistently these passages are misinterpreted by them.

The first and lead passage we looked at in the last message. That is Galatians 3:13 which the positive confession people link with Deuteronomy 28. Galatians 3:13 simply says "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law." What do the positive confession people do then? They get a concordance and look up the word "curse." Sure enough they find that the word "curse" is used in Deuteronomy 28 and 29. In those chapters Israel at Sinai was given an opportunity to walk in God's blessings if they obeyed and be cursed if they disobeyed. Some curses were pronounced upon them if they disobeyed the law.

Therefore the positive confession teaching comes along and links the curse to the covenant of Christ. Copeland says for example, "Jesus bore the curse of the law on our behalf. He beat

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Satan and took away his power consequently there is no reason for you to live under the curse of the law. No reason for you to live in poverty of any kind.” What he’s saying, if you take the scriptures like he takes them would make perfect sense. If indeed the curse that Christ freed us from are the curses that are described in Deuteronomy 28 then it makes no sense to live in poverty. Because Christ bore that curse for us.

Why does this not make sense however from the scripture? There are essentially three reasons. One reason right off the bat is that not everything as a curse in Deuteronomy 28 is of itself taken literally by the positive confession people. That is, in interpreting Deuteronomy 28 everything that is listed as a curse they do not believe has been covered by Christ assuming the curse for us.

How do I know that? The illustration I gave last time: mildew is an aspect of the curse. I want to say that any positive confession person that has mildew anywhere around them has not exercised sufficient faith to rebuke the mildew. It falls apart on mildew right there. There are other things that can be pointed to but is it the most ridiculous to start with.

The second thing, and the more major thing, is a total misreading of what Paul is talking about in the whole book of Galatians let alone Galatians 3. That he is talking about the curse that comes upon anyone who tries to build their relationship with God on the basis of obedience to the law. Paul very explicitly says, If you attempt to be in relationship with God on the basis of obedience to the law you are under the curse. Christ came to set us free from that curse so that we might live by faith. That is where the analogy is.

A third thing that ought to be said is if it is true from Copeland and Hagen’s point of view that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law and poverty is a curse of the law then we would expect when we open the New Testament for the New Testament to make clear statements that poor people who have not yet fully embraced this revelation are still under a curse.

Here’s where you run into some interesting things. What do you do with the Jerusalem saints who are going through famine in Acts 12? Are they under a curse because they are poor? What do you do with the saints in Macedonia in 2 Corinthians 8 who “out of their poverty gave an offering of abundance.” Are they under a curse because they were poor? What do you do with Mary the mother of Jesus who was poor? We know she was poor because when Jesus was dedicated it was two pigeons that were used in the dedication and not an animal. That was the gift of a poor person. Yet when the mother of John the Baptist greets her what does she say? “Blessed art thou.” And when the angel greets her he says, “Hail Mary.” Here we have the mother of the Lord who was poor being called blessed by no less than Elizabeth, and Gabriel the archangel of God.

Copeland attempts to link the curse with Ephesians 2:12. That you he says were foreigners to the covenant of promise. We as Gentiles didn’t have all these promises that Jews had. But now Christ has brought us near so that we inherit the promises of the covenant. Surely he is not advocating that we who are men become circumcised because that is one of the requirements of the Old Testament covenant. What Paul is saying in the Ephesians 2 passage is that “Once you were religious outsiders but now in Christ, not through the means of the Old Testament, not through the means of the law, you have been drawn unto Christ. You have been brought near and he has broken down the middle wall of partition that separated us from one another.” He’s referring to the dividing wall of the temple beyond which Gentiles could not pass. He’s broken

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that down. And now we find ourselves in a new temple that God is creating of Jew and Gentile alike.

Paul is not in that passage saying that you have the privilege of stepping back inside of the covenants. God really only has one significant covenant as pertains to our salvation. That is the covenant that he gave to Abraham, which he said to him, "Through your seed shall all the nations of the world be blessed." Paul is very clear in Galatians 3 in saying that God is precise in his language. It was not through your seeds but through your seed. Meaning Christ. Singular. Will all the nations of the world be blessed. You're in the covenant if you are in Christ. You're under a curse if you're outside Christ. There is no other curse except the curse that comes from being outside Christ.

A second key misinterpreted passage of the positive confession movement is 3 John 2. "Beloved I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth."

This is a greeting in a very short letter in the New Testament, which simply says from John, I hope everything is going well with you. That we know from literature of the period that is non-biblical. That is letters that people sent to one another in the Mediterranean world that were not even Christians. This was a very common form of greeting. Where you find New Testament letters you find them conforming to letters of the time. For example just the greeting "Grace and peace," would have been a common phenomenon of the period.

To take the text and make it refer to financial and material prosperity for all Christian is to put more weight on the text than it can bear. I think of a text like that as bearing a certain amount of truth but if you try to put the whole weight of a doctrine on it that text is not strong enough to support that doctrine. Especially when the view is contradicted in other places in the scripture. It is a natural normal attitude to say to a person, "I hope everything is going well with you. I pray everything is going well with you."

But to universalize it by saying it is a fundamental guarantee of health and prosperity as taught by the scripture is like universalizing 1 Timothy 5:23 "Drink a little wine for your stomach's sake and your oft infirmities." It's a kind of a wise saying. A kind of a common saying. If every time a person gets sick you say to them, Don't see the doctor. The Bible says drink a little wine for your stomach's sake. First of all we wouldn't do that anyway. We would never build a major universal practice on that one phrase. But that's exactly what the positive confession people have done with 3 John 2 "I wish that you would prosper, that all would be well with you even as everything is going along well with your soul."

The third scripture that they build greatly on is John 10:10 "The thief comes only to kill and to destroy. I have come that they might have life and have it to the full." Therefore lifting again that text out of its context the thief and the robber is the devil who is trying to take your prosperity away from you. Jesus came to rebuke him so you could live life to the full. I.e. be prosperous.

There are several problems with that.

One is John's meaning of the word "life". See how John uses "life" in the gospel of John." If you'll very carefully compare the synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke with the gospel of

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John you will find that the synoptic gospels use the words “kingdom of God” where as John uses the term “life.” They are parallel terms meaning the same thing. The life of God, the rule of God and the reign of God has become present in this moment. It is heading toward a future disclosure when all will be under God’s rule and God’s kingdom. What Jesus is saying in John’s gospel is that the life, which God has to give, is the life of himself to the believer. It is a gift in the present age. Material abundance is not even a concern of that particular passage because Jesus is simply saying, Everyone who came before me saying that they knew the way to God was a thief and a robber and only I am the true shepherd. That’s what he’s saying. Not giving life in the sense of having it abundantly – a split level house and three cars in the garage and two in the street. That’s to stretch life beyond it’s gospel meaning.

The most butchered text of this movement is the story of the rich young ruler found in the synoptic gospels – Mark 10, Matthew 19 and Luke 18. This is the worst distortion of scripture probably in the positive confession teaching.

Copeland says that the rich young ruler was rich because he had kept the commandments from his youth. Deuteronomy 8:18 says “Remember the Lord your God for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth and so confirms his covenant which he swore to his fathers as it today.”

Copeland says in this regard there are two things about God’s financial covenant. One, God is the only reason you have anything. And the reason why the young man had something was that he had kept the first part of the covenant of God.

But secondly Copeland says that the Old Testament covenant was that God will never ask you to give up anything without giving you something better in return. He says that Jesus told the young man “One thing thou lackest.” What did he lack? According to Copeland was a working knowledge of the covenant. He forgot in that moment Proverbs 19:17. “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord and that which he hath given him will he repay again.”

So what was the proposition that Jesus was making to the rich young ruler? A) God gave you everything you have. B) Give it away so I can give you back more than you gave away to the poor. Surely he didn’t say that??? “This was the biggest financial deal that young man had ever been offered. But he walked away from it because he didn’t know God’s system of finance. He didn’t take the time to inquire. He just assumed that God wanted to break him. Instead of being word minded that young man was money minded. So what happened on that particular day was the young man could have made it so much more richer if he had only given up everything. But because he didn’t know the covenant, he had to suffer the rest of his life with only the amount of money he had when he came to Jesus.”

That’s essentially the bottom line of what Copeland is saying.

Copeland then goes on to support his view by saying that Jesus wrapped up the passage by saying, “I tell you the truth. No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age.” Homes. Brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields and with them per section. And in the age to come eternal life.

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Copeland says, Here's the truth. Jesus says if he had given this up in this time, not just in the age to come, in this time he would already have received a hundred fold – homes and families and the like.

What's wrong with Copeland's view? Several things.

First, Jesus is on the way to the cross himself when the rich young ruler meets him. It is just before he comes into Jericho. And from Jericho he moves up to Jerusalem for his passion. He has left everything. He is in the process of denial. He is on the way to the cross. He has with him a company of persons who themselves have left everything. It's unthinkable that he here who though he was rich for our sake became poor is at that moment concerned to make a financial deal while he is on the way to the cross that would make a young man double richer than he was when he first met Jesus. The whole logical absurdity of Jesus going to the cross being concerned about making a man financially wealthy, I have some problems with.

The second thing is that the disciples themselves who are with Jesus have left all and they were not financially rewarded. That is if this is something Jesus really believed in why had he not made the same deal with all the others? Mark 10:28, Peter says when this rich young man walks away, "We have left everything to follow you." But didn't Peter get something out of it? A few months later after the resurrection on the day of Pentecost "Silver and gold have I none," Peter says. Where's the financial covenant? Peter the apostle, the rock of the church is saying, "Silver and gold have in one." How did he die? Did he ever finally get wealthy and come under the terms of the covenant by getting back everything he had given up for the Lord? Jesus says to him in John 21:18-19 "When you are old you will stretch out your hands and someone will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Then he said to him, "Follow Me." It was a call to the cross. It was a call because Jesus pre-saw Peter's own crucifixion. It was not a covenant to Follow Me and I'm going to dump everything on you as double full for what you've given up for me.

The final thing that's wrong with the interpretation of scripture is the total misunderstanding of the hundred-fold increase. What is the hundred fold? It is that when you become a child of God you may have left behind your family business as did Peter, Andrews, James and John. But what do you get instead? You get a new family. Everybody in the body's home becomes your home. Everyone who names the name of Christ where they live is where you can live. Everyone who is not a family member but is a member of Christ is your brother, your sister, your mother, your father. You've received in this life a hundred fold. You have extended resources because of the network that is in Christ's body. It is not the kind of financial transaction that the positive confession people are teaching.

That's point number one. Misinterpretation of four key passages upon which they build their doctrine.

Point two. Not only are key passages misinterpreted (and there were more than these) but scriptures which bring balance are ignored.

They are ignored in two fundamental areas. The one area is the teaching on expecting a return. The other are a is the name it and claim it position.

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Expecting a return. There is Old Testament teaching and New Testament teaching on giving and expecting a return. Malachi 3:10-11 “Test me in this says the Lord almighty and see if I will not open the flood gates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops and the vines of the fields will not cast their fruits,” says the Lord God almighty.” Jesus says in Luke 6:38 “Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap with the measure you use it will be given you.” The critical question and this is a matter of interpretation is how did the apostles, how did the early church understand and live out this teaching?” How the New Testament always understood the Old Testament was that any material prosperity in the Old Testament promised Israel is carried over into spiritual realms in the New Testament.

Secondly, the teaching of Jesus about giving and it will be returned to you what you give may be returned to you but it may be returned to you in a non-financial way.

How do I know that? Because of what happens in the early church. Acts 2 and 5 the early disciples of the Lord, the church in Jerusalem sold their houses and land. They gave. But then what happened? Acts 12. They had a famine. Did they get rich off the famine? Because they had a heavenly count in which they deposited their money when a famine came along did they get double wealthy? But it was given back to them. By the Gentile church to the north which made it possible through their giving to bring linkage to the church. Up until that time these two groups really had not gotten along that well. But because of the need of the Jerusalem saints suddenly they saw these Gentiles who they never liked because they didn't conform to their traditions, they saw the love that was in their heart. They got a whole new family and a whole new understanding of what the body of Christ really was. God gives good gifts to his children. If it is not a momentary gift that he gives us it will still be a good gift.

Jesus gave his life away. Yet on earth, the Son of man had no where to lay his head. He does not quote Malachi 3:10 as he's on the way to the cross saying, “I've not only tithed. I've not only given ten percent. I've given a hundred percent. So Father, you must pour out your wealth upon me.” You know what the wealth of Jesus is? We are his wealth. It's not the money in the bank. It's, we are his wealth. I simply say yes when you give it's right to expect that God is going to bless but don't be so callus and material as to limit that blessing to a materialistic way. It may include that but it may be something totally else.

Jesus says in Luke 12 “Do not be afraid little flock for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out. A treasure on earth that will not be exhausted. No. A treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”

How did Paul understand his giving? Did he suspect that God had failed him if God hadn't made him wealthy as an apostle. 1 Corinthians 4:8-14 “Already you have what you want. Already you become rich. [He's speaking to the positive confession movement at Corinth.] You have become kings and that without us. How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you. For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession like men condemned to die in the arena. We've been made a spectacle to the whole universe to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ but you are so wise in Christ. We are weak but you are so strong. You are honored. We are dishonored. To this very hour we

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go hungry, thirsty. We are in rags. We are brutally treated. We are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we were cursed we bless. When we were persecuted, we endure it. When we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. The garbage of the world.”

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:4-10 when he returns to this same theme, “Rather as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way. In great endurance, in troubles, hardships and distresses and beatings, imprisonment and riots. In hard work, sleepless nights, in hunger, in purity, understanding, patience, kindness, in the Holy Spirit and sincere love, in truthful speech and in the power of God. With weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left. Through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report, genuine, yet regarded as imposters. Known yet regarded as unknown. Dying yet we live on. Beaten and yet not killed. Sorrowful yet always rejoicing. Poor [here’s the apostle Paul saying it] yet making many rich. Having nothing and yet possessing everything. [He didn’t have a dime in his bank account but yet he possessed everything]”

1 Timothy 5:6-10 “But God in us with contentment is great gain for we brought nothing into the world and we can’t take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing we will be content with that.” If we have food and clothing we’ll be discontent with that and claim Malachi 3:10-11? If we have food and clothing we will be content with that.

Some people read Matthew 6:33 “Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you,” and take that as a carte blanche. Seek his kingdom first and the Lord is obligated to give you the wealth of the nations. But in the context of that passage Jesus has been talking about enough to eat and enough to wear. Food to eat and clothes to wear. He’s saying your Father will take care of that. He’s talking about needs, elemental life needs.

Paul goes on to say in 1 Timothy 5 “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and are trapped into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” He’s not condemning money per se, but he’s condemning the senseless pursuit of it as if that were the only thing in life.

You know how much Paul had at the end of his life? 2 Timothy 4 he tells us what his personal possessions were. Here is a man who did more than tithe. Here is a man whose giving followed the giving of Christ. And what did he have at the end? He doesn’t have anything. So he says to Timothy “I want you to bring me the scrolls and the parchments and get my cloak. I left it with Carpas at Troas. Come before winter. I need something.” He literally has nothing physical. So he has task for the scriptures, the parchments, the commentaries, the books and his cloak to keep him warm at night, to keep him warm in that prison. That cold dungeon-y place. That’s all he has.

Is he rich or is he poor? He’s rich.

1 John 2:15 “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him.”

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What I'm simply saying in regard to the misinterpretation of scripture on the positive confession movement is there is a false emphasis on expecting a return. The teaching is not balanced by how the New Testament saints and apostles themselves understood what it was to get a return. You, Paul says, are our epistle. Known and read by all men. He took it that he had been rewarded because his life had had some lasting fruit.

The other matter of a key misinterpretation, which ignores other scripture, is the claiming and confessing. Copeland draws up a contract that if you had financial need this is what you can do. "Father, in the name of Jesus we ask you for..." and then you fill in the dollar amount. "We have this money in our heavenly account." When you tithe, when you give to the poor, when you do good things you put that deposit up in heaven. "We are withdrawing this amount now. We believe we receive _____ dollars. As in Mark 11:23-24 we believe it in our heart and confess now that it is ours in the name of Jesus. We agree that we have _____ dollars according to Matthew 18:19. From this day forward we will roll this over on you and thank you for it. Satan, in the name of Jesus, we take authority over you. We bind your operation now and render you helpless. Ministering spirits we charge you to go forth and cause this amount to come to us according to Hebrews 1:14. Father, we praise your name for meeting our needs according to your riches in glory for Christ Jesus and for multiplying our seed for sowing in the name of Jesus." It sounds relatively good. Make out a contract with God – that's the amount I need. I claim it, I agree with the scripture. Satan I bind you and angels you get to work.

What's wrong with that? Several things are wrong with that. First, if that were how God wanted us to operate we would find some example of it in the book of Acts. And we would find some teaching on it in the epistles. What does the church in Acts do when they have famine? We read of no such transaction. We would expect the apostles would have used this method if when they were financially destitute. Yet we read of nothing like that. We would expect that Paul when training Timothy about how to care for widows would have taught the widows to have a blessing pack. Say what you need, agree, and that's what will be done.

No, what does the church do? They have a financial administration that provides for some kind of equity across the board. The money was given out not according to a claim but according to a need.

Paul writing in the midst of his own poverty in Philippians 4:19 says "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in Christ's glory." That has been stretched to cover all kinds of things. But the needs that Paul is talking about again are the needs for daily sustenance.

We find no example of this kind of transaction in the scripture. One of the things that this kind of blessing pack does, this claiming it, is it creates an expectation of response from God that negates grace. "God, I have earned this. I've put money in my account. You're my financial partner. You come through. It's your turn." Receiving therefore comes because we've earned it. Not because of God's grace. It's critical in looking at the scripture to understand something of God's grace.

Thirdly, this kind of blessing pack assumes that we know how to solve our problem. But Paul as we saw a few weeks ago in Romans 1 wanted to go to Rome but God had him get there through a very circuitous route. How Paul wanted to get there was not how God wanted him to get there. By detouring him and making him go through suffering, much good came of it.

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I deplore the positive confession movement's teaching Christians to not say "Thy will be done." I repeat again what I said two Sunday nights ago. They say "You cannot say 'Thy will be done,' unless you say 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' And the will of God is done perfectly in heaven because everybody's wealthy and nobody's sick so therefore it must be his will on earth." Yet as I said before when Jesus was in Gethsemane, he prayed Thy will be done, and there are no crucifixions in heaven.

So what is happening? What the scripture is teaching us is that we do the will of God as completely and within our circumstances on earth as the will of God is done completely within the sphere of heaven.

One other little concern I have. I never find anyone in the New Testament talking to the devil while in prayer to God. I don't find people talking to God and all of a sudden saying, Satan I bind you! I am not having a conversation with the devil when I'm talking with God. The binding, this word binding, has in charismatic usage been stretched all out of proportion. In Matthew 16 and 18 where the word occurs it has to do with discipline within the church. It has to do with the admission of people into the church. When they come upon confession of faith in Christ you have the power to receive them. Whatever you loose, will be loosed. Whatever you bind will be bound. If you bring discipline as in Matthew 18 and censor and expel someone from the body because they've been disobedient to God and won't repent. Whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven.

Even Jesus did not say anything in his temptation other than, Get thee behind me! James tells us resist the devil and he will flee from you. We don't have to bind Satan. He's already been bound. How can you rebind something that's been bound? Jesus is saying in his earthly life it's D-Day. The mission of God has come. In his life, death and resurrection he's already bound the devil. He's going to further bind him when he throws him into the bottomless pit. I'd rather let him bind the devil. In his name, casting out demons, but I don't have to talk to Satan. I don't know anywhere in scripture it tells me to talk to the devil. In fact Jude says that even the archangel Michael when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him. But simply said, The Lord rebuke you. Michael, the great archangel didn't even say, I bind you devil. He simply left it to the Lord.

How do you become financially prosperous? There is a balance scriptural teaching. I wouldn't want to leave this without addressing that. The problem with the positive confession movement is it has the medicine man formula to wealth. Generally it's associated with sending some TV minister an offering so that God will bless your seed faith. I have file on my desk that I call scam letter. Absolute gutter tactics of some of these ministries to get your bucks. It's unbelievable. It's kind of a hocus-pocus, buy this elixir for a buck and you'll get two bucks out of it sort of thing.

One of the things God wants to do in becoming financially prosperous if that's his will for you is to develop certain virtues in your life. We ought to ask two questions about financial prosperity. How does money come to you? And how do you disperse the money coming to you?

There are legitimately four ways. You can work for it, you can inherit it, you can invest it and get a return, or you can receive a gift. That's basically how we get money. Not through a

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gambling system but through work, inheritance, investment and gift. That's our source. Our source ultimately is God but those are the mechanisms that he uses to give us finances. For example if we don't work the scripture tells us and we're able we're not to eat. That is a clear law. Don't set at home sending money to people hoping that by being generous a chain letter will show up at your door making you rich. No, get to work.

How do you disperse the money coming to you? How can you be prosperous through a virtuous dispersal of that money?

Eight principles – I speak as one who is prosperous, who has clothes to wear, food to eat and a nice a place to live. But nothing really than that other than the equity we have in our house that we share with the bank.

1. Put the Lord first. In putting the Lord first as a starting place in your life no matter how old you are learn to live on 90% of your income so you can begin by giving 10% to the Lord. Put him first. As you grow in your income learn to live on less percentage and give more to the Lord. That's fundamental. I get confused with people who say, tithing was an Old Testament principle and it's not for the New Testament. In the Old Testament they kept alive a dead institution of legalism. In the New Testament we have the privilege of spreading the gospel. Just the sheer force of the difference between the new and the old covenant ought to do something to really make us want to be a part of it.

2. Build a budget that you can live within your means on. And keep records to make sure you know what you're doing. Do you really know where your money is going? If you'll keep records for 30 days or 90 days by the end of that time if you've accounted for every cent you'll know where it's going. You'll be able to see where it is that you have the weaknesses that are causing you not to live within your means.

3. Stay away from debt on operating costs. I realize there are some who teach we're to stay away from debt on everything, including a house. I believe that to take our economy and overlay it against biblical economy when there was no inflation rate is to misapply a biblical principle. It seems to me that if you're getting into debt for operating costs like the food you're eating and the utilities you're using you are really making some bad financial mistakes. But some debts such as investment in a house is exactly that. It is an investment, which may grow. I think in this matter the Lord may call us to a certain degree of liberty to be prudent. Remember that the man with talents went out and invested it and the Lord approved him for investing it even though he didn't have a return on it at that particular moment. But when we are borrowing, borrowing, borrowing simply to maintain a lifestyle we can't afford and 20% of our income is going out on debt service, then we're not leading in paths that build prosperity.

4. Buy smart. There's a lot of buying we do we could save a lot of money. Buy smart and stay away from impulse buying.

5. Set aside savings or make prudent investments. Or if you don't feel that that's what God wants you to do and you want to take some of your money and travel with it or invest it in the kingdom of God, do that. We've been able to live without a savings account – kind of going along. Some people are uncomfortable with that. If you're going to get money, obviously you've got to get some capital. So save some.

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6. Be generous to the needy.

7. Get counsel. I try to learn all I can from people who are successful in business. Especially as it pertains to the operation of the church. I want to see us being wise stewards of what the Lord has given us. Malcomb McGregor's book for example on personal finance is superb for us to read. Get counsel.

8. The last thing I would say is hold everything lightly. Don't put your security in your possessions like the farmer did who wanted to build bigger barns. Jesus says do not store up for yourself treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal.

The Lord has caused me to periodically re-evaluate my life and to say, Are you free enough to follow me. That if I had some ministry for you, something for you to do and it involved you getting away fast to do it, are you portable? Can you move? Can you de-invest quickly? If I call you to leave whatever you have will you do it are you holding onto it so tight. Has your finances, what you own become your security or is your security really in the Lord's provision for you? Let God then work out his particular will for you.

I pray that all is going well for you and that you are prospering even as your soul prospers. According to the right interpretation of that verse, Amen!

Our Father, we're in a body because we're meant to share one another's needs. We're thankful Lord that being placed in this family we see occasions where that is happening. We are aware of the fact that you are intimately concerned with our needs before we even know our own needs. You are aware of it. You who count the hair on our head and see the sparrow that falls to the ground are aware of the amount of food we have in the cupboard, the amount we have in our checkbook, the bills coming due. We do look to you, Lord, as our source and our supply. Teach us, Lord, how to receive wisely. And how to give wisely. How to disperse what you entrust us with. How to put the kingdom of God first in our lives. We especially would take some moments to pray for those that are in the positive confession movement. Both those who are its teachers and those who are its followers. We thank you for many who have come to you because of the ministry of the cross. We realize with Paul that while some may preach a gospel that is not totally wholesome nevertheless in it Christ is being preached. Names are being added to the Lamb's book of life. We give you thanks for that. We sense that some of the people who have advocated these views are genuine disciples and lovers of you but have a zeal without knowledge. We would pray for them. That as shepherds of the flock to which you have given them charge, that you will minister to their spirits and bring them to a position of balance that they may better help the flock you have entrusted in their care. Those who are not walking with you their teaching will become more and more extreme and their ways more and more perverted. It will become apparent to all who has a heart to follow you and who is in it for their own gain. We pray for those who have come under this teaching and have experienced miserable failures. And have come to blame you or to doubt your love for them. That you will cause strong teaching to arise in the body to minister healing grace to persons who have been beaten down with these teachings. For those who have used the principles of positive mental association and have dreamed dreams and saw great things happen in their life in a financial way teach them Lord to dedicate their resources in a complete way to you. That we have only one life, it will

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soon be past, and only what's done for you will last. Bring wholeness to your body, bring wholeness to us. Help us, Lord, in our own attitudes not to judge the poor nor the rich but to leave every person to God for his judgment. And to ourselves take head of our own walk that we might in all ways please you and be a good steward of what God has given us. We ask this, Lord, in your name. Amen.