

Christian Teaching, Learning and Assumptions about Wealth and Poverty in a Biblical Perspective: Some Critical Reflections and Lessons

By

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Abstract

The first Sustainable Development Goal or Global goal is to eradicate poverty in all its forms but the Word of God the Bible has the authentic guidance on wealthy and poverty and development: All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness... (2 Tim. 3:16-17). As Adei (2006) notes in the African Bible Commentary, many are poor because we live in a world where there is injustice and a skewed economic order. This means that there is a lack of access to education, land and other means of improving their material conditions. However, there are biases that Christians in Africa harbour such as being fatalists, having theological prejudices and biblical misinterpretations- a disservice and a roadblock or hindrance to development. There will be an analysis of the relevant biblical texts and especially about the mistaken assumptions. About material poverty as advanced by the promoters of prosperity gospel. There are questions that are central to this book chapter: what are the major mistaken assumptions about wealthy and poverty? What are some of the key responses and teachings of those assumptions in the Word of God? What are some of the recommendations of how to avert the Christian's mind-set on those mistaken assumptions? Thus, this bible-based book chapter is to expose the mistaken assumptions about wealthy and poverty and how a contemporary Christian can use wealthy as a powerful tool to serve both God and humanity but based on the Word of God.

Key Words: Teaching, Learning, Mistaken assumptions, Wealthy, Poverty

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Introduction

We live a world that experiences poverty and Africa as a continent is not an exception. The African Church like any other church in the world is an influencing power in this 21st century. Thus, the involvement of churches in development is very salient in Africa playing decisive roles in socio-economic development. Walt (2006) while giving a general picture of Christianity in Africa, mentions that all the different sections of Christianity are represented on the continent: Catholic, mainline Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic but the fastest-growing of these is undoubtedly the so-called New Pentecostalism, sometimes called Faith Gospel or simply the Prosperity Gospel. Over the years, however the message being preached in some of the largest cities in the world has changed- indeed, a new gospel is being taught to many congregations today. This message has been ascribed many names, such as ‘name it and claim it’ gospel, the blab it and grab it’ gospel, the ‘health and wealth’ gospel, and the ‘prosperity gospel’, and ‘positive confession theology’. Simply put, ‘this prosperity gospel’ teaches that God wants believers to be physically healthy, materially wealthy, and personally happy. However, one of the major sources of knowledge and guidance about wealthy and poverty for Christians is the Word of God; the Bible.

The biblical source provides us with the right way of the *how, what when, why, where* regarding wealthy and poverty. It is also a known biblical fact that Christ came to give people abundant life (John 10:10) and this includes how they can come out of poverty as one can’t live a whole life when he or she is living in poverty. This message of liberation is also found in the gospel according to St. Luke 4: 14-22. After undergoing rites of passage, Jesus announces the five purposes for God sent him: *to preach the good news to the poor...to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of the sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of Lord’s favour (Luke 4: 18-19).*

Humanity is ever in need of complete liberation. One of the ways in which some churches address poverty is through the proclamation of the prosperity gospel which is also called prosperity theology. The proponents of prosperity gospel include E. W Kenyon, A. A. Allen, Oral Roberts, T. L Osborn, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland and John Avanzin (Gifford, 1994). It was Allen for example who first made it an aid towards fundraising; he was the first to teach that God is a rich God and that those who want to share in his prosperity must obey and support God’s servant- the speaker himself (Gifford, 1994). Most of the prosperity gospel is promoted by the Pentecostals whose message is about miracles and other materialistic tendencies where some Christians claim what is not theirs: In Jesus’ name I claim that car! I claim that house in Jesus’ name! How does one claim property that does not belong to him or her? Are such people psychologically sound? Are they sincere to themselves?

Statement of the Problem

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Many Africans face material poverty and many have turned to God through prosperity gospel or faith gospel. On the road to escape from the pangs of material poverty, they have encountered various mistaken assumptions about wealth and poverty. Partly, this is due to the misleading and twisting of God's word that is only based on the obtaining of material wealthy yet the Word of God should liberate them holistically (Luke 4:18-19).They put more trust in created beings (religious leaders) than in the creator and giver (God). Many have joined various Christian groups and embraced teachings in search of material blessings like the prosperity gospel in many churches in Africa today (Gruden & Asmus, 2013). Thus, there are skewed teachings about topics such as tithing and seed sowing such that some give in as directed and in anticipation of immediate receiving back from God. All such mistaken assumptions have a bearing on both the individual and society's development. Therefore, this book chapter is to expose the mistaken assumptions about wealth and poverty and also give a highlight on how a Christian can promote the place and role of the un-skewed and untwisted word of God in relation to development

Objectives

This book chapter is based on the following objectives:

- a. To expose the mistaken assumptions about wealthy and poverty in relation to development
- b. To emphasize the role of the un-skewed and untwisted word of God on wealthy and poverty
- c. To propose implications for a contemporary Christian on wealthy and poverty

Methodology

This is a bible-based book chapter on the mistaken assumptions about wealthy and poverty among Christians. The bible is at the centre of this work and other related extra-biblical sources have been used. An analysis has been made on both the word of God and other extra-biblical sources so as to have a way forward for those misled on development especially based on prosperity gospel teachings. Implications on the Christians for proper meaning of the word of God on wealth and poverty have also been drawn.

Review of Related Literature

Mistaken assumptions on wealthy and poverty

This section exposes various mistaken assumptions by Christians especially those from the prosperity gospel or faith gospel. Mission in Stenger (2007) stresses that development embraces all dimensions of human existence and that if (development) is left unbalanced, stressing one aspect (e.g., material) at the expense of other aspects (e.g., social, spiritual) will not be humanly fulfilling and leads to unbalanced relationships. It is realized that development must be based on moral values, like trust, solidarity, altruism, companionship, honesty, respect for others, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy. It implies engagement with the world; it aims at improving the quality of life, realizing the unfinished capacity of nature (material and human). Development is an open-ended process. However, this particular work looks at development in a biblical perspective which (biblical perspective) can't be in isolation. There has to be other related factors that contribute to cause of humanity since there is need for holistic development.

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In his book *A Biblical Vision for Africa's Development*, Speckman (2007) argues that the history of the so-called development programme which spans almost four decades now has not made Africa technologically independent, economically self-sufficient, culturally confident and intellectually respectable. He instead points out that it has produced international beggars and technological, cultural and intellectual replicas of the West. It is also realized that part of the problem is that Africans have not given themselves space to reflect on their God-given potential and its ability to transform their lot decisively. He also proposes a 'new' approach to socio-economic development, based on a Biblical vision. That is; his concern is with alternative intervention strategies to address and overcome, the crisis of persisting poverty and underdevelopment suffered in Africa. Therefore, Africa needs a miracle as a transformative action that is self-generated and that this empowerment will change the continent from a beggar status, or in contemporary language, underdeveloped position, into a 'new reality' of freedom, which also entails development. However, a lot needs to be done and realized on the ground so as to do away with poverty related issues.

In the same vein Tokunboh in Sugden (2001) notes that God has blessed Africa with a varied natural environment and it is the second largest in land area of the earth's seven continents. With its islands, Africa covers 30330 square kilometers, or about 22 percent of the world's total land area. This could contain the United States, Europe, India, China, Argentina and New Zealand together. Most of the land in Africa is good for farming or pastoralism. Given the diversity of climate, topography, and vegetation; the variety of food and commercial products; and the abundant (though underused) water supply, Africa is capable of not only feeding itself but also of being an agricultural supplier to the rest of the world. This is also attested by Walt (2008) who comments on the fertile soils and notes that certain parts of Africa also receive enough rain to have the agricultural potential to provide food for the rest of the continent. This is addition to the unspoilt scenic beauty and rich diversity of the African landscape. But in spite of its riches, contemporary Africa experiences a deep crisis and it is the poorest continent.

However, there are other ways in which Christians want to gain material wealth based the Prosperity gospel that is found on the fertile soil in Africa in what Gifford (2004) calls' the explosion of charismatic Christian churches. Prosperity gospel in Africa is synonymous with the Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. It is correctly asserted that: 'the impact of the Prosperity Gospel in contemporary African Christianity has been noted by scholars and it has often been associated with the development of new charismatic movements' (Anim 2010). As much as this movement has historical roots in the United States, it has grown to become a global phenomenon which has also found its home in Africa. Historical evolvement of prosperity gospel on African soil is well articulated by Gifford (2004) who notes that this prosperity gospel spread widely in Africa in the 1980s. One of its means of diffusion was Bonnke's 'Fire Conference' in Harare in April 1986. At this conference, which drew 4,000 delegates from 41 African countries, Kenneth Copeland conducted one of the key seminars on 'The Gospel and Prosperity'. It is now realized that this doctrine is associated with many of Africa's fastest-growing churches: the Rhema churches of South Africa and Zimbabwe; Andrew Wutawunashe's Family Church in Accra, Ghana; Benson Idahosa's Church of God Mission International in Nigeria and countless others.

Prosperity gospel, with both its positives and negatives, has grown in Africa to become one of the successive stories that is paradoxically placed. There are distinct characteristics of

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prosperity gospel in the post-colonial era and the following can be cited: *It is the gospel of affluence*: Africa is home to some of the richest religious leaders. Here, we can mention the likes of flamboyant pastors like the Nigerian pastor and Christian author David O. Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church Worldwide (Winners' Chapel), the late Nigerian pastor Temitope Balogun Joshua (TB Joshua) of The Synagogue, Church of All Nations (SCOAN), Nigerian-born pastor Chris Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy, South African televangelist pastor Paseka Motsoeneng (Mboro) of Incredible Happenings, South Africa-based Malawian prophet Shepherd Bushiri of the Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) and many others. The grass and petrol pastor, Daniel Lesego of Rabboni Centre Ministries is one of the emerging and controversial pastors in Tshwane. Speaking of the Nigerian context, which is relevant elsewhere in Africa, Umoh (2013) concluded that 'religion appears to be the most lucrative business today'.

Jones (2019) identifies some of the mistaken assumptions and errors where he observes that the Abrahamic Covenant is a means to material entitlement. One of the theological bases of the prosperity gospel is the Abrahamic covenant. Prosperity gospel advocates are correct that much of the common errors in prosperity gospel: Scripture is the record of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, yet they do not maintain an orthodox view of this covenant. In particular, they hold to an erroneous view concerning the application of the covenant. Researcher Edward Pousson explains that according to the prosperity gospel, Christians are Abraham's spiritual children and heirs to the blessings of faith. This Abrahamic inheritance is unpacked primarily in terms of material entitlements.

In other words, God's primary purpose for the Abrahamic covenant was to bless Abraham materially, they claim. Since believers are now Abraham's spiritual children, they have inherited these financial blessings of the covenant. For example, prosperity teacher Kenneth Copeland writes, "Since God's Covenant has been established and prosperity is a provision of this covenant, you need to realize that prosperity belongs to you now!"

It is further noted that Christians give in order to gain material compensation from God. One of the most striking characteristics of the prosperity theologians is their seeming fixation with the act of giving. Students of the prosperity gospel are urged to give generously and are confronted with such pious statements as, "True prosperity is the ability to use God's power to meet the needs of mankind in any realm of life," and, "We have been called to finance the gospel to the world." While these statements appear to be praiseworthy, a closer examination of the theology behind them reveals that this emphasis on giving is built on anything but philanthropic motives. The driving force behind this teaching on giving is what teacher Robert Tilton referred to as the "Law of Compensation." According to this law, which is purportedly based on Mark 10:30, Christians need to give generously to others because when they do, God gives back more in return. This, in turn, leads to a cycle of ever-increasing prosperity. As Gloria Copeland put it, "Give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000... in short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal. "The prosperity gospel's doctrine of giving is built upon faulty motives. Whereas Jesus taught His disciples to "give, hoping for nothing in return" (Luke 10:35), prosperity theologians teach their disciples to give because they will receive a great return.

Faith is a self-generated spiritual force that leads to prosperity. Whereas orthodox Christianity understands faith to be trust in the person of Jesus Christ, prosperity teachers espouse quite a different doctrine. In his book, *The Laws of Prosperity*, Kenneth Copeland writes, Faith is a spiritual force, a spiritual energy, a spiritual power. It is this force of faith which

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makes the laws of the spirit world function. There are certain laws governing prosperity revealed in God's Word. Faith causes them to function. This is obviously a faulty, if not heretical, understanding of faith. According to prosperity theology, faith is not a God-centered act of the will, stemming from God; rather it is a man-centered spiritual force, directed at God. Indeed, any theology that views faith solely as a means to material gain rather than the acceptance of heavenly justification must be judged as faulty and inadequate.

Prayer is a tool to force God to grant personal prosperity. Prosperity gospel preachers often note that we “have not because we ask not” (James 4:2). Advocates of the prosperity gospel encourage believers to pray for personal success in all areas of life. In regard to the power of prayer, Creflo Dollar writes, when we pray, believing that we have already received what we are praying, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass. It is a key to getting results as a Christian.

Certainly, prayers for personal blessing are not inherently wrong, but the prosperity gospel's overemphasis upon man turns prayer into a tool believers can use to obtain their desires from God. Within prosperity theology, man — rather than God — becomes the focal point of prayer. Curiously, prosperity preachers often ignore the second half of James' teaching on prayer which reads, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:3). God does not answer selfish requests that do not honor his name. Certainly, we should make our requests known to God (cf. Philippians 4:6), but the prosperity gospel focuses so much upon man's desires that it may lead people to pray selfish, shallow, superficial prayers that do not bring God glory. Furthermore, when coupled with the prosperity doctrine of faith, the teaching upon prayer within the prosperity movement may lead people to attempt to manipulate God to get what they want — indeed, a futile task. This is far removed from praying to God to see his will accomplished.

Therefore, in the light of Scripture, we see that the prosperity gospel is flawed. There is perhaps one general reason why the prosperity gospel is a wayward gospel: Its faulty view of the relationship between God and man. Simply put, if the prosperity gospel is correct, grace becomes obsolete, God becomes irrelevant and man is the measure of all things. Prosperity teachers seek to turn the relationship between God and man into a financial quid pro quo transaction. As scholar James R. Goff noted, God is “reduced to a kind of ‘cosmic bellhop’ attending to the needs and desires of his creation. “This is a wholly inadequate and unbiblical view of the relationship between God and man.

In light of the above, there are therefore pertinent examples where the church is called upon to give so as to receive yet it is not biblically supported. It is like a command from some religious leaders to people who are poor and they want material wealth there and then. This called the law of sowing and reaping:

In the course of one service the pastor called upon those who were jobless but hoping for a job to come forward to pledge 10% of the salary they were hoping to for, the pledge to be paid within the following ten days. As soon as the jobless came forward, ushers distributed pens and paper for them to write their names and amount. Then at the end of the service e told them of the revelation he had the previous Friday night. He called out those who would pledge 8,000, 80,000 or 800,000 shillings (US \$8, 480 OR \$800) within the following ten days. Again, the

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sanction of God was invoked: Obey the urging of the spirit”. About 120 came forward and paper and pens were immediately distributed so that they could write their names and the amount. He told them:” You are doing this for yourself, for your business, your promotion” (Gifford, 1994)

In teaching and preaching, it is also noted that ‘You cannot give to a prophet and become poor. God will never decrease your supply; he will increase it. It is important to bring the man of God a gift. There are people who don’t think of giving a prophet anything

When you give to a prophet you are not paying. It is a prophetic principle, he who gives a prophet will not go empty. You should not wait for any special announcement to bless the man of God. When you get a job, you come and bless the man of God. Some of you are in financial difficulties because you are rebelling against what God is saying on this church. Some say “why does he preach so much about money?” You are the greatest blocking to your own blessings. If you don’t receive, it is nobody’s fault. But your own. When you come to the church you should not come empty-pocketed, you should not come empty-handed. I will give you two minutes to get ready. If you need to write a cheque, do so. You are giving to a servant of God. (Gifford, 1994)

When prosperity gospel preachers ask you to sow in their ministries to get blessings, they are asking you to treat God as a slot machine. Give a little, pull the slot machine’s handle, and see how much you will get—take a chance on them. These wealthy prosperity gospel preachers’ prey on the vulnerable, the greedy, and the ignorant. They know folks do not study their Bibles, and so many people won’t understand the parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:9-23. This is the parable of the seed. The *life is in the seed*, which is God’s word. Jesus followers’ *heart is the soil*. And *obedience to the word is the fertilizer* that causes blessings to flow. Yes, obedience, not money sent to a preacher! Prosperity gospel preachers get rich on backs of poor. The health and wealth, prosperity gospel preachers, are getting rich on the backs of the vulnerable, ignorant, and poor people. Are you wasting God’s money giving to prosperity gospel preachers so you can get a blessing from God? (Managing God’s Money, 2023).

Thus, from the above the real interpretation of ‘sowing and reaping” needs to be understood. But ‘prosperity gospel’, attempts to use the natural law of sowing & reaping to apply as a” spiritual” law for giving money for Kingdom work without following what sowing and reaping is about; according to the Word of God. They say that if one plants a ‘seed’ of say a certain quantity of money, by giving it to their pastor, or to an evangelist, then that preacher would pray for the giver and s/her would eventually reap a ‘harvest’ of wealth. It sounds nice to the ear and it can be appealing to the person wanting to make wealth quickly. However, this is a *misapplication* of the illustration of the law of sowing & reaping. This misapplication is often used by unscrupulous preachers, pastors, and evangelists to fleece people of their hard-earned incomes and to become wealthy quickly themselves. What happens in such situations is that the *people* plant the ‘seeds’ of wealth but the unscrupulous *preacher* reaps the ‘harvest’! Nowhere do we find that if I plant my seeds in my neighbour’s fields, I will reap the harvest in my own fields! *It just does not happen.*

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It is anchored in the spirit of 'name it, claim it' syndrome: It is asserted that: 'the gospel of prosperity therefore teaches that all resources are there for the people to claim them' (Togarasei 2011). The bluff with prosperity gospel is that African Christians who have embraced this message continue to 'name it', whilst their pastors are the ones 'claiming it'. Prophets of prosperity gospel continue to live conspicuous materialistic lifestyles in affluent suburbs and drive the most expensive cars on the market, whilst their congregants are drowning in the triple unholy alliance of poverty, unemployment and inequality. For further clarity Umoh (2013) observes that the poor continue to hope against hope, even in their hopelessness'. In his book, *When African and Western cultures Meet*, Walt (2008), argues that the latest trends in Christianity cannot help to solve Africa's crisis. He points out that the fastest growing types of Christianity is the so-called Prosperity Gospel introduced by evangelists from especially North America. Its basic teaching is that Christians should share in the victory of Christ over sickness, deprivation and poverty. He emphasizes that the believer has the right to his blessings of health and wealth. One can obtain them merely by sincere confession of faith. He assesses this kind of Christianity as a reflection of the present socio-economic situation and therefore it lacks the ability either to improve the situation or endure for very long.

The gospel of prosperity holds a very shallow view of material prosperity and derived from the Bible, but from superficial, secular, consumerist Western culture. He identifies another form of Christianity which he calls as a socially irrelevant type namely Apocalyptic Christianity. This believes that the hardships which Africans are experiencing are the signs of the end time, a fulfillment of God's prophecies. One can improve one's situation but have to accept it as his will. From this side also, one cannot expect either criticism of the status quo or active Christian involvement to improve the situation. He argues that Christianity serves as a narcotic instead of a tonic. Therefore, these examples of the mushrooming prosperity gospel and apocalyptic Christianity are mentioned to illustrate that even the latest forms of brands of Christianity are not world transformative types. It is noted that Christianity on the African continent is infected by the dangerous virus that life should be divided into a sacred and secular sphere. Hence it lacks the comprehensive view of service in God's kingdom in every area of life.

However, despite the argument raised above, Walt (2008) quoting Kinoti (1994) realizes that the main reason for the little impact of Christianity is that what was received from the West emphasized the spiritual aspect of life, often to the neglect or even exclusion of the intellectual, social and material aspects. This is the reason for the widespread neglect of economic, political and social affairs by African Christians. They failed to apply the whole gospel to the whole life. They read the Word of God selectively, placing emphasis on (spiritual) salvation and neglecting those sections of the bible that speak of justice, peace and social well-being for the purposes of development. In a Christian context however, a lot is found in the bible towards the understanding of poverty and wealthy aspects despite the said impact of the European religion (Christianity).

The un-skewed and untwisted word of God on wealth and poverty

This section is very significant because it shows the very significance of Scripture for all seasons, for all people and for all ages. The word of God is for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness: *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete,*

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equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Thus, there is a lot the Bible teaches, inspires and contributes those who the understanding of wealth, poverty and development in contemporary Africa and the world at large. The Word of God does away with misconceptions about wealth and poverty. It shows people the best way to acquire riches and at the same time talks about poverty. All these have implications on development “. What are some of the biblical texts to counteract the above assertions? Let’s look in St. Luke’s gospel 3:10-14

¹⁰ *“What should we do then?” the crowd asked.*

¹¹ *John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”*

¹² *Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”*

¹³ *“Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.*

¹⁴ *Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”*

He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

It is noted that in the theological and ethical theory of John the Baptist, above, there is a call to share life’s necessities of food and clothing with those in need, the tax collectors were told for them it would be ceasing to demand more than the appointed amount of ta. Soldiers were to refrain from extorting money or goods by force or by falsely accusing people; they were to be contented with their army wages and provisions. All these are still applicable to issues of injustice today which in one way or the other are related to the cause of poverty.

The Word of God also speaks harshly of those that have not used their God-given mind, strength and resources. Laziness or slothfulness are condemned (Prov. 6:6-11)

⁶ Go to the ant, you sluggard;
consider its ways and be wise!

⁷ It has no commander,
no overseer or ruler,

⁸ yet it stores its provisions in summer
and gathers its food at harvest.

⁹ How long will you lie there, you sluggard?
When will you get up from your sleep?

¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest—

¹¹ and poverty will come on you like a thief
and scarcity like an armed man.

In the above text, the writer of Proverbs has reduced humanity to a mere ant, one of the smallest insects yet a human being was created in the image of God and is the apex of all creation. It’s noted that the sluggard is sarcastically advised to go and learn from ants—a person with gifts of speech, with a brain the size of an anthill, is told to bend over, peer down, and learn from the lowly ant. The implication is that one learns to be a planner, to be prepared and to be wise for the purposes of development in this respect. Above all, one should be industrious. Their industriousness is evident in the way they store up (the ants) provisions at the right time.

Further in the New Testament, Paul urges people to work as he himself couldn’t bother others to feed him and provide other needs (1 Thess. 2:9 & Acts 18:3). Although Paul had the right to receive financial support from the people he taught, he supported himself as a tent-maker so that he wouldn’t be a burden to the Thessalonian believers. This is a call to Christians to value

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hard work and self-reliance but not to wait to receive help and other forms of hand-outs. Adeyemo (2006) comments that in our context of poverty and high unemployment, becoming a pastor may be seen as just another way to earn a living. Such a thinking is completely wrong and endangers the church. The motive for preaching and general church work should not be financial. This is one of the misconceptions of about wealth by those who do not know the real meaning of serving God. We are called to serve God unselfishly and to rely on him to provide for our needs. In some cases, he does this by giving us the ability to work with our own hands. We can then support ourselves while still carrying out the work at which God has called us as his workers. However, this particularly becomes relevant who want to gain riches in being pastors but it is also applicable for other lay people too.

Implications for a contemporary Christian on wealthy and poverty

Adei in Adeyemo (2006) notes that our attitudes to money, wealth and poverty reveals our eternal values as well as our character and relationship to both God and others. Poverty is a recurring theme in the bible and also an experience of many Africans. In the book of Genesis, the patriarchs amassed wealth according to the promise:

² “I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.” (Gen. 12:2-3)

Earlier on, 13:2 describes how wealthy Abram became as the first provisional fulfilment of this promise. The rest of the book of Genesis unfolds as a narrative of the various steps and obstacles to inheriting the promise, including the important material portion of that promise the land of Canaan, Clinel (1978). . And, along the way the riches amassed by the patriarchs are highlighted several times (Gen. 20: 14-16; 24:5; 26:13; 30:4; 47:27). However, it must be realized that the wealth of the patriarchs must be understood within the covenantal context. This wealth was directly to God’s plan to give his people a special land. And, in this Christian era, in which believers do not live in a uniquely promised land, we must take care not to assume that wealth necessarily, or even frequently, represents God’s blessings.

However, what is more, Genesis also consistently stresses that the patriarchs gave generously of their wealth. Abram allows Lot to choose the more fertile land (Gen. 13) – a model for his descendants to imitate (Wenham, 1987). Also, after defeating five kings of Canaan in battle, Abram gives a tithe of his spoil to the high priest Salem, Melchizedek (14:20). Jacob also gave lavish gifts to his estranged brother Esau (32:13-16). It is noted that those with abundance must help the needy generously (Prov. 29:7) and a godly king will free the poor person who calls to him and will have pity on the feeble (Ps, 72:4).

Also, it is noted that Proverbs 3:27-28 says: *27“Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. 28Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Come back later; I’ll give it tomorrow’—when you now have it with you.”* Most of these texts are about sharing and showing justice to the cause of the poor by the rich and with wealth. It is important to note that

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even globalization's effects on the poor mean that social concerns must be at the heart of mission and the church. As Escobar (2000) Christian compassion will be the only hope of survival of the victims of the global economic process. Thus, it is a calling for the church to have social concerns that include Christian compassion which in a way counteracts the challenges of injustice in our communities. Whatever that the Word of God is about poverty, Christians should promote faith with works as supported by Ruele in Amanze (Ed.) 2010 and help the poor to come out poverty brought about by injustice in society.

The Word of God however, encourages people to shun laziness (Prov. 6-11; 10:4-5; 14:20:4, 1; 2 Thess. 3:10) since they have not used their God-given mind, strength and resources. It is realized that those who work hard, learn a trade, improve their knowledge and skills, are entrepreneurial, learn to save and invest small amounts, and who are faithful to God are often able to improve their material conditions (Prov. 21:5).

Instead of dwelling of material wealth as Christians, our lie is to be God-centred and not thing centred (Matt 6:25-34). Adeyemo (2006) while basing himself on Matthew 6:25-34 argues that material affluence is associated with materialism. Yet the fact that the majority of Africans are materially poor does not mean they are free from materialism. Many long for the material comforts seen depicted in the magazines yet one of the Africa's problems is the encouragement of Western patterns of consumption without the economic discipline required to achieve them. This longing for material riches fuels the preaching of a prosperity gospel in many parts of Africa. It is also realized that treasures on earth have a habit of disappointing their owners since offer no permanent security, instead of putting all the trust in such wealth that does not rust (Matt. 6:19) trust should be put in God since treasures in Heaven are permanently secure and against depreciation or decay (Matt. 6:20) as seen in Halo (2000).

In addition, instead of relying on misconceptions about wealth through prosperity gospel, (and also to practice) there is need to promote stewardship since the basis of all wealth is God's bounty. Everything belongs to him (Ps 24:1) and He gives the ability to produce wealth (Deut. 8:10-18) Verse 18 says...." *But 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 your ancestors, as it is today.* It is the Lord who provides wealth. Being stewards and managers of God's possessions is crucial but not dwelling on unclear teachings that are not bible -based. After all human beings are God's representatives on earth with responsibility to take care of creation (Kapolyo, 2005). It is also advisable that who are rich should be generous and willing to share their riches with the poor (1 Timothy 6:17-19) and the wealth obtained shouldn't be used lavishly like a prodigal son and his wildly living.

There are biblically approved ways to earn money and create wealth. The exploitation of workers and the poor. One of it is about the parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30). What is of value is to note is that Christ gives gifts to different people according to their ability. If he gives us land, then it should be used diligently to raise crops. If He gives wealth, we must use it in his service. Working diligently is required (Prov.14:23). Likewise, all the resources of the earth should be used wisely as good stewards not wastefully or abusively, but we should do this eagerly with the knowledge that the earth has been created by God for our benefit. The earth's purpose is to serve the well-being of the human race (Grudem & Asmus, 2013). Instead of 'crying' for the material blessings, we need to note that 'a slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich' (Prov. 10:4). Likewise, Paul told the Thessalonian Christians

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“To work with your hands as we instructed you...and be dependent on no one.” (1 Thess. 3:6), and were to imitate Paul’s example of working ‘night and day’ (v.8). He even says, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (v.10)

Conclusion

Christian misconceptions on wealth and poverty are due to ignorance and misinterpretation of the knowledge and Word of God respectively. This is especially through the spread of the prosperity gospel to alleviate material poverty. The very hard and challenging economic situation lead some Christians to join or look for material wealth through prosperity gospel. Ideally, the Word of God should be *holistic*: for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3: 16-17) hence a need for a true and holistic approach to the gospel about wealth and poverty. Getting rich and amass wealth has become the order of the day and most churches neglect the spiritual aspect. Walt (2008) notes that Christianity in Africa needs to be holistic instead of being a small section of life, but should embrace the whole of one’s being and life- but not based on obtaining good life without any huddle economically, socially and financially among others. Christians should promote good work ethic hinged on God’s word to fight poverty other than waiting for hand-outs in various forms; but at the same time those with material wealth should give and share with the needy and poor (Matt.25:14-30).

Recommendations

The study came up with some recommendations. First, proper understanding and application of the Word of God holistically other than misinterpreting it, is paramount and it does away with Christian misconceptions on wealth and poverty. Thus, there is need for reproof, correction and instruction (2 Timothy 3:16-17) but not depending on the whims of the promoters of prosperity gospel.

Second, the church needs proper stewardship and a good Christian work ethic based on God’s Word to combat poverty such as Gen. 2:15, Ps. 24:1, Prov. 6:6ff, 2 Thess,3:10ff among others. And, Christian sharing of wealth of the wealthy with the poor in order to relieve physical need and oppression (Matt. 25) should be highly applied.

Third, with the government, the church needs to promote Good Governance that alleviates all forms of injustice in society. These forms of injustice lead to desperation of Christians looking for material wealth through various ways that are not bible based.

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