

Does God Care About Our Money?

Rise & Shine, September 22nd

2 Corinthians 9:10-11

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us.

Questions:

Does God care if you are rich or poor?

Why do you give to the Church?

Is there a connection between living faithfully as a follower of Jesus, giving to the Church, and receiving blessings and good health?

How does the fact that Jesus spent so much time with the poor and spoke about the risks of wealth affect the way you view finances?

Is it immoral to be a millionaire? A billionaire? Is there a line where wealth becomes immoral?

In the News

Televangelist Benny Hinn Says He Is 'Correcting' His Theology

This month, televangelist Benny Hinn appeared to renounce the "prosperity gospel" that has been a foundational teaching of his ministry for more than 40 years. If Hinn follows through on what he's said, it would mark a sea change for not only his work, but also for expectations among his supporters. Many observers of Hinn's preaching, however, are skeptical that he is really changing his prosperity claims.

The prosperity gospel is a controversial doctrine among some Protestant Christians who maintain that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for them, and that faith, along with donations to religious causes will increase the giver's material wealth. In this line of belief, there's a "contract" between God and a person: If the person has faith in God, and sows financial "seeds" in God's work, God will deliver security and prosperity.

Most theologians, leaders of various Christian denominations, and pastors, along with many laypeople, view prosperity teachings as not supported by scripture and thus a misrepresentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some critics say it is a form of idolatry and many point out that it is exploitative of people who give sacrificially to the prosperity ministries.

In his remarks on his September 2 broadcast, Hinn said, "I'm sorry to say that prosperity has gone a little crazy, and I'm correcting my own theology, because when I read the Bible now, I don't see the Bible in the same eyes I saw the Bible 20 years ago."

Often in the past, Hinn has told his audiences that God will give them material blessings in exchange for a gift of \$1,000 to his ministry. In his September 2 announcement, he said he wouldn't do that anymore.

Hinn added, "I think it's an offense to the Lord; it's an offense to say, 'Give a thousand dollars.' I think it's [an] offense to the Holy Spirit to place a price on the gospel. I'm done with it. I will never again ask you to give a thousand or whatever amounts because I think the Holy Ghost is just fed up with it."

Hinn even said, "If you are not giving because you love Jesus, don't bother giving. I think giving has become such a gimmick it's making me sick to my stomach. And I've been sick for a while, too. I just couldn't say it. And now, the lid is off. I've had it."

Hinn's nephew, Costi W. Hinn, who is a pastor of a church in Arizona, recently wrote a *Religion News Service* column about his own departure from the controversial theology. "I grew up in the prosperity gospel. I lived it, believed it and bankrolled it," he wrote. "My family was at the center of it, with Uncle Benny leading the charge, until eventually my eyes opened to the exploitation and abuse of it." He went on to say that the seed faith teaching made his family rich, powerful and prominent.

Hinn's nephew concluded that "prosperity preachers who exploit the poor and target sick people in Third World countries have a scary reality awaiting them in the next life if they don't make things right in this one."

Perhaps Uncle Benny read his nephew's remarks, for in his September 2 broadcast, the elder Hinn said, "I don't want to get to heaven and be rebuked. I think it's time we say it like it is: The gospel is not for sale. And the blessings of

God are not for sale, and miracles are not for sale, and prosperity is not for sale."

Debra J. Mumford, professor of homiletics at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, said, "My question to Benny Hinn is: You've benefited from this for 40 years. What is your repentance going to consist of? Is it just words? Is this just a symbol, or are you somehow going to pay back some of that money that you received from people who believed in your message?"

Noting that Hinn had at least twice before said he was abandoning prosperity theology and then not followed through, Charles Self, a professor of church history at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, said, "I think time will tell whether this is a minor correction, something for publicity, or the beginning of a new trajectory towards greater maturity. I'm taking a wait-and-see perspective, because we've been down this road before."

Ecclesiastes 11:1-2

Send out your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will get it back. Divide your means seven ways, or even eight, for you do not know what disaster may happen on earth.

Mark 10:21

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

1 Peter 2:21

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

Prayer for the Right Use of God's Gifts (BCP p.827)

Almighty God, whose loving hand *has* given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honor *you* with our substance, and, remembering the account which we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of *your* bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*