

Prosper and Be in Health

Though Benny Hinn's demeanor was calm, his incendiary words sparked a firestorm in Pentecostal circles. It was the day Billy Graham died, and followers tuned in to hear Hinn ostensibly eulogize Graham over Facebook Live. But many were surprised to hear Hinn casually remark that some prosperity gospel teaching, including his own, had "gone beyond" the Bible.

"We get attacked for teaching prosperity. Well, it's in the Bible, but I think some have gone to the extreme with it, sadly," Hinn said. "And it's not God's Word [that] is taught. I think I'm as guilty as others."

He then clarified, "The more you know the Bible, the more you become biblically based and balanced in your opinions and thoughts, because we're influenced. When I was younger, I was influenced by the preachers who taught whatever they taught. But as I've lived longer, I think, 'Wait a minute. This doesn't really fit totally with the Bible. It doesn't fit with reality.'

"What is prosperity? No lack. I've said this before. Did Elijah the prophet have a car? No. He did not even have a bicycle. But he had no lack. What about the Lord? Did Jesus drive a car or live in a mansion? No. He had no lack. How about the apostles? No lack. No lack among them. Today the idea is abundance and palatial homes and cars and bank accounts. They've gone beyond. ... The focus is wrong."

Hinn has been a longtime advocate for prosperity, so his remarks stunned many. Frenzied reports said Hinn had renounced the prosperity gospel. Yet Hinn tells *Charisma* he still believes prosperity is a biblical idea; it just needs clarification. He sets the record straight here, explaining how his views have changed, what true biblical prosperity is

and why it matters for the future of evangelism.

Prosperity and the Bible

Prosperity means “no lack,” Hinn says, or having all of one’s needs met in every area of life. But that doesn’t necessarily require money or possessions. The evangelist bases his updated view on the Bible, specifically early church practice cited in Acts 4:34.

“In the book of Acts, we read that the New Testament church had no lack,” Hinn says. “Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Luke specifically wrote, ‘Nor was there anyone among them who lacked.’ Obviously, from time to time, there were people in the early church who had needs while others were blessed more abundantly, but because of the faithfulness of God’s people, the saints who ‘had lack’ immediately had their needs met and experienced no lack.”

However, Hinn says “no lack” doesn’t mean “no problems.”

“Throughout the ages, heroes of the faith have experienced tremendous hardships,” Hinn says. “Many, such as Abraham, David and Solomon, were men of wealth, social stature and influence. Others, such as Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist, were not known to own possessions and land, yet time after time, they experienced abundance and had no lack because their needs were met supernaturally.”

Because of this, Hinn believes that focusing on what God has given one person or another is fruitless, since prosperity is more than material goods.

“Prosperity is, above all, the abundant, abiding presence of the Lord Jesus in our lives,” Hinn says. “That is why the late Kathryn Kuhlman so wisely said, ‘The poorest man with Jesus is rich, and the richest man without Him is poor.’ Knowing Him and having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ are the greatest blessings a person can know.”

Yet while we may not control how God blesses us, we can control how we bless others. Hinn says that's because God often uses the local church and individual believers as bringers of blessing.

"When we are obedient in the area of giving toward the spread and establishment of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God is faithful to meet the needs of His children and thus ensure that we have no lack," he says. "God wants to bless believers so each can, in turn, be a blessing to others. But the Lord doesn't expect us to become mere pipelines with blessings flowing through us to other people without our experiencing the blessing ourselves. When we are obedient to the Lord in blessing others, the Father delights in blessing us."

Prosperity and the Prosperity Gospel

Whether such comments will help turn the tide against prosperity extremes remains to be seen. But charismatic pastor Mike Shreve says Hinn's influence makes his remarks "extremely significant." Shreve says that when recognized leaders of Hinn's stature choose to walk in honesty, humility and transparency, it causes a ripple effect throughout the body of Christ. As a result, he hopes Hinn's comments will encourage other believers to view prosperity through a biblical rather than monetary lens.

"For instance, Joseph was described in Scripture as a 'prosperous man,' yet at the time he was a slave in Egypt," Shreve says. "He owned no material things; he wasn't rich. He simply achieved excellence and fruitfulness in his endeavors, responsibilities and influence over others."

Bishop Doug Beacham, leader of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, echos Hinn's remarks. He says God's blessings are not meant to be hoarded for our good; they're meant to be shared for others' good.

"Regarding the prosperity message, I prefer to approach it

from the perspective of stewardship," Beacham says. "The Wesleyan revival brought salvation that led to social and economic lift for many families. The Protestant or Puritan ethic did the same. The addition of resources in one's life means additional responsibility. God blesses us, often in ways that are beyond the material, so that we are a blessing to others."

Charles Self, a professor of history at Assembly of God Theological Seminary, says Hinn's evolving beliefs fit into a larger pattern of prosperity gospel advocates maturing over time.

"I'm thrilled with how the prosperity gospel, in many cases, is maturing into something far more than prayer formula or miraculous mailbox moments," Self says. "I'm watching prosperity leaders look at the whole picture and realize God does want people to flourish and economics to grow, but it takes divine wisdom to put it together. There's still a lot of personality cults and abuse in certain segments of the world, but in general, there's a great maturation going on."

Self's background in history gives him a special perspective on this issue. He says the church oscillates between praising poverty and asceticism and praising wealth and abundance. Yet he's hopeful that today's church is finding a healthy balance.

For instance, Self says, one church that's embracing this balance is Bethel Church in Redding, California. Bethel leaders have spoken about the necessity of Spirit-filled believers contributing to the prosperity of their community and influencing society. But dealing with both prosperity and pain means embracing a nuanced worldview, one which acknowledges not everything is black and white.

"I don't go around rebuking everyone who talks about prosperity, but it has to take into account the reality of a fallen world," Self says. " ... With the more gullible, saying,

‘Sow your seed and God will bless it 10 times’ is easier than facing the pain of your situation. But there are groups who are helping people get out of payday-lending traps. We went wrong in not considering the complexity of life.”

This movement toward a more biblically balanced view of prosperity and working together to build God’s kingdom is timely, especially in light of Hinn’s forecast of persecution touching the church in America.

Prosperity and Evangelism’s Future

Almost lost in the prosperity controversy was Hinn’s prediction of a coming, concurrent wave of evangelism and persecution. On Facebook, the evangelist recalled that in 1989, while he was pastor of Orlando Christian Center in Orlando, Florida, he heard God say the deaths of Oral Roberts (who died in December 2009) and Billy Graham (who died this February) would mark the beginning of the greatest revival in church history.

Hinn noted that evangelism followed the Spirit’s outpouring on the day of Pentecost, as did miracles, healing and prosperity. In the video, he encouraged people to prepare for seeing children and loved ones coming to Christ “in a big way.”

Months later, Hinn stands by that prediction: “God clearly is doing something amazing as we enter new frontiers of ministry. ... We are entering into a bold new future, and souls hang in the balance.”

Yet Hinn also says Americans may not be spared from persecution much longer.

“If you look at what’s happening in the world, people are under persecution in most nations in Asia, the Arab world and beyond the Arab world—India, Pakistan, North Korea and so forth,” Hinn said. “Men are getting killed in many parts of the world, but we’ve been spared up to now. I don’t know if

we'll be spared much longer."

For Hinn, these two predictions are not contradictory. He believes that, like the early believers of Acts 4:34, the church's "greatest victories" are yet to come, but it may have to undergo persecution first.

"Persecution takes many forms," Hinn says. "The Bible contains vivid illustrations of discrimination and oppression, both subtle and overt. Every believer today should read *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, *The Hiding Place*, *Tortured for Christ* and so many other powerful books that detail what real persecution is. Persecution continues today, and according to the latest World Watch List from the Christian human rights advocate group Open Doors, at least 215 million Christians face significant levels of persecution in the world today, from harassment to abduction, rape and murder. Churches are being attacked and destroyed."

He also says, while comparatively mild to persecution in other countries, political correctness represents an attempt to remove Christianity from culture.

"Couched in such positive-sounding concepts as 'tolerance' and 'diversity,' the forces of this world have been successful in their social engineering attempts to eradicate any vestige of Christianity from society," Hinn says. "Court cases and news headlines prove, our First Amendment rights of religious freedom are under widespread assault. Will persecution of this degree come to America? Prayerfully not, but what we can do now is be aware of what is happening in the world. We must stand up for those who are persecuted and intercede for the oppressed."

Hinn says he's asked God to let him do five more things before his death: proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, bring souls to the cross, share the Holy Spirit's miracle-working power, strengthen the body of Christ and equip the next generation of

Spirit-filled leaders.

He says, "What happens to the multitudes of lost men, women and children for all eternity largely depends upon what we do with the amazing opportunities and sobering responsibilities in front of us."

Because of that, Hinn says it's important now more than ever to declare God's promises of ultimate prosperity. He recommends 1 Chronicles 7:14, Zechariah 4:6 and even 1 John 4:4: "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

Ken Walker is a writer and book editor from Huntington, West Virginia, and a longtime contributor to Charisma.

Watch the original video in which Benny Hinn explains his new perspective on biblical prosperity at .