

The 'Gain Is Godliness' Message Dilutes the Power of the Gospel

"Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. When He had looked around at everything, as the hour was now late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve" (Mark 11:11).

This is a very telling verse of Scripture. The day before Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, He visited it. He had taken a look inside the temple and inspected the whole situation, surveying the entire spectrum of the daily activities conducted there.

He was angry at what he observed, but He did not react immediately. Instead, He must have pondered it all night. Zeal for His Father's house was eating Him up

"His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house will consume Me'" (John 2:17).

The next day, He cursed the fig tree, signifying the end of a fruitless Jewish religious system, as the new covenant would soon be introduced and the church era would begin.

"And they came to Jerusalem. Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who sold and bought in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves" (Mark 11:15).

Then He said this: "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" (Mark 11:17).

Examples of Error

I realize that there are many godly Christians, consecrated

ministers and great churches in the world today, but the extreme teachings and practices of the minority make it harder for the rest to succeed. A little leaven leavens the whole lump, and the general populace has a tendency to lump (no pun intended) us all together. The lump is much bigger than it was just a decade or two ago, and it's time for many of us to blow it up and start all over again—similar to what Jesus did in cleansing the temple. The gain-is-godliness message and the extravagant lifestyle of the minority has diluted the impact and power of the gospel through the majority.

I have a good friend who ministers nearly every year in India for a large national apostolic organization that is making a tremendous impact on the poor and needy, planting hundreds of churches and training many to take the gospel into persecuted areas and thousands of unreached villages. Truly it is a sacrificial ministry with many suffering for the gospel's sake.

My friend asked the leading apostle and founder of this ministry what the greatest abuse was to the charismatic church of India. Immediately and surprisingly, he told him that it was the carnal prosperity gospel. Perhaps many Christians do not fully realize the extent of the harm and damage this carnal gospel has done.

By carnal gospel, I mean the message that claims Jesus died to make us financially rich, that equates godliness and spirituality with gain, that encourages us to focus on our material prosperity and increase our earthly possessions. This is such an utter perversion of the real apostolic gospel and completely contrary to the criterion set by Jesus for being a true disciple (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 14:26-33). Sadly, much of it has been exported from America to nations like India and has spread like a plague throughout Africa and other continents and nations.

For example, we lived and ministered in West Africa for many

years in several impoverished nations, and many of the poor Christians are now all following their bishops' teachings and example of living a prosperous life. They are equating their wealth and possessions with God's favor, and many of them are striving to attain that in their own lives. This causes great pain and turmoil in their hearts when they fail to attain these things, and it conjures up questions as to why God is not blessing them with financial prosperity. Meanwhile, I have observed some of these bishops who once burned brightly for the Lord now bound by the pride and arrogance of position, wealth and possessions. Some do not know that they've become "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

This usually also produces an insensitivity to the poor in those who do attain to these things, as they seek to climb the prosperity ladder. I'm afraid to say that this mindset and these excessive teachings on financial prosperity have done more harm than good in many ways and places. Similar to the Jews in Jesus' day, it can cause us to subtly esteem the rich believers as the recipients of God's blessings while looking on the poor believers with a sort of disdain.

I believe the first century Judaism prosperity culture has infiltrated much of the Church today, and there is often an arrogance and a self-righteousness attached to it.

I remember having a roommate in Bible school who was ashamed of me for driving an old beat-up car. It had a good functional engine and served me well during those years, but he made it an issue of spirituality. He actually talked to me about it—telling me that my old car was not a good witness of God's blessings. This is a small example of equating gain, such as a nice car, to godliness.

If you examine this issue beyond the surface, my roommate was making gain and financial increase a substitute for our union with God. He was subtly allowing the spirit of mammon to take the place of God. This attitude can keep you striving for the

rest of your life to attain the best of what this world has to offer. This is what happened to Lucifer. He wanted more than what he had. He wanted to be more than what God made him, and this is what ultimately led to his great fall. After all, he is the author of the love of money, the root of all evil (Ezek. 28:14-16).

Here's a riveting quote from a friend of mine that describes the extremes of this carnal gospel (with my own tweaks):

"What amazes me, and has for decades, are those carnal prosperity preachers and teachers who try to transform Yeshua HaMashiach (The Anointed One Who Saves And Delivers) and His message from that of an itinerant rabbi—who warned His hearers against covetousness and spoke unceasingly of how the rich will have a very hard time making heaven—into a prosperous Potentate who wants every believer to get stinking rich." —Dr. Anthony G. Payne

Poverty Is Not a Blessing

At the same time, poverty is not a blessing. We need not have a poverty mentality. God is a God of abundance, and He wants to bless the poor and help people come out of a poverty mentality. He's especially pleased with those who are spiritually rich toward God. He is not opposed to His people being rich; rather, He opposes the covetous. And I do honestly believe that God needs more millionaires who know how to steward their wealth for the gospel, but I also believe there may not be a more dangerous calling.

"But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in ruin and destruction" (1 Tim. 6:9).

I'm a holiness preacher who believes in financial prosperity, but not for my back pocket. That is the life a minority of ministers and saints have also chosen and they've truly made the Lord their portion. Others are free to choose differently

as they wish. I judge no man's heart in this matter. Each have their own reward—either in this life or the next.

Let every man be persuaded in his own mind, and do what they do as unto the Lord (Rom. 14:5-6).