

Introduction: “The Prosperity of the Gospel” is more clearly understood by contrasting the dangers of prosperity, perversity, and pessimism.

The Danger of Prosperity -- What do you think of when you read the words “prosperity gospel”? Does your stomach turn a bit as you think about the preachers on television who speak to very large crowds and appeal to even more people in their books? Queasiness is the reaction one should have to the brand of Christianity trumpeted by prosperity preachers. This is because the prosperity gospel is not a gospel at all, but rather a damnable perversion of the true gospel. Its preachers herald a message of self-improvement that runs painfully contrary to several key biblical realities. They minimize the purpose of suffering, discourage self-denial, and make the Christian life about the accumulation of stuff. To do this, they turn Jesus from the self-giving, sin-atoning, wrath-satisfying, guilt-removing Savior into an eager butler who fetches all of our desires and gives us our best life now.

The prosperity gospel shrinks the gospel down to an unfiltered pursuit of our desires. It shifts the message from the spiritual to the material. The prosperity gospel is about us rather than about God.¹

The Danger of Perversity -- What do you think about the current condition of our nation? Is the media truthful? Is our constitution honored? Are our politicians honest? Are the sexual preferences that are promoted biblical? Are our law enforcement officers respected? Can we trust our health care officials? Are our schools safe? Are our elections reliable? Are our borders secure? Are our unborn children protected? Is the meaning and intent of the two genders God created preserved? Is our responsibility of self-defense threatened? Are our freedoms of speech and worship protected? Are our differences about race, gender, inclusion, diversity, equity, and entitlements expressed with honesty and good will? What about the availability of pornography? What about pedophilia and sex trafficking? What about the redefinition of marriage? What about substance abuse, and the use of social media? What about the rise of the dictatorship of relativism? Isn't this a dangerous time of perversity?²

The Danger of Pessimism -- How shall we discern the times in which we live? For God's people it is not the news media, or podcasts, or our analysis -- whether we tend to be optimistic or pessimistic -- but God's Word. The Bible is the source of our understanding of the revealed will of God and our understanding of the world in which we live. The major concern confronting us is evil.

How can an all-good and all-powerful God allow evil to exist? Is He sadistic

¹ Erik Raymond, *The Soft Prosperity Gospel*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/soft-prosperity-gospel> [edited]

² Adapted from the prayer by Mark Davis, *Radio Talk Show Host*, 660 AM, The Answer, Dallas, TX, <https://660amtheanswer.com/radioshow/the-mark-davis-show>

or is He impotent? Those are NOT the only options. A very powerful God in control of all things, who is very loving, has a plan that will realize His kingdom on earth in such a way as to allow evil and suffering. His wisdom is above our wisdom. We are not in a position to challenge His wisdom and plan.³

The Delight of Perspective -- What we might expect about the kingdom of God and the prosperity of the gospel is not important. What does Christ expect? That is supremely important. The expectation of Christ for His kingdom on earth between His two advents is stated in what is named “The Great Commission” recorded in Matthew 28:18-20, which reads, “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

We have to understand that when we speak of the Great Commission, it is not the great suggestion. It is not the grand idea. It is not an essay on manifest destiny. It is a mandate from the King of kings, who possesses all authority in heaven and on earth. We say that Jesus is the Lord of the church and that we believe in Him. That means we must obey this mandate He has given us.⁴

The flow of Jesus’ statements reminds us of the structure of covenants. It begins with the identity of the great sovereign. It outlines the duties of the grateful subjects. It concludes with promises of continuity and completion. We may identify three themes: The Greatest Authority (verse 18); The Greatest Assignment (verses 19-20a); The Greatest Assurance (verse 20b).⁵

A. The Greatest Authority (verse 18)

Jesus uses “all” in the distributive sense. In every realm of human endeavor and culture Jesus possesses the authority for that area to be conducted appropriately. Jesus says all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him. We might think that since He is the Son of God, therefore by definition, He has all authority in heaven and on earth. However, Jesus isn’t thinking of Himself here as the eternal Son of God, but as the God-man. He is thinking about Himself as the one who has taken our flesh, has borne our sin on the cross, and has risen from the grave to be our Lord and Master. He is thinking about the way He came into this world, took our human nature to do something unique. Thus He received all authority as God incarnate.

³ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Defending the Faith*, Colossians 2, December 14, 2020, www.sermonaudio.com (edited)

⁴ R.C. Sproul, *Matthew* (Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2013), p. 824-825 (edited)

⁵ Steven Lawson, *The Great Commission*, Mat. 28:18-20, 1/18/2015, OnePassion Ministries, Dallas, TX, www.sermonaudio.com

When Jesus says that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him, He is summarizing everything that He came to do. He is telling His disciples that He has actually been obedient to the heavenly Father where Adam was disobedient, and we likewise. He has won the victory over the powers of darkness that ensnared our first parents. He has offered Himself as a sacrifice to the heavenly Father. He came to redeem sinners and to bring them back to God. Remember what He actually said on the cross. As the Son of the heavenly Father, He cried out, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Now He is telling His disciples, “Because I have done everything that needs to be done, all authority in heaven and earth, all dominion in the cosmos is mine.” That is who He is. This is a magnificent testimony and a very simple explanation of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.⁶

His authority is amplified by the promises in the Scriptures. Abraham was promised that “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 18:18; 22:18). More specifically, God said, “I will make your descendants multiply as the star of heaven ... and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 26:4). This promise is assured by the Messiah in Psalm 72:17 where it is declared, “His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed.” Malachi 3:12 affirms this promise by writing, “All nations shall call you blessed.” In Galatians 3:8 Paul writes, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’” The nations are blessed only because the Lord Jesus now has the greatest authority.

B. The Greatest Assignment (verses 19-20a)

This assignment is actually a series, but focus on two things. The first is the enormous privilege to proclaim the gospel. The second is the enormous privilege to believe the gospel.

The first enormous privilege is that they are to go into all the world. They are to make disciples of all nations. They are going to do that by two things: the first is sharing a privilege of baptism with those to whom they speak the gospel, and the second is giving directions to those who believe the gospel.

The privilege of baptism is this: baptize them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Nobody in the Old Testament ever said that. This is a real indication that Jesus is teaching us something about the very character and being of God that was never really clear to anybody. When any Orthodox Jew comes to a passage in the Old Testament where the name of God is to be

⁶ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Savior and the Great Commission*, Mat. 28:16-20, 4/24/2013, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC, www.sermonaudio.com (modified)

translated “LORD” or “Jehovah,” they will not pronounce it but say “the Name.” God’s name is too holy to be vocalized. But now, says Jesus, here is the way true believers pronounce the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When people become Christians, there is a revolution. They are taken out of the name that they have by nature, which Paul tells us is “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). They are brought into this amazing fellowship of love, intimacy, and knowledge of God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The second enormous privilege to believe the gospel is explained as teaching to observe everything that Jesus has commanded. That is a beautiful summary for those who enjoy fellowship with the triune God. That is a majestic summary of how we live the Christian life, which is to do everything Jesus said.⁷

Here is another way of explaining the enormous privilege of baptism. Baptism is NOT what the church does by removing original sin (as stated by the Roman Catholic church). Baptism is NOT what the sacrament does by saving unless resisted (as stated by the Lutheran church). Baptism is NOT what the believer does by confessing his faith (as stated by the Baptist church). Rather, baptism is what the LORD does by expressing His ownership (as stated by the Reformed church). R.C. Sproul explains, “Baptism is not a sign of one’s faith; it is a sign of the faithfulness of God to give all of His Son to all who believe.”⁸ He owns those who confess Him as Savior and Lord, and their children (Act. 2:39). Baptism into the name of the persons of the Godhead signifies union with and discipleship to the three persons of the one God. The symbolic cleansing with water testifies that God the Father selected the elect in eternity (Eph. 1:4), that God the Son saved the elect in history (Eph. 2:8), and that God the Spirit sealed the elect in person (Eph. 1:13).

We may note that sprinkling is the biblical practice to symbolize purification and consecration, as when Moses sprinkled blood on the altar and the people at the inauguration of the covenant between the LORD and Israel (Exo. 24:6, 8). Whereas immersion symbolized judgment and damnation, as in the flood at the time of Noah which drowned all living things (Gen. 7:23), and the flood at the time of Moses which destroyed Pharaoh’s army (Exo. 14:28).

Think again about the enormous privilege to believe the gospel. The gospel tells us three things we need to know: the greatness of our sin and misery, how we are redeemed from all of our sin and misery, and how we are to be thankful to God for such redemption.⁹ The greatness of our salvation is revealed in that Jesus saves from the punishment of God against sin (justification), from the

⁷ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Savior and the Great Commission*, Mat. 28:16-20, 4/24/2013, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC, www.sermonaudio.com (modified)

⁸ R.C. Sproul, *Matthew* (Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2013), p. 826

⁹ *Heidelberg Catechism 2* (modified)

power of Satan over sin (redemption), from the pollution of sin in persons (sanctification), and from the presence of sin in eternity (glorification).

The Great Commission tells us that Christ has all authority and calls the church to make disciples of all nations. Christ is building His church. The gates of hell will not prevail against Christ and His church and their onslaught against Satan's kingdom (Mat. 16:18). Christ has bound the strong man and is now spoiling his house (Mat. 12:29). Satan is bound so that he can deceive the nations no more (Rev. 20:3). Other texts indicate that all the nations will turn to the Lord (Psa. 22:27; 72:7-11).¹⁰

The Scriptures are clear about the turning of the nations. We read in Isaiah 9:6-7, "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."

Daniel prophesied the success of the greatest assignment in the imagery of a divinely cut stone smashing the statue of the kingdoms of man in these words. "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold -- the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure" (Dan. 2:44-45).

John prophesied the success of the greatest assignment in the imagery of the rider on a white horse in these words. "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:11-16). The sword is the

¹⁰ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Why I am Postmillennialist*, 2 - The Nature of Christ's Kingdom, Hebrews 10:9-13, www.sermonaudio.com (modified)

Word of God (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12). A great day of the prosperity of the gospel is coming as the result of the greatest assignment.

C. The Greatest Assurance (verse 20b)

There is one thing that you do not need to be afraid of if you listen to what Jesus is saying here. You do not need to be afraid that you will be left on your own to live this way to His glory because of what He has promised.

Until the end of the age we are to keep on going into the world, making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them. As we do, Jesus promises to be with us always. “Lo” means behold or look at this. This sentence must capture our attention. We must not forget this statement. “I am with you always,” is in the present tense. No matter where we are, no matter what we are doing, the Lord is with us for all that we need. He ministers to us by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus pledges to supply everything we need to fulfill the commission. Christ in you shall complete the commission. He supplies all of the grace, power, love, wisdom, and endurance to carry out His commission. “Always” literally means “all the days.” This includes good days and bad days. He is with us when someone commits his life to Christ. He is with us when someone rejects us for sharing the gospel. Ultimately the success of the commission rests with the Lord. He works in us as we present the gospel. He works in others as they hear the gospel to bring about His glorious plan. Hebrews 13:5 promises, “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” Jesus promises to be with us in every circumstance of life so that the nations shall be gathered to Him. Thus we are part of this massive plan over the centuries to put all His enemies under His feet.¹¹

Remember what God promised through Isaiah, “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10). Psalm 46 states twice, “The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psa. 46:7, 11). One of the names given to the Son of the virgin Mary is His name Immanuel, which is translated, “God with us” (Mat. 1:23). Because of Christ’s presence in His church, we have the greatest assurance.

Conclusion: An excellent summary of Christ’s expectation of what will happen between His two advents is taught in the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer. *Westminster Larger Catechism* 191 explains the petition as follows.

“In the second petition, (which is, Thy Kingdom come,) acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel

¹¹ Steven Lawson, *All Days*, Mat. 28:20, 8/17/2021, OnePassion Ministries, Dallas, TX, www.sermonaudio.com (modified)

propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fulness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrates; that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him for ever: and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.”

Christopher Martin Idle (1938-), a British hymnodist and priest in the Church of England, wrote:

*All authority and power, / ev'ry status and domain,
Now belongs to him who suffered / our redemption to obtain:
Angels, demons, kings and rulers, / over all shall Jesus reign!*

*All the nations owe him worship, / ev'ry tongue shall call him Lord;
How are men to call upon him / if his name they have not heard?
Therefore go and make disciples, / preach his gospel, spread his word.*

*All the clear commands of Jesus / must be heeded and obeyed;
Full provision for our weakness / in his teaching he has made;
In the gospel words and symbols, / saving truth to us conveyed.*

*All the time he will be with us, / always, to the end of days,
With his own believing people, / who keep steadfast in his ways;
God the Father, Son, and Spirit, / bless us, and to him the praise!¹²*

In the Great Commission (the greatest authority, assignment, and assurance), Jesus commands the discipleship of all nations. All nations shall become His disciples. Because He expects this to be done, the nations are to be baptized in the triune name of God. Put the claim of God's ownership on them.

The Great Commission is not great because of what it attempts, but because of what Christ commands. Jesus has conquered sin, Satan, and death. Therefore, teach the nations all that Jesus commands. Further, He promises to be with the church through all the ages to see that this task is completed.¹³

The Lord Jesus Christ expects the prosperity of the gospel! Do you?

Psalter selections: 2, 22I, 72A, 72B [BPS]; 22E, 72A, 72B, 72C [BPW]

Scripture reading: Psalm 72:1-20; Matthew 28:16-20

¹² Christopher Idle, *Trinity Hymnal* (Revised Edition), 1990, Great Commissions Publications, Inc., #453

¹³ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The End? Finding Hope in the Millennial Maze*, 1999 National Conference, www.ligonier.org (modified)