

Bogus Beliefs

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Excerpts, Part 1

Pastor Paul Crouch calls it "God's economy of giving," and here is how it works:

People who donate to Crouch's Trinity Broadcasting Network will reap financial blessings from a grateful God. The more they give TBN, the more he will give them. Being broke or in debt is no excuse not to write a check. In fact, it's an ideal opportunity. For God is especially generous to those who give when they can least afford it.

"He'll give you thousands, hundreds of thousands," Crouch told his viewers during a telethon last November. "He'll give millions and billions of dollars."

Crouch has used a doctrine called the "prosperity gospel" to underwrite a worldwide broadcasting network and a life of luxury for himself and his family TBN collects more than \$120 million a year from viewers of its Christian programming < more than any other TV ministry The network's donors also help fund generous salaries for Crouch (\$403,700 a year) and his wife, Jan (\$361,000), and an array of perks, including a TBN-owned jet and 30 homes across the country, among them a pair of Newport Beach mansions and a ranch in Texas.

The prosperity gospel is rooted in the idea that God wants Christians to prosper and that believers have the right to ask him for financial gifts. TBN has woven this notion into its round-the-clock programming as well as the thousands of fund-raising letters it mails every day.

During one telethon, Crouch, 70, told viewers that if they did their part to advance the Kingdom of God -- such as by donating money to TBN -- they should not be shy about asking God for a reward.

"If my heart really, honestly desires a nice Cadillac . . . would there be something terribly wrong with me saying, 'Lord, it is the desire of my heart to have a nice car . . . and I'll use it for your glory?' " Crouch asked. "I think I could do that and in time, as I walked in obedience with God, I believe I'd have it."

TBN viewers are told that if they don't reap a windfall despite their donations, they must be doing something to "block God's blessing" – most likely, not giving enough.

Crouch has particularly stern words for those who are not giving at all: "If you have been healed or saved or blessed through TBN and have not contributed . . . you are robbing God and will lose your reward in heaven," he said during a 1997 telecast.

A central element of the prosperity gospel is that no one is too poor or too indebted to donate. Bishop Clarence McClendon, a preacher whose show "Take It By Force" appears on TBN, told viewers in March that God had asked him to deliver a message to those in financial difficulty:

They should "sow a seed" by using their credit cards to make donations. In return, the Lord would see to it that the balances would be paid off within 30 days.

"Get Jesus on that credit card!" McClendon said.....

[TBC: God's Word says: ³If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing...destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows² (1 Timothy 6:3-10).]