


# Between contentment and prosperity: A study of 1 Timothy 6:3–12 in light of the prosperity teaching in Nigeria



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The prosperity theology is the teaching that every person is purposed by God to be prosperous in all areas of life with emphasis on financial abundance. Since the early 1980s, the gospel of prosperity has been firmly established in Nigeria. This article examined this theology considering the demand on Christians for godliness with contentment in 1 Timothy 6:3–12. It employed the descriptive approach and the historical-critical exegesis. This study found that the prosperity preachers often support their claims with the Bible, but texts are usually cited without regard to their literary or historical contexts. It also discovered that 1 Timothy 6:3–12 does not teach that Christians should not be rich, but condemns inordinate desire for money because of the evils associated with it. The text supports benevolence from the wealthy towards the needy, but does not make giving mandatory. This article concluded that the prosperity gospel is at variance with the teaching on godliness with contentment. Instead, it encourages greed for money among Christians, particularly in view of the claim that poverty is proof of unrighteousness. The doctrine of giving in order to receive from God contradicts the principle of giving as found in 1 Timothy 6 and other relevant New Testament texts.

**Contribution:** The article is a contribution to Christian ethics with a special focus on Christian attitude to money. It postulates that the prosperity teaching that all must be rich, contradicts the demand on Christians for godliness with contentment.

**Keywords:** prosperity theology; Pentecostal churches; desire for money; godliness with contentment; 1 Timothy 6:3–12.

## Introduction

The prosperity theology is the teaching among a group of Pentecostal preachers worldwide that it is God's plan for every person 'to be prosperous in all areas of life [and] ... that poverty and sickness are' a result of sin (Williams 2017:5; cf. Asuquo 2020:36). In other words, 'all human debts and misfortunes have already been bought and paid for by Christ, [therefore] every Christian can live victoriously over sin, sickness, and poverty' (Krinsky 2007:3). Abundance in this form is the birth right of every Christian, and he or she 'should enjoy it here and now' unless he or she is not in tune with God (Ademiluka 2008:4), or has 'not enough faith' (Kitause & Achunike 2015:22). As so much research has been done on various aspects of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria, this article focuses specifically on financial prosperity, that is, the teaching that all Christians can and should be rich, particularly as ostensibly derived from the Bible. In view of this fact that this teaching is often given biblical support, this study seeks to contrast its claims with the position in 1 Timothy 6 where Paul<sup>1</sup> advocates godliness with contentment. According to him, the Christian should be satisfied even with mere food and clothing, for the love of money is the root of all evils, as it makes people to stray away from the faith. Thus, the aim of this article is to examine 1 Timothy 6:3–12 with a view to assessing in light of this the teaching that all must be financially prosperous. It employs the descriptive approach for the discussion of the prosperity teaching in Nigeria as well as the historical-critical exegesis for the study of the text and other relevant ones alluded to. The work begins with the analysis of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria and its claims. Subsequently, it engages the exegesis of 1 Timothy 6:3–12, and finally this article examines the claims of the prosperity preaching regarding Christian attitude to money in light of the text.

1. The Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Tm and Tt) are internally acclaimed to have been authored by Apostle Paul (1 Tm 1:1; 2 Tm 1:1; Tt 1:1). There had been no evidence since 'the early church to the contrary [until] the early 19th century' when scholars began to deny that Paul wrote them (Guthrie 1994:1292). It is claimed that their literary 'style is noticeably different from' those of Paul's other letters (Keener 1993:605), for which reason today many 'scholars maintain that the [letters] are pseudepigraphical' (Towner 1994:15). At the same time, many have observed that 'the many personal allusions in 2 Timothy provide a strong argument against' the thesis of pseudepigraphy (Keener 1993:606). Therefore, and because the focus of this article does not include the authorship of 1 Timothy, it safely assumes Paul as the writer.

## The prosperity preaching in Nigeria

Many have traced the historical roots of prosperity gospel to the North American Christian movements, particularly those of the 20th century (Hunt 2000:331). It is said to have originated from the 20th century three-wave changes which 'occurred in American Christianity' (Kitause 2015:42), namely Pentecostalism with the evidence of tongues speaking pioneered by Charles Fox Parham (1873–1929) and championed by William Joseph Seymour (1870–1922), the faith prosperity movement of Essek William Kenyon (1867–1948), and the signs and wonders movement organised by Peter Wagner and John Wimber (Kitause 2015:42). It arose in the 1950s–1970s with the preaching of figures such as 'Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland', among many others (Krinsky 2007:3). Hagin is reported to have been heavily influenced by the teachings of Kenyon, hence many believe he was the father of the modern prosperity gospel (Kitause 2015:43).

America was not only the converging point for the prosperity gospel at that time, but American preachers of prosperity were also 'mentors to those in other parts of the world' (Okwori 1995:17). It was in this context that the teaching arrived in Nigeria in the mid-1980s (Kitause 2015:50). Many believe that the pioneer of prosperity preaching in Nigeria was Benson Andrew Idahosa 'who later became Pentecostal Archbishop, with the Headquarters of his Church of God Mission International (CGMI) in Benin City' (Kitause 2015:44–46). Idahosa 'received early support and training from prosperity institutes' in America (Krinsky 2007:3) through which contact he became influenced by prosperity preachers like T.L. Osborn, Oral Roberts, Jim Baker and many others (Kitause 2015:48). Among these, Oral Roberts' influence on Idahosa and the prosperity ministry in Nigeria is the most remarkable (Adeleye 2011:81; Okosun 2018:85). Idahosa himself wielded international influence in the prosperity circle. From the beginning of 1978, he sponsored a scholarship scheme which granted many students, including non-Nigerians, the opportunity 'for a nine-month Bible and theological training' in his Bible Institute in Benin (Kitause 2015:51). Idahosa was ordained Bishop in 1981 and Archbishop in 1985 and, subsequently, 'consecrated some of his disciples' in Nigeria and abroad as bishops (Kitause 2015:51).

Thus, the popular view is that the prosperity gospel came to Nigeria from America. Although the debate on its source is not within the scope of this article, it is noteworthy that some scholars have raised the argument that, rather than being an American influence, 'prosperity preaching originated here in Africa' (Kitause 2015:51).

According to Gifford (1990:382), for instance, 'Prosperity as a religious idea, was not introduced into Africa' by American preachers, nor is it 'a foreign element in African Christianity'. For this school of thought, prosperity preaching arose in Nigeria in the mid-1980s as a response 'to the impact of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) [and] the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP)' (Kitause 2015:51). Adamo (2021:8) attempts to demonstrate the African background of

the prosperity gospel in Nigeria from the premise of the 'the historical connection of the African Diaspora with the African continent'. The idea of prosperity was part of African culture which African slaves had taken with them to America. Hence, prosperity was only brought back to Africa through African American preachers such as William Joseph Seymour.

The most outstanding of Idahosa's immediate disciples is David Olaniyi Oyedepo, being the first to be ordained by Idahosa as bishop (Kitause 2015:56). Many have acclaimed the teaching of Idahosa to be the foundation for Oyedepo whose Living Faith Church (a.k.a. Winners' Chapel) was founded in 1983 with the Headquarters first in Kaduna and later in Ota, Ogun State in 1989 (Krinsky 2007:10). Krinsky (2007:10) opines that there is no single person that 'better epitomizes the present popularity of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria' than Oyedepo, whose church lays claim to one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria. Other prominent disciples of Idahosa in the prosperity gospel in Nigeria are:

Fred Ado of the International Praise Church, Kaduna; Sam Amaga who founded Foundation Faith Church, Port Harcourt; Hayford Anayo Iloputaife the slain founder of Faith Revival Ministries World Outreach, Lagos; Gabriel Oduyemi of Bethel Ministries, Lagos; Ayodele Joseph Oritsejafor who pastors Word of Life Mission, Warri; Michael Chukwuweike Okonkwo popularly known as Mike Okonkwo of The Redeemed Evangelical Mission, Lagos; Simeon Okah of Flock of Christ Mission, Lagos; Tunde Jordan of Christ Chapel International, Lagos and others. (Kitause 2015:55)

With the ministries of these figures and many others, the gospel of prosperity has been firmly established in Nigeria, 'steadily thriving by the day ... with Nigerian urban cities replete with prosperity churches' (Kitause 2015:52).

In the section below, this article examines the prosperity preachers' teaching on attitude to money as purportedly derived from the Bible.

## Nigerian prosperity preachers' teaching on Christian attitude to money

Nigerian prosperity preachers hold that, according to the Bible, it is God's plan for everyone to prosper abundantly. In the teaching of Bishop Simeon Okah of the Flock of Christ Mission, it is for this purpose that God created man in his own image, which implies that man is destined for greatness, as God is great (Okah 2006:39). This point is manifest in the fact that God gave man dominion over everything he created (Gn 1:28). Man is therefore ruler, purposed to be fruitful and successful in every area of endeavour (Okah 2006:39). As expressed by David Oyedepo, to prosper means to be in a state of abundance, a state of 'mighty finances' (Oyedepo 2005:149). For Oyedepo, Christians should not just to get by but live comfortably, 'amassing fortunes on the basis of minimal work' (Krinsky 2007:11). According to these preachers, the fact that it is God's plan for all Christians to be

rich is demonstrated in the richness of God's son, Jesus. Pastor Chris Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy derives the idea of Jesus' wealth from 2 Corinthians 8:9 where the author says Jesus became poor so that his followers can be rich. In Oyakhilome's interpretation, being rich here does not refer to spiritual but physical wealth (Oyakhilome & Oyakhilome 2007:18). As Oyedepo (2005:3) puts it, Christians are saved to display Jesus' wealth and, in fact, any believer who does not demonstrate prosperity is 'a misfit in the Kingdom'. Another text that is often applied to imply prosperity for all is 3 John 1:2 where the writer wishes that the recipient 'may prosper in all things' (New King James Version [NKJV]). Oyedepo (2010:9) interprets this text to mean financial abundance, that is, 'possession of a great amount of property, money, riches', et cetera.

In their application of 2 Corinthians 8:9 to prosperity, however, these preachers fail to consider the context of the passage. Paul appeals to the Corinthian church 'to give out of their abundance' (Williams 2017:9) to the church in Jerusalem, as it was in distress (2 Cor 8:1–15). 2 Corinthians 8:9 is an illustration that Jesus gave all that he had to the believers who were spiritually poor so that they could become rich, which refers to the 'love and kindness' (New Living Translation [NLT]) that Jesus demonstrated by his sacrificial death. It is from this perspective that Paul urges the Corinthian Christians to follow 'Christ's example of using their prosperity to enrich the poor' (Keener 1993:506). Moreover, the gospels make it clear that, rather than being rich, Jesus hardly had a place to lay his head (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58). Hence, Taylor (1966:429) states that Jesus appears to have lived a life of poverty in view of the fact that his disciples were often hungry, and sometimes some women had to provide for their needs (Mk 2:23; 8:14; Lk 8:3). The Greek word rendered by many translations in 3 John 1:2 as 'to prosper' is εὐδοῦσθαι which, according to Rev Bible (n.d.), is itself from the root εὐδῶ – a compound word from the noun *hodos* (road) and the prefix *eu* (good)' (cf. UK Apologetics n.d.). Therefore, although usually translated as "to prosper", εὐδοῦσθαι 'literally means to have a good road, that is, have an easy, successful path ahead of you' (Rev Bible). It may connote financial prosperity as in 1 Corinthians 16:2 but the fact that it is used in Romans 1:10 'in the context of things working out well' indicates that the term has a far broader meaning (Rev Bible n.d.). Many commentators hold that the context in 3 John 1:2 indicates that the Greek word implies good wishes in terms of bodily health. For instance, Keener (1993:751) opines that 3 John 1:2 represents a standard greeting in many ancient letters which usually began with 'a prayer for the reader's health ... [It thus] represents an actual prayer that all is well with Gaius'. That the author most likely has Gaius' health in mind is shown in 3 John 1:3 which suggests that he (Gaius) was possibly in bad health.

Therefore, 3 John 1:2 does not speak about money, but simply that 'John hopes things are going well for Gaius in every category of his life', particularly his health (Rev Bible n.d.). In modern terms, εὐδοῦσθαι does not need to mean more than 'I trust that this letter finds you well' (UK Apologetics n.d.);

or 'I hope you are well' (Keener1993:751). Several modern versions seem to realise this fact so that, instead of the 'you may prosper' of the KJV, they render the Greek word as 'may go well with you' (e.g. the Revised Standard Version [RSV]; Today's English Version [TEV]).

Prosperity preachers teach that the biblical promises of wealth apply specifically to the present generation of believers. As Oyedepo (2005:149) puts it, this end-time church is 'programmed to prosper exceedingly'. This thesis, according to him, is based on Haggai 2:6–8 and Zechariah 1:17 (cf. Rotimi, Nwadiolor & Alex Ugwuja 2016:15). In the former text, the Lord promises to glorify the temple of the Restoration Community with the treasures of all nations, while in the latter he declares that the cities of Judah will once again overflow with prosperity. The bishop asserts that the present church is the generation to preach the gospel to all nations; hence, these prophecies apply to the present generation. This view, then, forms the basis for the teaching that the time has come for all believers to be exceedingly rich. Apparently, the claim derives from the words silver, gold and prosperity, which are found in these passages. In the Haggai text, God will bless the new temple with treasures (silver and gold) so much that its glory will surpass that of the former temple. In Zechariah 1:17, God will also bless Jerusalem and its inhabitants, restoring to it prosperity<sup>2</sup> as of the former times. It is popularly held that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah preached to the same audience under the same historical circumstances in the latter part of the 6th century BCE after the Babylonian exile. Upon the issuance of the decree in 539 BCE by the Persian King, Cyrus, authorising exiles to return to their various homelands, about 50 000 Jews returned from Babylon to Jerusalem (Longman & Dillard 2006:478). In their attempt to rebuild the temple, the returnees faced opposition from neighbouring peoples and the Persian officials appointed in the area (cf. Ezr 4:1–5; 5:3–5). Apart from this, they seem to devote more energy to their own personal needs than to the rebuilding of the temple (Hg 1:3–11). It was in this context around 520 BCE that Haggai and Zechariah gave the prophecies in order to urge the people to continue the temple work (Longman & Dillard 2006:486; Moore & Kelle 2011:414–418; cf. Ezr 6:13–15). Therefore, it is evident that the prophecies in question are not meant for all times as Oyedepo claims. While the Bible generally may be applied to all times, it does not follow that every prophecy in it applies to every people in every generation.

Prosperity preachers set certain criteria for achieving financial abundance – all of which subsume under the precept of righteousness. For them, the righteous does not suffer want, because poverty is proof of unrighteousness while prosperity is proof of God's favour for the righteous. The case of Abraham, who was ready to sacrifice his son to God, is an example that, when one takes delight in obeying the word of God, one is led to 'mighty finances' (Oyedepo 2005:149). However, righteousness is exhibited not only in

2. It is important to note that the Hebrew word *prosperity* rendered by most English Bible versions is טוב of which the basic meaning is 'good' or 'good things' (Bowling 1980:346).

obeying the word of God, but particularly in various forms of giving. God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others, especially the poor. Giving to the poor actually means lending to God. Until our hands are open to the needy 'God's window stays shut over us' (Oyedepo 2005:126). In this way, as Williams (2017:7) rightly observes, prosperity teachers posit that 'one gives in order to receive [*thereby interpreting*] the principle of giving as the means by which people can receive more wealth'. If people give much to the church or to the pastor, they are paid back in multiples. Giving in order to receive back is what teachers of prosperity term as 'sowing the seed of faith' (Williams 2017:7). Bishop Oyedepo considers contributions to the church as 'righteous investments' (Oyedepo 2005:360), that is, when Christians 'invest in Christianity, [*they are*] ... investing in spiritual resource materials' (Krinsky 2007:11). Hence, he states that, in order for Christians to get rich abundantly, they must 'sow their seed in the form of ... financial contributions to [*the*] church' (Oyedepo 2005, cited in Krinsky 2007:11). It is only then that they become eligible for supernatural blessings: 'reaping a hundredfold' of what is given out (Krinsky 2007:11). In another place Oyedepo (2010:84) asserts that giving is the 'key to receiving Heaven's increments. Without it, God has no access to you, because his law states that 'there can be no harvest without first planting a seed'. Similarly, the general overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Adeboye (2001), teaches that 'giving is a key that opens the door of abundance. When one begins to give extraordinarily, one will begin to receive extraordinarily' (cited in Kitause 2015:97).

The text popularly quoted in support of the doctrine of 'sowing the seed of faith' is Luke 6:38 (Kitause 2015:136): 'Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back' (RSV). As in some Old Testament texts (e.g. Dt 15:10; Pr 19:17; 22:9), Jesus here speaks of God's 'blessings towards the generous' (Keener 1993:206); the person who gives freely 'will receive an ample return' (Marshall 1994:991). Teachers of prosperity would also support Luke 6:38 with 2 Corinthians 9:6 which says, 'He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully' (NKJV). However, Jesus has earlier said in Luke 6:35 that people should lend to others and expect nothing in return, which runs contrary to the perception of giving as sowing seeds for receiving. Giving in order to receive back is also not supported by the caveat in 2 Corinthians 9:7 that each person should do as he or she finds in his or her heart to do and 'not reluctantly or under compulsion' (RSV). The rule of free-will giving seems to be clearer in 2 Corinthians 8:2-3, namely that giving 'should be voluntary and according to individual ability' (Ademiluka 2020:299). The principle of giving in order to receive apparently places the giver under compulsion because he or she is made to believe that anyone who does not give, does not receive. Therefore, in using Luke 6:38 in connection with giving, 'other Christian principles must also be taken into consideration' (Marshall 1994:991).

In the prosperity teaching in Nigeria, among all the various forms of giving tithing is viewed as the most important. Tithing is obligatory in many denominations in Nigeria, particularly among the neo-Pentecostal churches – the doctrine which is usually supported by Malachi 3:8-12 (Ademiluka 2020:287). For instance, in the Assemblies of God it is taught that tithe payment 'demonstrates members' faithfulness to God' (Ehioghae 2012:12). Pastor Enoch Adeboye of RCCG teaches that tithe defaulters will not go to heaven because, based on the Malachi passage, they are robbers, and thieves will not make heaven (Kitause & Achunike 2013:13). Oyedepo of Winners' Chapel also holds that non-payment of tithes amounts to robbing God, and defaulting brings 'with it an almost irredeemable financial curse' (Oyedepo 1997:187). However, in this church the emphasis seems to be more on tithes being a means of receiving back from God. According to Oyedepo (1997:189), 'prosperity is impossible without tithe', as tithing is 'the master key to enjoying financial miracles' (Oyedepo 2008, cited in Ehioghae 2012:12). That is why payment of tithes is an obligation for all members of Winners' Chapel, including children and the unemployed. Nonetheless, as Ademiluka (2020:285-305) found out, the Malachi text on tithing need not apply to all peoples across generations. In Malachi 3:8-12, the Israelites are defaulting in payment of tithes and offerings, which the prophet terms as robbing God. For their crops to yield plentifully, they should pay their tithes and offerings (Ademiluka 2020:294). It is important to note, however, that the New Testament does not impress tithing on Christians. Although a few of Jesus' sayings indicate the practice of tithing (e.g. Lk 18:9-14), there is 'no evidence of Jesus' direct teaching on the subject' (Ademiluka 2020:297). It is also significant that tithing 'is conspicuously absent in all the NT texts regarding giving' (Moretsi 2009, cited in Ademiluka 2020:299; cf. Rm 15:25-28; 1 Cor 9:6-18; 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8-9; Eph 4:28). Giving itself is also not compulsory, but 'voluntary and according to individual ability' (Blomberg 1994, cited in Ademiluka 2020:299). Therefore, the teaching that tithing is a means to financial miracles is not biblical.

Thus, the prosperity preachers teach that every Christian is proposed by God to be exceedingly rich. Being prosperous is proof of righteousness, the attribute which is exhibited through giving to others and the church. Giving in this way is a means to financial abundance; hence, people lack, because they fail to give. In the section below, this article examines Paul's teaching on contentment in 1 Timothy 6 with a view to appraising in light of it the thesis that all must be rich.

## The intent of 1 Timothy 6:3-12: An exegesis

Following Constable (2021:6-7), four major broad themes are discernible in 1 Timothy (i.e. excluding the salutation in 1:1-2 and the conclusion and benediction in 6:20-21). These are Timothy's mission in Ephesus (1 Tm 1:3-20), instructions on the life of the local church (2:1-4:5), and on leadership of the church (4:6-5:25).

1 Timothy 6:3–12 falls within the fourth major theme, that is, instructions for groups within the church (vv. 1–19), which are slaves (vv. 1–2), false teachers (vv. 3–10), those committed to Christ (vv. 11–16), and the wealthy (vv. 17–19). 1 Timothy 6:3–5 is significant for this exegesis only in that the activities of the false teachers stated by the author link up with the subject of godliness with contentment in verses 6–8. In a way, 1 Timothy 6:6–12 ‘can be said to be Paul’s response to the problem of [these] false teachers’ in the church at Ephesus (Dlamini 2018:22). In these three verses (1 Tm 6:3–5), Paul indicates the existence of certain teachers whose doctrines were opposed to the teachings of Jesus and contrary to the tenets of godliness. The false teachers are ‘conceited, lack understanding, [and] have an unhealthy interest in controversies’ (Guthrie 1994:1303). Elsewhere in the book, there is the hint that this group of people were ‘undermining the work of Paul and his companions in Ephesus’ (Keener 1993:606). Apparently, basing their claims on the Torah (1 Tm 1:7), these teachers promoted ‘a syncretistic blend of Jewish and Gnostic elements’ (Stott 2010:16), being opposed to marriage (4:3), commanding abstinence from certain foods (4:3), and denying resurrection (2 Tm 2:18). 1 Timothy 6:20 implies that they were also ‘boasting of a higher knowledge<sup>3</sup> (*gnosis*) [which others] did not possess’ (Dlamini 2018:22). It is not clear how these teachers desired to make gain from godliness (1 Tm 6:5), but it is plausibly suggested that these ‘heretics were using the gospel to get rich’ (Keener 1993:606); or that ‘they desired to be rich through their teachings’ (Dlamini 2018:22). The activities of these teachers may therefore be similar to those of Paul’s ‘adversaries in Corinth who’ disguised as apostles, apparently demanding money from members of the church (Gotsis & Dodd 2002:20; cf. Constable 2021:122; 2 Cor 11:13; 12:16–17).

In contrast to people aspiring to be rich through the gospel, Paul admonishes in 1 Timothy 6:6 that there is greater gain in godliness (*ευσεβεια*) with contentment (*αυταρχεια*), that is, a combination of these virtues is of higher value than riches. Wuest (2000) states that *ευσεβεια* ‘literally means to worship rightly; to have appropriate beliefs and devout practice as it relates to God’ (cited in Dlamini 2018:26). This definition perfectly accords with the usage of the Greek word in other places in the pastorals (e.g. 1 Tm 2:2; 4:7; 2 Tm 3:12; Tt 2:12) which indicate that *ευσεβεια* can be said to be a precept ‘corresponding to piety’ (Bourman 2016:14). The manner of life ruled by it can be called ‘sound’ as against ‘the “sick” teaching’ of the false teachers (Bourman 2016:15). Louw and Nida (1996:298) define *αυταρχεια* simply as ‘the state of being content with one’s circumstances or lot in life’. According to Wuest (2000):

[It refers to] an inward self-sufficiency; [it is] ... a Stoic word expressing the philosophy that a person should be self-sufficient for all things, and able, by the power of his own will, to resist the force of circumstances. (cited in Dlamini 2018:26)

Paul uses this term in 2 Corinthians 9:8 in soliciting for funds for the Jerusalem church, in which context *αυταρχεια* apparently:

3. Oosterzee (2004:13) suggests that this ‘knowledge’ is a reference to the influence of Gnosticism in the early church.

[M]eans *material sufficiency*, but the word can also mean the quiescent inner aloofness of the Stoics and Cynics, a kind of self-sufficient philosophical detachment and resignation to the status quo. (Gotsis & Dodd 2002:20)

As exemplified in himself ‘in abundance and want’ (Constable 2021:122; cf. Phlp 4:11–12), Paul’s idea of *αυταρχεια* ‘carries Stoic overtones of detachment from the vagaries of his circumstances and fortunes’ (Gotsis & Dodd 2002:20). Paul, however, acknowledges that self-sufficiency derives from God rather than his own efforts (Phlp 4:13), the view which stands in resonance with the idea in 2 Corinthians 9:8 that through his grace God enables the believers to achieve both material and spiritual sufficiency. Hence, as observed by Gotsis and Dodd (2002:20), *αυταρχεια* involves the precept of benevolence, that is, ‘the ordinance of using material goods to the advantage of others’. In other words, God supplies the believers’ needs in order that they might give to others.

Paul’s idea of self-sufficiency can be understood in the Graeco-Roman context of his day. Keener (1993:620) opines that the philosophers laid emphasis on contentment, teaching that ‘people should be self-sufficient, recognising that they need nothing other than what Nature has given them’. According to Malina (2001):

Economic achievement was indeed frowned upon, and the notion of a loosely affiliated group of individuals each pursuing utility-maximisation through rational economic activity is inappropriate ... Family honour was enacted through, among other things, living self-sufficiently in a manner according to one’s [*status*]. (cited in Gotsis & Dodd 2002:21)

The Pauline groups functioned similarly, adopting ‘the form of fictive kin groups’, and thereby making the principles of shame and honour significant to them. This might explain the frequent injunction to the groups to maintain honour in relation to outsiders (Malina 2001 cited in Gotsis & Dodd 2002:21; cf. 1 Th 4:12; 1 Cor 6:6; Rm 12:17–18, etc.). Nonetheless, in 1 Timothy 6:6, Paul adds a new dimension to the philosophical connotation in that *αυταρχεια* is ‘a constituent part of *ευσεβεια*’ (Kittel, Bromiley & Friedrich 1964:467). The implication of the combination is that it is *ευσεβεια* that ‘provides the contentment that each individual must appropriate’ (Kittel et al. 1964:467). This proposition corresponds with Paul’s statement in Philippians 4:11–13 that Christ strengthens him to be content in either want or abundance.

In the statement that we brought nothing into the world and would not take anything out of it (1 Tm 6:7), Paul indicates that ‘material things are transitory’ (Constable 2021:122), for which reason there is no need getting passionately attached to them. What believers ought to seek is only food and clothing, that is, their essential needs (1 Tm 6:8). In 1 Timothy 6:7, Paul makes reference to ‘a moral common-place’ (Keener 1993:620) reminiscent of the saying in Job 1:21: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return’ (RSV; cf. Ec 5:15). It may be correct to interpret Paul here as saying that, from the perspective of death, ‘the whole process of seeking riches looks foolish’ (Guthrie 1994:1303). ‘Food and

clothing' in 1 Timothy 6:8 echo Jesus' teaching against worrying (Mt 6:25–34), which is 'the antithesis of contentment' (Guthrie 1994:1303). Keener (1993:620) notes that Paul may also have been influenced by ancient literature in which food and clothing are recognised as the basic needs of life. For instance, Cynics and most peasants would make do with 'only one cloak each'.

In 1 Timothy 6:9 and 10, Paul contrasts godliness with contentment with the desire for riches. Various English versions translate the Greek βουλομαι (1 Tm 6:9) variously, but the most probable corresponding verb in English is 'desire' (as in NKJV, RSV, English Standard Version [ESV]). According to Austin (2020), βουλομαι means 'to will, to wish, to will deliberately, to intend'. *Boulomai* expresses the idea of the deliberate and specific exercise of volition'. Given this connotation then, it will be right to say that the word refers to the dedicated, 'whole-hearted pursuit of wealth' (Gotsis & Dodd 2002:28), the 'quest for riches' that is carried on with greed (Guthrie 1994:1303). The pursuit of wealth with this mind-set of 'greed for more ... opens the door to temptation' (Constable 2021:124), 'a trap and many harmful desires' (Guthrie 1994:1303), which lead the pursuer to eternal damnation. That 1 Timothy 6:9 is a reference to inordinate desire for riches, helps to clarify the idea of the love of money being a root of evils in verse 10. In other words, from 1 Timothy 6:9, it is clear that there exists 'a distinction between money itself and the love of it' (Guthrie 1994:1303). Hiebert (1983:114) interprets the love of money in this text to connote 'the miserly accumulation and hoarding of money for the very love of it'. In that case, Constable (2021:124) may be right when he states that it is the love of money or, better still, greed for money and not money itself which ensnares. 'As a commodity there is nothing wrong with [money], but when it becomes the object of overriding desire it leads to evil' (Guthrie 1994:1303). Paul says that concentration on riches in this way is 'a dangerous occupation [as] it brings about distraction from spiritual life' (Gotsis & Dodd 2002:27) and causes sorrows for the persons involved in it. Commenting on the latter effect, Barclay (1962:152) opines that the love of money often leads to getting money through illicit means, which may lead 'in the end into pain and regret'. In Kelly's interpretation (1978:136) of 1 Timothy 6:9–10, those who are greedy for money often get their sense blurred as a result of their passion and they become 'prey to a mass of irrational pernicious desires of the kind which submerge men in ruins and destruction'. Paul's warning against the dangers of greed for money is reminiscent of Jesus' teaching on attitude to wealth in Luke 12. Addressing the multitude when a man implored Jesus to intervene in a dispute between him and his brother over inheritance, Jesus said, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consists not in the abundance of his possessions' (Lk 12:15 – RSV). Godet (1976:98) says that Jesus' warning here is that one should beware of avarice. In contrast to the greedy preachers, Timothy is admonished to seek godliness (1 Tm 6:11–12). In urging Timothy to 'fight the good fight of faith' (1 Tm 6:12 – NKJV), Paul apparently draws on the image of 'the wrestling match or athletic contest' as customary of Graeco-Roman moralists (Keener 1993:620).

In 1 Timothy 6:17–19, however, it is important to note that in the warning against the love of money, 'Paul addresses those seeking to accumulate wealth rather than those who had already become wealthy' through honest means (Keener 1993:620). In these verses, Paul recognises the presence of wealthy people in the church at Ephesus. Gotsis and Dodd (2002:124) affirm that, with time, some 'wealthy and upper class' individuals became members of the Early Church. Timothy is to teach this group neither to be arrogant because of their wealth, nor trust in riches instead of God. It is God who gives wealth; hence, the rich should do good and be benevolent to others. For Paul, then, it is not sinful to possess wealth; what is important is 'whether one used it for oneself or for others' (Keener 1993:621). As expressed by Gotsis and Dodd (2002:124), 'Maintaining personal wealth modestly [is] acceptable, so long as one [takes] care of the needy'.

Then, in terms of Christian attitude to money, 1 Timothy 6:3–12 does not teach that Christians should not be rich. What it condemns is the excessive desire (i.e. greed) for money because of the evils associated with it, particularly its capability to lead one away from the faith. In the section below, the article assesses the prosperity teaching in Nigeria in light of this conclusion.

## Appraising the prosperity teaching in light of 1 Timothy 6:3–12

In the first place, the prosperity teaching in Nigeria can be said to ignore the precept of contentment in view of the teaching that all can and should be rich. This teaching has the tendency of inculcating greed for money in Christians, especially as they are also taught that abundance is proof of righteousness while poverty is evidence of not being in tune with God. It is noteworthy that the prosperity preachers hardly dwell on the virtue of contentment and the dangers associated with the pursuit of wealth. Their teaching on giving, particularly, contradicts the principle of giving as found in 1 Timothy 6 and other relevant New Testament texts. As demonstrated in the exegesis, wealthy Christians are enjoined to give to others in recognition of the fact that their wealth derives from God. In line with the teaching in 2 Corinthians 8:2–3 and 9:7, 1 Timothy 6 does not make giving compulsory for Christians, which means it could be done according to individuals' will and ability. Perhaps, this is the area in which Nigerian prosperity preachers most conspicuously contradict the biblical standard. As earlier mentioned, some of them, for example Oyedepo of Winners' Chapel, do not only make giving and payment of tithes compulsory, but that giving should be done in order to receive back from God. It is only when people sow the seed of faith in terms of giving and tithe payment that they are eligible to receive God's blessings. Hence, they teach that many people are poor, because they are not giving to God. However, as already stated in this work, the idea of giving in order to receive back is not a biblical teaching. As Basse, Charles and Ojua (2014:566) put it the prosperity doctrine of 'give and take completely eliminates the selfless, sacrificial

aspect of giving' as taught in the New Testament (cf. Williams 2017:8).

Overall, the exegesis of 1 Timothy 6:3–12 has therefore demonstrated that the prosperity preaching on Christian attitude to money in Nigeria stands against the teaching of the New Testament. One major reason for this error is the inadequacy of the hermeneutical approach of the teachers (Okwori 1995:63), which is clear from the exegeses of the texts employed by them. Rather than 'carrying out an in-depth study' of biblical texts (Kitause 2015:60), they quote passages 'without giving any attention to proper hermeneutics [ignoring] grammar, semantics, genre [and] historical context' (Lioy 2007, cited in Kitause 2015:60; cf. Adeleye 2011:52; Young 1996:5). As expressed by Fee (1976:120), prosperity teachers' biblical interpretation has 'a general disregard for scientific exegesis and carefully thought-out hermeneutics'. Some scholars actually believe that these preachers' approach is 'a calculated attempt ... at distorting biblical truth' (Kitause 2015:129).

## Conclusion

According to the prosperity preachers, being prosperous is proof of righteousness – the attribute which is exhibited through giving to others and the church. Giving is a means to financial abundance; hence, people lack because of their failure to give. These claims are often supported with Bible references which mention prosperity or other words suggestive of wealth. Studied in the perspective of 1 Timothy 6:17–19, verses 3–12 does not teach that Christians should not be rich, but it condemns inordinate desire for money because of the evils associated with it. It also supports benevolence from the wealthy towards the needy. However, in resonance with other relevant New Testament texts, it does not make giving mandatory for Christians, meaning it is voluntary and according to people's ability. When the prosperity gospel, as taught in Nigeria, is appraised in light of 1 Timothy 6:3–12, it is clear that the former ignores the precept of contentment. Rather, the teaching that all can and should be rich is capable of inculcating greed for money in Christians, particularly with the claim that poverty is proof of unrighteousness. The doctrine that one should give in order to receive back from God contradicts the principle of giving as found in 1 Timothy 6 and other relevant New Testament texts. Overall, the prosperity teaching on Christian attitude to money in Nigeria is at variance with the teaching on godliness with contentment in 1 Timothy 6. The major reason behind the false teaching that all must be rich is the inadequacy of the preachers' approach to biblical interpretation which quotes Bible references without regard to their literary and historical contexts.

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I am the sole author of this research article.

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