

Debra J. Mumford, *Exploring Prosperity Preaching: Biblical Health, Wealth, and Wisdom*. Valley Forge, PA.: Judson Press, 2012. Pg 160 Paper: \$15.99

Needless to say, preachers that preach what is commonly called the “prosperity gospel” have had to answer a myriad of questions ranging from whether or not the preaching and teaching of prosperity is sound Christian doctrine, or do they do this to line their own pockets. In her book, *Exploring Prosperity: Preaching Biblical Health, Wealth, and Wisdom*, Homiletics professor and Baptist minister Debra Mumford addressed these and other issues that focus on the preaching of prosperity. Mumford offers a historic reflection of the prosperity gospel movement, which is critical for those interested in the origins and questioning the interpretations of the prosperity doctrines preached because many preachers offer prosperity gospel messages today.

Mumford’s work has two main strengths: the historic overview of prosperity preaching and describing the controversy of the doctrine. The first part of the book is devoted to the landscape of prosperity theology, and to her credit, Mumford carefully examined the message and the people credited for the formulation and formation of the prosperity movement. By the end of the book, a reader knows the parents of prosperity theology of past and present and some current preachers who are upholding the doctrine.

Parts of the book were interesting, including the themes that emerged from the confession and faith reflection. One such theme illustrated the teachings of prosperity preachers who claimed that sickness and disease has no place in the body of Christ (p. 87); another theme, supported by prosperity preachers, strongly suggested their followers believe they can do all things. Because the themes were compelling and this exploration area is important, I found myself frustrated with the limitations imposed by the deconstruction of the teachings. This may have been a fascinating study, but not written as such, and the author does not provide an integral biblical critique of the growing movement. Given the thoroughness of the origins of the movement and the preachers involved, the analysis sections titled “Sifting the Wheat from the Chaff” left many questions unanswered.

Unfortunately, while Mumford synthesized the literature well, she simply summarized many examinations with long paraphrases about theology and biblical interpretations. The author's central questions seemed lost in the details and in the recurrence of summarized theology. A reader may not always agree with the biblical exegetical approaches, but Mumford is consistent in her application of terms.

In the end, though exciting in intent, the book seems to accomplish a worthy objective. The historical review and background stand in contrast to the balance of the sections within the body, and the author's voice overshadows perceptibly in these sections, perhaps to address the different themes until the concluding chapter. This would be a helpful text for understanding the history and origins and somewhat less helpful as a model for research.

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