

# Contrasting Church Giving with Prosperity Theology

*A Study Contrasting Biblical Stewardship and the Prosperity Gospel*

**Reflections**   Covenant and Doctrine   2 February 2024

Matthew 19:21

Luke 12:20

Matthew 25:14-30 (referenced)

Church giving refers to the practice of Christians contributing their time, talents, financial resources, and wealth to support and sustain their local churches and other Christian organisations. It is based on the principle of stewardship, where believers recognise that everything they have — time, health, energies, talents, and money — belongs to God, and they are called upon to give back a portion of their resources to support the work of the Christian community and help others in need. This is in line with what Jesus said to the rich young man: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21). Neither the young man then, nor most Christians now, find it necessary to practise this saying of our Lord. Accumulating wealth for self and for the following generations seems to be the order of the day for members of all communities, including Christians. There is no ambiguity here, as another saying of Jesus makes clear: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20).

In contrast, prosperity theology, also known as the prosperity gospel, is a doctrinal belief within some Christian circles that emphasises material wealth and financial prosperity as signs of God's blessing. It teaches that if individuals have enough faith, and give generously, God will bless them with material abundance and success in every area of life. I see it as gambling with God: one puts in a hundred, and expects to gain five hundred. I call it heretical.

When we talk about 'giving', it is about giving all we possess — not just money and wealth, but our skills, our time, and our energies. Nothing truly belongs to us; it is entrusted to us, so that we may use it for the benefit of the needy. The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), spoken by Jesus, has been misinterpreted time and again. In the process, stewardship is reduced to the mere mobilising of money.

Christian giving, in itself, is highly desirable. But the motivation has to be right. Church giving should be driven by a sense of gratitude, generosity, and the desire to support the just causes of the church and help others in need. People give out of a sense of duty and obedience to God's commandments. Prosperity theology, in contrast, often promotes

giving primarily as a means to receive material blessings and financial abundance; the focus is on personal gain rather than selfless giving.

Funds mobilised through Christian giving are meant to support various ministries, social outreach programmes, missionary work, and the helping of the less fortunate. Prosperity theology tends to focus more on personal prosperity and individual success, with far less emphasis on the needs of the wider community.

Church giving does not guarantee or promise any specific material blessing or reward. It is better seen as an act of faith and obedience than as an investment for personal gain. Prosperity theology, however, often presents giving as a transactional relationship with God, in which individuals are encouraged to expect financial blessing and material abundance in return for what they have given.

Prosperity theology, although it may draw on certain Biblical texts, often relies on a selective interpretation that focuses on prosperity and success, while downplaying other essential teachings on suffering, sacrifice, and the importance of spiritual growth.