

TITLE:	Poverty or Prosperity... Which is Biblically Correct?
TEXT:	Matthew 6:24
THOT:	Stewardship Theology is a better theology.

INTRODUCTION

- A.** There has been some confusion in the Body of Christ regarding **poverty** and **prosperity**...which is more **spiritually correct**?

You can turn the TV on and hear some preachers/televangelists say, "Give **all** you have." Promoting a philosophy that says "only those without material possessions are spiritual.

The next hour on the same station another minister comes along and preaches with great conviction that God wants to prosper you financially...and those who have the most are the real spiritual people of faith. It's confusing.

The reason for the confusion is that each of these philosophies are preached with passion and **have scripture to back it up**.

- B.** Let me illustrate the confusion.

*I John 2:15 – Strong anti-materialism: **everything** in the Greek = everything*

*III John 2 – Definitely a prosperity scripture: all translations except the NIV use the word **prosper**.*

Two passages of scripture: same author yet two different perspectives, no wonder we are confused.

- C. *Matthew 6:24*...I want you to grasp the truth and the power of this verse.

Serve = to be a slave...

Master = absolute ownership of...

You cannot be both.

There are three words that describe this owner/salve relationship:

1. **Choice** – The choice of who you will serve.
Remember, it's not so much what money does for us, but to us.
2. **Control** -- Once we've chosen who we will serve, that owner will be in control of us.
 - Who is more in control of your life – God or money?
 - Easy test...how do you make decisions – Is it based God's will or enough money?
3. **Confidence** Whichever one we place our trust in, it will become our God.

Christ did not say that you **should not** serve.

Christ did not say that you **can not** serve.

Christ did not say that you **must not** serve.

He said it is **impossible**...**no one** can serve two masters.

The fact of the matter is, it's either God or money to whom we are enslaved.

- D. Now if it's difficult for you to really determine which one you serve, I've got a great little way for you to check. Take a look at your calendar and your **checkbook**. Daytimers and Visa statements are great indications of your God. For the things we put our time into and money into, they will control us. *Matthew 6:21*... "For where your treasure is (time is treasure too) That's where your heart is."

E. OK, OK, - So the question is.. what is it? A **poverty** theology (hate the things of the world: all materialism is bad) or a **prosperity** theology? (God wants you to be rich.)

Today I want to suggest that there is a stewardship theology that's more Biblically based and has better proven results.

F. Three Perspectives Contrasted

I want to examine the problems of a poverty and a prosperity theology and then look at the privileges of a stewardship theology.

I. THE PROBLEMS WITH A POVERTY THEOLOGY

A. Presumes that people who do well financially...are not spiritual.

◆ **NONSENSE** (If they really love God, they wouldn't be rich.)

◆ *Proverbs 22:2 "Rich and poor have this in common, the Lord is the maker of them all."*

1 Timothy 6 "The love of money is the root..."Not money.

◆ It's not what money does FOR the people that's the problem, it's what it does TO people.

I've known rich people who love Jesus and are very Godly, and I've known poor people who are far from God.

B. Exaggerates the role of sacrificial works.

◆ The problem I have with this philosophy is that it can lead to an arrogant self-righteous complex. "Look at me, I'm poor, Aren't I spiritual."

◆ Seems exaggerated, yet that thinking leads to focusing on the **amount**, not the **attitude**. And according to God, in giving, **attitude** is more important than **amount**. Attitude is **always** more important than amount. (Matthew 6:23-24)

C. Extremely naïve

◆ A lack of common sense – they justify the responsibilities of being a good steward by saying, "**Just give it all!**"

(Having a missions emphasis)

You know I believe in Missions. How much more could we do for the kingdom and ministry?

D. **Can be a manipulative lifestyle**

- ◆ When one rejects responsibility for good **stewardship**... when one sees **possessions** as a kind of curse...it becomes easy for this person **to depend** upon the sympathy of **others**.

- ◆ Friends, don't get me wrong. I'm not talking about **neglecting** the benevolent responsibility of the church...we can and should do much better with care for widows, helping the unfortunate...and being involved in more of a social obligation to the less privileged.

But I'm addressing those who live with a **poverty** kind of theology and strategically share their needs at opportune times to have their needs met.

- ◆ Remember, God **never** instructed the poor to live off the rich. He **instructed** the rich to take care of the poor.

- ◆ Poverty is not a sign of spirituality!

II. THE PROBLEMS WITH A PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

A. It's a sign of God's approval.

- ◆ Material blessings can and do come from God. But material blessings are not a **spiritual** badge of **honor** that says, "God really likes me." If this was the case, then why weren't **Luke** and **Matthew** (*a doctor and a tax collector, the wealthiest disciples*) a part of Jesus' inner circle?
- ◆ God honors and blesses the good management of what we have. But the amount of what we have has nothing to do with our spirituality.

(The Distraction of Money)

- ◆ The fact of the matter is friends, more times than not, money is the thing that removes us from being under the approval of God's blessing. **1 Timothy 6:9** (*People who want to get rich, fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction.*)

B. Produces guilt and divides the Body of Christ.

(Not Giving to Get More)

- ◆ My giving should never be used to try to get more! My **obedience** to the Lord in giving keeps me under His protection and provision.
- ◆ The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away...I can not use my giving as some magical wand for financial gain.

Scripture clearly teaches "***My God shall supply my needs according to His riches and glory...***"

C. **Creates wrong motives**

- ◆ We do not serve Christ and give to the Lord to become rich and get wealthy.

We give because we love Him. He first gave to us.

We love Him because He first loved us. We love Him because without Him, we are sinners destined to Hell...but it's by the grace of God (**His generosity in giving that we receive the gift of eternal life**).

- ◆ Bumper sticker – “**Prosperity, My Divine Right**”

This is false!

Everything we have has been given by the grace, mercy and the generosity of God. Our resources are not **rights**, they are **privileges**. *“To whom much is given, much is required...”*

III. THE PRINCIPLES OF A STEWARDSHIP THEOLOGY

If we embrace these principles and get them into our spirit...

A. Recognizes that God owns it all.

I Tim. 6:10...”and in their eagerness to get rich, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

David prayed in **I Chron. 29:10-14**. *“Praise be to you O Lord, God of our Father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for **everything in Heaven and Earth is yours**. Yours, O Lord, is the Kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. **Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things**. In your hand s are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks and praise your glorious name. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? **Everything comes from you and we have given you only what comes from your hand.**”*

- ◆ God is the owner not just of heaven and earth, but of **all** our possessions.
- ◆ This is foundational! I have found that as we develop proper **attitudes** and **scriptural principles** with regards to money...we can trust God with other circumstances of our life.
- ◆ The knowledge of this will **free** you from **selfish outgrowths** of a **possessive attitude** and **produce** within you a Godly perspective.

B. Recognizes that God is in control of all.

1 Chron. 25:14 ..." Everything comes from you."

- ◆ Scripture constantly reminds us that God rules in the affairs of man.
- ◆ When we embrace this, there will be a confidence that allows us to relax when facing the potential fears and concerns over financial matters.

C. God can provide all that we need.

Matthew 6:32-33..."Your heavenly Father knows what you are in need of. Therefore seek ye first..."

- ◆ God has **promised** to meet all our needs! And God's provisions include some things that money can't buy.

Norwegian writer **Arne Garborg** once said:

- ◆ **Money will buy...**
 - a bed, but not sleep;**
 - food, but not appetite;**
 - books, but not knowledge;**
 - medicine, but not health;**
 - finery, but not beauty;**
 - luxuries, but not culture;**
 - entertainment, but not happiness;**
 - a house, but not a home;**
 - fun, but not love;**
 - music, but not joy;**
 - physical comforts but not eternal security.**

CONCLUSION

- A. Stewardship does not begin when we become blessed, rather blessings follow stewardship.

Luke 16:11... "If you've not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, how can you be trusted with true riches?"

The question is not what you would do if you had a million dollars, but what you do with the dollar you've got?

- B. How faithful are you?
What are you doing with what you've got?
It's not poverty or prosperity, it's stewardship theology!