

Do America's Pastors Embrace the Prosperity Gospel?

There's a stark divide between pastors and congregants when it comes to the so-called "prosperity gospel," according to newly released research.

There are somewhat different understandings and assumptions about the prosperity gospel, but Lifeway Research defines it as a "theological movement that teaches God wants to make followers materially wealthy and will do so if individuals hold certain beliefs or perform specific actions."

As it turns out, fewer than 10% of preachers embrace such an ideology.

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"Fewer than one in 10 (8%) Protestant pastors believe individuals must do something for God in order to receive material blessings from Him," Lifeway Research noted. "Nine in 10 (90%) disagree, including 74% who disagree strongly. Few (2%) aren't sure."

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Meanwhile, just 18% of pastors said their churches teach that God will bless a giver if he or she gives more money to the church, with 79% disagreeing and 3% noting they're simply not sure.

There is a bit more disagreement over whether the Lord wants people to be financially prosperous, though, with 37% agreeing and the majority—59%—disagreeing.

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The research found that Protestant pastors with church attendance of 250 or more were among the “least likely” to reject the idea their church sees a tie between giving money and God’s blessings. These leaders were also more likely—52%—to see God as wanting people to prosper in their finances.

Interestingly, a 2022 Lifeway Research study found some disparities in how churchgoers view the issue. It found that 45% of Protestant churchgoers say they have to do something to “receive material blessings from God”—a percentage up starkly from the 26% found in 2017.

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