

Most Pentecostals Believe This About the Prosperity Gospel

For some Americans, dropping a check into the offering plate at church is a bit like having a Discover Card.

Both offer a cash-back bonus.

About a third of Protestant churchgoers say their congregation teaches that God will bless them if they donate money.

Two-thirds say God wants them to prosper. One in 4 says they have to do something for God to receive material blessings in return.

Those are among the key findings of a new study on so-called “prosperity gospel” beliefs from Nashville-based LifeWay Research. For the study, LifeWay Research surveyed 1,010 Americans who attend a Protestant or non-denominational church at least once a month.

Researchers found more than a few churchgoers believe giving to God leads to financial rewards, said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research.

“A significant group of churches seem to teach that donations trigger a financial response from God,” said McConnell.

A Controversial Topic

The belief that God gives financial rewards in exchange for offerings is a central part of the so-called prosperity gospel, which offers a “direct path to the good life,” as Duke professor Kate Bowler puts it.

That belief is both controversial and fairly commonplace.

LifeWay Research found 38 percent of Protestant churchgoers agree with the statement, “My church teaches that if I give more money to my church and charities, God will bless me in return.” Fifty-seven percent disagree, including 40 percent who strongly disagree. Five percent are not sure.

Pentecostal and Assemblies of God churchgoers (53 percent) are most likely to agree. Churchgoers with evangelical beliefs (41 percent) are more likely to agree than those without evangelical beliefs (35 percent).

African-American (51 percent) and Hispanic churchgoers (43 percent) are more likely to agree than white churchgoers (32 percent).

Even if they don’t see a direct link between offerings and blessings, many churchgoers say God wants them to do well.

Sixty-nine percent agree with the statement, “God wants me to prosper financially.” Twenty percent disagree. Ten percent are not sure.

The more people go to church, the more likely they are to think God wants them to do well. Among those who attend at least once a week, 71 percent say God wants them to prosper financially. That drops to 56 percent for those who go to church once or twice a month.

Churchgoers who have evangelical beliefs (75 percent) are more likely to agree God wants them to prosper than those without evangelical beliefs (63 percent). Pentecostal and Assemblies of God (80 percent), Baptist (74 percent), non-denominational (67 percent) and Methodist churchgoers (65 percent) are among the most likely to agree.

Lutherans, however, are more skeptical. Just under half (49 percent) say God wants them to prosper financially.

Blessings Linked to Action

Some churchgoers draw a direct tie from their actions to God's blessings.

One in 4 (26 percent) agrees with the statement: "To receive material blessings from God, I have to do something for God." Seventy percent disagree. Five percent are not sure.

Southerners (30 percent) are more likely to agree than those who live in the Midwest (20 percent) or West (19 percent). African-American (44 percent) and Hispanic (34 percent) churchgoers are more likely to agree than white churchgoers (17 percent) or those from other ethnic groups (16 percent).

Pentecostal/Assemblies of God churchgoers (34 percent), Methodists (29 percent) and Baptists (28 percent) are more likely to say they have to do something for God to get a material reward than other denominations. Lutherans (12 percent) are less likely.

A previous LifeWay Research study on American theological views found similar results. In that study, 1 in 4 Americans said they believe God will always reward true faith with material blessings. Americans who hold evangelical beliefs were most likely to agree with that statement.

McConnell said evangelicals appear to be the most eager to embrace a link between God's financial blessings and their actions.

"A number of high-profile evangelical leaders have condemned the prosperity gospel," he said. "But more than a few people in the pews have embraced it." {eo}

For more information on this study, visit or view the complete survey report PDF.

Bob Smietana is senior writer for Facts & Trends.