

# **Faith in Action: Diligence and Almsgiving for God's Glory, Spiritual Growth, and the Path to Salvation**

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## **Abstract**

This paper proposes a holistic Orthodox Christian approach to wealth management by uniting the theology of receiving with the theology of giving, presenting both as essential expressions of our life in Christ. In Orthodox teaching, receiving is not simply a matter of gain, but an act of stewardship—of recognizing that all things come from God and must be received with gratitude, humility, and accountability. Our labor, when done diligently and ethically, is a form of obedience that glorifies God. What we earn through such labor is not for self-exaltation but is entrusted to us for the care of our bodies, families, neighbors, and the Church.

Yet the act of receiving is incomplete without the grace of giving. At the heart of Christian life stands the commandment of almsgiving, upheld by Christ alongside prayer and fasting. Far from being an optional good, almsgiving is a measure of the heart, a visible expression of love for God and neighbor. It is in the face of the poor and the suffering that we encounter Christ Himself. Thus, giving becomes not only a response to need, but a path to healing the soul, breaking the chains of greed, pride, and self-love.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to reframe wealth management as a spiritual discipline. Through faithful stewardship, sacrificial giving, and a heart rooted in Christ, believers can transform material blessings into eternal treasures, drawing nearer to the Kingdom of God and transforming into God's likeness.

**Keywords:** Stewardship, Almsgiving, Diligence, Salvation, Spiritual Healing, Acts of Mercy, Love, Obedience, Wealth Management, Faith in Action, Treasures in Heaven, Eschatology.

## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to connect the theology of receiving with the theology of giving, with an attempt to propose a holistic Orthodox Christian approach to wealth management. Almsgiving is not just a favorable recommended action; it is a Divine commandment. Alongside prayer and fasting, almsgiving is one of the three essential spiritual disciplines declared by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1–18). It is a concrete manifestation of the great commandment—to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:39) – a love that becomes incarnate in our merciful works toward the poor, the suffering, and the weak. Christ reveals that our treatment of "the least of these" is nothing less than our treatment of Him (Matthew 25:40), making giving not an optional virtue but a measure by which our salvation will be judged.

The Theology of Receiving is equally sacred, a concept embedded in stewardship. We are not owners but stewards of God's creation, called to labor with diligence, love, and for His Glory. What we earn must be received as an entrusted gift, and the more we receive the more a good steward should give to the Church and the needy. True stewardship involves not only multiplying what has been given, but also caring for our bodies, families, neighbors, and all of creation as sacred trusts.

The primary motivation for writing this paper is to highlight wealth management as a vital expression of faith in action. Although Scripture addresses material possessions more frequently than topics such as love, prayer, and belief, the subject of financial stewardship is often underemphasized in pastoral teaching.<sup>1</sup> As a result, many faithful overlook its spiritual significance, mistakenly believing that money is unrelated—or even contrary—to the life of faith. In truth, however, faith and work are not separate realms; rather, our work reflects our faith, and our acts of mercy are indispensable to both our spiritual maturity and salvation. Therefore, the discussion of finances must be understood as soul-centric—not merely concerned with meeting the Church's earthly needs or aiding the poor, but essential to our purification and journey toward union with God.<sup>2</sup>

This paper will begin by examining stewardship, with an emphasis on the virtue of diligent labor and the danger of sloth. It will then explore the nature of earnings, affirming that just labor deserves just reward. Following this, the discussion will turn to the accumulation of wealth, arguing that while wealth itself is not sinful, it introduces spiritual vulnerability and requires careful, faithful management. Finally, the paper will return to almsgiving, emphasizing its indispensable role in spiritual growth and in our journey toward salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Geleris, *Money & Salvation: An Invitation to the Good Way* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2022), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Geleris, *Money & Salvation*, 13.

## Stewardship, Diligence, and Laziness

Humans are divinely appointed as stewards—not owners—of God’s creation (e.g., Psalms 113:23-24; 1 Chronicles 29:10-13).<sup>3</sup> Citing Genesis 1:28 and 2:15, it explains that stewardship was part of man’s original vocation, instituted before the Fall, and remains integral to his purpose. God placed man ““in the garden to tend and keep it” (Genesis 2:15), and established man’s dominion “over the fish of the sea, over the birds of heaven, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28).

That said, stewardship is rooted in responsibility and accountability: managing what belongs to another. This trust includes everything from nature to our bodies, families, neighbors, animals, and resources. As seen in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30), God entrusts each person with gifts "according to their ability" and expects their preservation and multiplication. Faithful stewards are rewarded for preserving and multiplying talents, while negligent ones face judgment, demonstrating that stewardship has eternal consequences. After the Fall, work became a means of purification and survival, associated with toil and hardship (Genesis 3:17–19).<sup>4</sup> Refusing to work is framed as disobedience and pride, a rejection of God's commandment and punishment.

Laziness, thus, is not only a vice, but also a source of other sins. Scripture consistently connects laziness with poverty, disgrace, and spiritual ignorance, while diligence is linked with wisdom, prosperity, and virtue (e.g., Proverbs 14:24; Proverbs 26:14–17). Sirach warns that God shows no partiality to the poor if their condition results from laziness rather than injustice (Sirach 35:13).<sup>5</sup> Poverty due to sloth leads to dependence on others, a form of slavery that contradicts the Christian call to freedom and self-reliance (Romans 13:8; Proverbs 22:7).

Church Fathers like Saint Basil warn against borrowing beyond one’s means, associating debt with vices such as falsehood and ingratitude<sup>6</sup>. He advises prudence, moderation, and contentment with one’s own resources (Proverbs 5:15). Neediness, when self-inflicted through idleness, breeds envy and temptation, sometimes leading to sin such as theft (Proverbs 6:16; Ephesians 4:28). The Orthodox Study Bible, drawing on St. John Cassian, identifies eight vices common in the slothful: gluttony, unchastity, avarice, anger, dejection, listlessness, self-esteem, and arrogance.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, laziness is not only a sin but a fertile ground for many others.

The apostolic tradition clearly upholds the necessity of work. Saint Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12, commands the faithful to withdraw from the idle and to follow the apostolic example of labor

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<sup>3</sup> Nicu Dumitrașcu, “Poverty and Wealth in the Orthodox Spirituality (with Special Reference to St. John Chrysostom),” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 49, no. 4 (2010): 300–305, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6385.2010.00556.x>, 300.

<sup>4</sup> The Orthodox Study Bible, 7.

<sup>5</sup> The Orthodox Study Bible, 958.

<sup>6</sup> Saint Basil the Great, Homily “Against those who lend at interest”, section 1. Translated in ST Basil The Great, *On Social Justice*, trans. C. Paul Schroeder (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 92.

<sup>7</sup> The Orthodox Study Bible, 862.

and self-sufficiency. He states explicitly: “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12). Christians must work quietly, mind their own business, and provide for their own needs to avoid becoming burdens or busybodies.

Work is to be done with zeal and integrity, imitating the industriousness of creatures like ants (Proverbs 6:7–12) and the selfless love of Christ. Saint Paul urges believers to be examples of good works (Titus 2:7) and to maintain diligence in both physical and spiritual matters (Titus 3:14; Ecclesiastes 9:10). Furthermore, labor must be ethical. It must reflect the worker’s faith in God through honesty, responsibility, and just action. Jesus’ words in Luke 16:10 emphasize that integrity in small earthly matters is linked to trustworthiness in greater, spiritual matters. Thus, the manner of work reflects one’s spiritual maturity.

Scripture also stresses the obligation to provide for one’s household. Failure to do so, Saint Paul warns, is equivalent to denying the faith and being worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8). Scripture and Church tradition uphold that caring for one’s family is both a responsibility and a manifestation of Christian love (Ephesians 5:28; 1 Peter 3:7; Genesis 33:5). This care extends beyond our bodies and families to all creation and humanity, based on the ability of each.

To conclude on stewardship, diligence, and laziness, diligent and ethical work is a fulfillment of God’s commandment and a means of accepting the hardships and suffering that come with providing for ourselves. These trials, when embraced with humility, become part of our purification.<sup>8</sup> Work, therefore, must be approached ethically, gratefully, and always directed toward the glory of God (Matthew 5:48; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 3:23-24; Corinthians 10:3). Laziness, by contrast, leads not only to poverty and loss of personal freedom but also opens the door to numerous sins, such as envy, dishonesty, and theft. Most importantly, laziness reflects disobedience to God’s commandments and contempt for the corrective purpose of His punishment. It fosters spiritual immaturity and gradually distances us from communion with God.

### **Just Labor Deserves Just Reward**

Before the use of currency, wealth was measured through valuable goods—land, livestock, grain, and other material resources that met human needs and often provided abundance. For instance, Cain, a farmer, generated wealth by cultivating the soil and harvesting crops, while Abel, a shepherd, tended flocks and benefited from their meat and byproducts (Genesis 4:2). In those times, transactions were carried out through barter.

Later, money emerged as a medium of exchange. When a person owns productive means and works for personal gain, this leads to the generation of goods and the accumulation of wealth, including money. Likewise, when someone works for another, they are entitled to just

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<sup>8</sup> Liviu Pecteu, “Orthodox Saints Speaking on Illness,” *Romanian Journal of Artistic Creativity* 5, no. 3 (2017): 45–55, 45.

compensation—a wage—whether paid in currency or in goods like livestock (e.g., Genesis 30:32). In some contexts, compensation was non-material, such as being granted marriage (e.g., Genesis 29:15-21) or receiving freedom from slavery. Regardless of the form, Scripture insists that workers must be fairly rewarded: “for the laborer is worthy of his wages”, and “the wages are not counted as grace but as debt” (Luke 10:7; 1 Timothy 5:18; Romans 4:4).<sup>9</sup>

The Bible consistently advocates for just treatment of workers and condemns exploitation. Saint Paul instructs masters to treat their workers justly (Colossians 4:1), while the prophet Malachi warns against oppressing laborers (Malachi 3:5). Saint James sharply rebukes the rich who withhold pay from their laborers, saying their cries “have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth” (James 5:4). Moreover, wages should not be delayed: “You shall not keep the wages of a hired worker with you all night until morning” (Leviticus 19:13). Wages are not a gift or a favor—they are a rightful debt and must be paid promptly and in full (Romans 4:4). Taking advantage of the vulnerable by delaying or denying their pay is a grave injustice, condemned by God (Deuteronomy 24:14–15).

For the laborer, it is both rightful and good to enjoy the fruit of their work. Their earnings are not to be viewed with guilt, but rather accepted with contentment and thanksgiving, as a portion granted by God. Hard work merits greater reward, and this too is affirmed in Scripture:

“Behold, I have seen good: It is a fine thing for a man to experience goodness in all his labor in which he toils all the days of his life that God has given him; for it is his portion. As for every man to whom God has given wealth, possessions, and authority—to eat from it, to receive his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. For he will not remember the many days of his life, because God distracted him in the merriment of his heart.” (Ecclesiastes 5:17-19)

Thus, the more diligently one works, whether for oneself or for others, the more one is entitled to reap, for each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor (1 Corinthians 3:8; 2 Corinthians 9:6). When one’s earnings exceed personal and household needs, wealth accumulates, and with it comes the sacred responsibility of stewardship, a responsible management of wealth that aims for God’s glory and our salvation.

### **Being Rich is not Sinful**

The relationship between wealth and sin is a delicate topic in Christian theology. Some Christians view the possession of wealth as inherently sinful, often assuming it results from the exploitation of others. This belief is shaped by specific interpretations of Scripture and teachings of early Church Fathers and saints.

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<sup>9</sup> See also Jeremiah 22:13, where wages are stressed as an acquired right; a free man should be paid back and refraining from payment is considered a grave act of unrighteousness and injustice.

One commonly cited example is the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man (Matthew 19; Mark 10; Luke 18). Jesus first instructed him to keep the commandments, which the man claimed to have done. Yet sensing a deeper spiritual lack, Jesus challenged him to sell all his possessions, give to the poor, and follow Him. The man's sorrowful response revealed his attachment to wealth. Jesus then declared the difficulty for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God, famously saying it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:23-24).

The issue is not wealth itself, but the love of wealth and trust in riches, which blinds the heart and makes true discipleship difficult. The rich man's inability to detach from his possessions is highlighted as the primary spiritual failing. Saint Basil emphasized that although the young man sought eternal life, he failed to act on Christ's prescription to achieve it. Saint Basil commented: "If a physician promised to cure some bodily defect, arising from birth or as a result of illness, you would not lose heart. But when the Great Physician of souls and bodies, seeing your deficiency in this vital area, wishes to make you whole, you do not accept the joyful news but rather turn sad and gloomy".<sup>10</sup>

Despite the difficulty, salvation is not impossible for the wealthy. As Christ said, "with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27), reaffirming that salvation is by grace and available to all who truly follow Christ—rich or poor alike. Saint Paul (1 Timothy 4:4–5) teaches that all of God's creation is good if received with thanksgiving. Wealth, therefore, is morally neutral. Saint John Chrysostom strongly distinguished between wealth and greed, rebuking not the rich per se, but those who misuse their wealth or oppress the poor.<sup>11</sup>

Scripture provides many examples of godly and wealthy individuals. In the Old Testament, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, and especially Job—all were wealthy and approved by God (Genesis 13:12; Genesis 26:13; Genesis 30:43; 1 Chronicles 29:28; 3 Kingdoms 10:14-33; Job 11:1-3). Job's story, in particular, highlights righteous detachment from possessions. He endured the loss of all his wealth and children without cursing God and was later rewarded with even more—ultimately gaining eternal life (Job 42: 12-17). In the New Testament, Joseph of Arimathea, Barnabas, Lydia, Dorcas, and Cornelius are some of many examples. Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy disciple, risked everything to bury Christ, Barnabas sold land and donated the proceeds for the Church's needs, and Lydia, a prosperous merchant, hosted a Christian church in her home (Matthew 27:57-58; Acts 4:36-37; Acts 16:11-15).

Therefore, we can conclude that wealth itself is not sinful. Its moral and spiritual value depends on how it is acquired, used, and regarded.<sup>12</sup> If a person values wealth more than God, they become

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<sup>10</sup> Saint Basil the Great, "Homily to the rich man", section 1. Translated in Schroeder, "On Social Justice", 42-43.

<sup>11</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, "Homily on the Fall of Eutropius", 2.3, quoted in Emmanuel Clapsis. "Wealth and Poverty in Christian Tradition." Greek Orthodox Theological Review 54, no. 1-4 (2009): 169–87, 174.

<sup>12</sup> Clapsis. "Wealth and Poverty in Christian Tradition", 171-174; Dumitrașcu, "Poverty and Wealth in the Orthodox Spirituality (with Special Reference to St. John Chrysostom)", 302.

enslaved to it and lose the grace of free will. However, if wealth is used for God's glory, to serve others, and to perform acts of mercy, it becomes a tool for sanctification. Thus, spiritual maturity depends not on the presence or absence of wealth, but on the heart's orientation toward God and how one's resources are stewarded.

### **Being Rich Increases Vulnerability to Sin**

To reiterate, Wealth is not inherently sinful, but it increases vulnerability to sin by tempting individuals to deviate from God and fall into spiritual destruction. The Christian goal is to purify oneself from sin, illumine the nous, and attain Theosis.<sup>13</sup> Scripture and the Church Fathers warn that the mishandling of wealth leads to war, betrayal, perjury, and oppression. Saint Basil describes wealth as “the hook of death, the lure of sin,” and criticizes the transformation of useful material goods into tools of wickedness.

This distortion arises when love for God is replaced with love for wealth—a form of idolatry that leads to worshiping creation rather than the Creator (Wisdom of Solomon 13:5–7; Romans 1:25). Solomon describes this misplacement of faith as “the beginning, cause, and end of every evil” (Wisdom of Solomon 14:27). Christ Himself warns in Matthew 6:24 that “you cannot serve God and mammon”, and Saint James condemns “friendship with the world as enmity with God” (James 4:2–5), linking greed to war, lust, jealousy and spiritual adultery. Saint Gregory Palamas stresses that avarice is “the root of all evils, for directly or indirectly they are almost invariably nourished by it”.<sup>14</sup>

Scripture teaches that love for wealth breeds fear, greed and discontent.<sup>15</sup> As Ecclesiastes 5:9 says, “he who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver.” Christ warns in Luke 12:15 that life does not consist in material abundance. The parable of the rich fool (Luke 12) demonstrates that storing up earthly wealth without being “rich toward God” leads to spiritual ruin. Echoing this, Saint Basil stresses that possessions are a trust, not personal property, and that we must let go joyfully, not mourn their loss.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, wealth can cause anxiety, lust, and a loss of spiritual freedom, turning man into a slave to his desires. Saint Paul teaches in Philippians 4:11–13 the virtue of contentment in both poverty and abundance. Similarly, 1 Timothy 6:9 warns that the desire to be rich leads to temptation and destruction, while Hebrews 13:5 cautions that wealth can also produce covetousness. Saint Basil

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<sup>13</sup> Vitaly Borovoy, “WHAT IS SALVATION?: An Orthodox Statement,” *International Review of Mission* 61, no. 241 (January 1972): 38–45, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.1972.tb02071.x>, 44–45; Cristian Sebastian Sonea, “Theosis and Martyria—The Spiritual Process of Deification and Its Implication for the Mission of the Church” *Religions* 14, no. 1: 12 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010012>

<sup>14</sup> Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 81.

<sup>15</sup> Nicolaus Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ* (1974; repr., Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 206.

<sup>16</sup> Saint Basil the Great, Homily “to the rich man”, section 3. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 46.

notes that even the wealthy feel miserable when they see others more affluent, driving them to envy and unhealthy competition.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to internal turmoil, wealth can lead to external injustice, such as oppression, deceit, and injustice. Wisdom of Sirach 13:5–6, Amos 8:5, and Proverbs 28:16 all highlight how the pursuit of riches often leads to cheating and exploiting the poor. Saint Basil condemns such behaviors, including predatory lending, hoarding during famine, and neglecting the needy, calling them symptoms of a spiritual sickness (Ecclesiastes 5:12).<sup>18</sup> This misuse of wealth often manifests in extortion, false accusations, and systemic corruption, all of which victimize the poor and vulnerable.

Further, wealth fosters pride and arrogance, distancing man from humility and God’s grace (James 4:6, 10; Sirach 5:1–3). The rich may feel invincible, scorn the poor (Sirach 13:19), and receive undeserved praise (Sirach 13:19–22). This distorts societal values, as people excuse the sins of the rich while unjustly condemning the poor (Sirach 13:3), ultimately breaching God’s command of fair treatment (Leviticus 19:15).

Saint Basil rebukes common excuses for not giving alms, such as saving for future uncertainties or providing large inheritances.<sup>19</sup> These reflect a lack of trust in God and can lead children into sin.<sup>20</sup> Saint John Chrysostom warns that delayed giving—such as bequeathing wealth to the poor only after death—fails to fulfill Christ’s call for active mercy in this life.<sup>21</sup> True stewardship, he insists, demands immediate, personal generosity, not theoretical or posthumous charity.

Thus, though materially rich, those who oppress the poor are spiritually impoverished, having alienated themselves from God (Proverbs 28:16). They lose the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Ecclesiastes 4:1) and become burdened by their own wealth to their own detriment (Ecclesiastes 5:12). Saint Basil vividly describes the torment of the guilty rich, haunted by their unjust acts and surrounded by the cries of those they have harmed.<sup>22</sup>

To conclude on the vulnerability of the rich, wealth, when mishandled, becomes a snare of sin, drawing individuals away from God and the path to salvation. Both Scripture and Patristic writings make clear that wealth must never be an end in itself, but rather a means of serving others and glorifying God. Pride, idolatry, oppression, and spiritual blindness are the fruits of wealth without

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<sup>17</sup> Saint Basil the Great, Homily “To the rich man”, section 5. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 49. See also Saint Basil’s Homily “Will Tear Down My Barns, Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 59-71.

<sup>18</sup> Saint Basil the Great, Homily “I will turn down my barns”, section 3. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 64; Saint Basil the Great, Homily “Against those who lend at interest”, section 2. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 91-92.

<sup>19</sup> Saint Basil the Great, Homily “To the rich”, section 7. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 53-55.

<sup>20</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Letter to the Ephesians. Translated in Helen Rhee, *Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2017), 98.

<sup>21</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew. Translated in, “Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity”, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Saint Basil the Great, “Homily to the rich man”, section 6. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 42.

humility. Thus, salvation does not require the renunciation of wealth itself, but rather the purification of the heart and the faithful exercise of stewardship through almsgiving, justice, and love. In this way, the rich can transform their spiritual vulnerability into a path of virtue and sanctification, storing up eternal treasures in heaven.

### **Almsgiving as a Path for Salvation**

Far from being a mere act of charity, almsgiving is a means of spiritual growth, purification from sin, and participation in the divine life. It is particularly emphasized during Great Lent, when the Church calls believers to repentance not only through personal asceticism, but also through love in action—by giving to the poor and caring for the afflicted. This call to mercy is not optional but foundational, as seen in the Gospel reading appointed for the Sunday of Judgment (Matthew 25:31–46), which precedes the beginning of Lent.<sup>23</sup>

In this striking vision of the Final Judgment, Christ identifies Himself with the “least of these,” declaring that the eternal destiny of each person will be determined by whether they showed mercy to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. Those who acted with compassion are welcomed into the Kingdom, while those who failed to do so are cast away—not for overt acts of evil, but for sins of omission. As Saint Gregory of Nazianzus explains, the goats are not condemned because they stole or murdered, but because they neglected mercy.<sup>24</sup>

This perspective is echoed forcefully by the Fathers of the Church. Saint Basil the Great warns that prayer and fasting, when not accompanied by acts of mercy, are empty and even offensive to God.<sup>25</sup> True piety, he insists, must be holistic; it must extend beyond the self and reach the neighbor in need. In harmony with this, Saint Gregory of Nyssa urges the faithful to treat the poor as members of their own household, caring for them with the same urgency and affection.<sup>26</sup> He draws a direct line between gluttony, greed, and the failure to give, asserting that hoarding resources while others suffer is not merely uncharitable, but a profound injustice.

This same message resounds on the Sunday of Forgiveness, with its Gospel reading from Matthew 6:14–21, which underscores the necessity of both spiritual enrichment and material detachment. Christ calls His disciples to forgive others, to fast with sincerity, and to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. Such heavenly treasures are not accumulated by saving or storing, but by giving—by acts of almsgiving that manifest a heart set on God and not on worldly gain.

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<sup>23</sup> Hilarion Alfeyev, “Eschatology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 107–20.

<sup>24</sup> Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 14: On the Love of the Poor. As presented in Helen Rhee, “Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity”, 84.

<sup>25</sup> Saint Basil the Great, Homily “to the rich man”, section 3. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 46.

<sup>26</sup> Saint Gregory of Nyssa, On the love of the poor. Translated in Rhee, “Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity”, 72.

Orthodox theology firmly holds that salvation comes by grace through faith and is revealed in good works (Ephesians 2:8–10). This understanding avoids both the error of legalism and the distortion of faith as mere intellectual assent. Grace is God’s uncreated and infinite gift, while faith is the dynamic, personal response that opens the soul to receive it. Yet faith is never passive. As Saint James writes, “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:14–17). Even demons believe in God’s existence, but their belief is not salvific because it is devoid of love and righteousness. For Orthodox Christians, good works—especially works of mercy—are not attempts to earn God’s favor but manifestations of living faith, revealing our cooperation with divine grace.<sup>27</sup>

Among all good works, almsgiving holds a privileged and transformative place. It is a means to Theosis, a spiritual discipline, an expression of active faith, and a demonstration of love that elevates man on the path to partaking in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Saint Gregory of Nyssa teaches that through acts of mercy, the soul is impressed with the image of God and is transformed into His likeness.<sup>28</sup> Almsgiving is thus not only ethical but ontological; it changes the very being of the giver. Saint John Chrysostom adds that the rich and the poor exist for each other’s salvation: the rich, by giving, may be saved from their attachments; the poor, by receiving, are supported in their suffering.<sup>29</sup> Economic inequality, then, becomes an opportunity for spiritual growth, humility, and communion.

This teaching is supported by Scripture beyond the Gospels. The Book of Tobit declares, “It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. For almsgiving delivers from death and purges away every sin” (Tobit 12:8–9). The same book advises that almsgiving should be proportional to one’s means (Tobit 4:7–9), emphasizing the interior disposition of the giver more than the quantity of the gift. What matters is not the size of the offering but the love with which it is given. In this way, almsgiving purifies the soul, delivers it from greed, and prepares it for union with God.

According to Saint Maximus the Confessor, the root of all sin is self-love.<sup>30</sup> Almsgiving, by its very nature, is the antidote to this spiritual disease. It shifts the heart outward, away from self-centeredness, and opens it to the needs and wounds of others.<sup>31</sup> The commandment to “love your

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<sup>27</sup> The Orthodox Study Bible, 1600.; The Orthodox Study Bible, 1319; Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 201-203.

<sup>28</sup> Dumitrașcu, “Poverty and Wealth in the Orthodox Spirituality (with Special Reference to St. John Chrysostom)”, 301; Geleris, *Money & Salvation*, 31.

<sup>29</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *To the people of Antioch*. Translated in Rhee, “Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity”, 88-89.

<sup>30</sup> ST Maximus the Confessor, “St Maximos the Confessor: Four Hundred Texts on Love,” [orthodoxchurchfathers.com](https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/philokalia/st-maximos-the-confessor-four-hundred-texts-on-love.html), n.d., <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/philokalia/st-maximos-the-confessor-four-hundred-texts-on-love.html>, Second Century, 8.; John Zizioulas, *Illness and Healing in Orthodox Theology*, trans. J.W. Lillie (Alhambra, California: Sebastian Press, 2016), 29.

<sup>31</sup> Clarke, Kevin M. “Chapter 20 Biblical Love, Insatiable Satisfaction, and Deification in Maximus the Confessor”. In *Patristic Spirituality*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022) doi: [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004526983\\_022](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004526983_022), 376; Junghun Bae, “John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Therapy of the Soul” (Ph.D. Thesis, 2018),

neighbor as yourself” is fulfilled most directly through concrete acts of mercy. These are not to be done out of guilt or social obligation, but as a conscious imitation of Christ, who emptied Himself for the salvation of humanity.

In this spirit, The Beatitude “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7) expresses a divine reciprocity. Those who show mercy receive mercy—not as a transactional exchange, but as a participation in the very life of God, who is Himself Mercy. Therefore, Almsgiving is a sacred act. It is not merely social justice but divine justice; not simply generosity but a sacrament of grace. It is through this path of mercy that believers are gradually healed of their passions, purified of sins, and drawn ever more deeply into the mystery of Christ.

In conclusion, almsgiving is indispensable in Orthodox Christian life. It is not peripheral to salvation but a primary expression of living faith. Through almsgiving, believers unite themselves to Christ, serve Him in the poor, and store up treasure in heaven. It is a concrete path to Theosis, and a vital expression of the love that fulfills the law and the prophets. In giving to the least of these, the faithful give to Christ Himself—and in so doing, receive the gift of eternal life.

## **Conclusion**

This paper is a modest attempt to clarify the Orthodox Christian theological framework surrounding work, wealth, and almsgiving, revealing them not as isolated concepts, but as deeply interconnected facets of a life devoted to God and the pursuit of salvation. Our exploration began by firmly establishing the biblical concept of stewardship, a foundational principle emphasizing that all creation belongs to God. We are merely entrusted with its care, obligated to preserve, enhance, and multiply it for His glory, not our own. This understanding underscores the critical importance of avoiding the illusion of ownership, recognizing our accountability for adhering to God's commandments regarding His creation.

Building upon this bedrock of stewardship, the paper demonstrated that our role as stewards is fundamentally linked to diligent and ethical work. Scripture consistently condemns laziness as a sin, upholding diligence and productivity as virtues. By embracing hard work and maintaining high ethical standards, we not only fulfill a divine mandate but also express our obedience, care for our families, and contribute to the well-being of humanity and all of God's creation. This diligence rightfully earns us fair wages and timely payment. The accumulation of wealth, when it occurs, is thus seen as a rightful reward, but one that carries the profound responsibility of wise management, ensuring its use glorifies God and reflects good stewardship.

Crucially, the paper clarified that wealth itself is not inherently sinful. This notion, often misunderstood, is not supported by Scripture or Orthodox Christian teachings, which condemn the

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improper use or attachment to wealth, not its mere possession. The spiritual challenge for the wealthy lies in wealth's potential to dominate the heart, replacing devotion to God. It is entirely possible to be both wealthy and virtuous, provided one's heart remains fixed on God. When approached with humility and used for God's glory and the betterment of others, wealth becomes a powerful tool for sanctification.

Nevertheless, the paper thoroughly addressed the significant spiritual risks and challenges associated with wealth. Both Scripture and the Church Fathers caution against its seductive power, which can lead to pride, injustice, exploitation, and idolatry, among many sins. Therefore, the wealthy are called to exercise their resources with profound humility and a deep sense of stewardship, understanding that true wealth is measured by one's relationship with God and by acts of mercy and justice, transforming earthly possessions into eternal treasures.

Finally, the paper highlighted the essential and indispensable role of almsgiving in achieving salvation and fostering spiritual growth. More than mere charity, almsgiving imitates the love and compassion of Christ, serving as a primary expression of living faith. Through almsgiving, believers unite themselves to Christ by serving the poor, conquering self-love, and actively participating in the divine nature. For the rich, almsgiving becomes an even more profound opportunity for spiritual healing, enabling them to elevate their standards of giving rather than merely their standards of living.<sup>32</sup> The relationship between the rich and the poor, in this context, becomes reciprocal and communal, with both contributing to each other's spiritual journey. Ultimately, Christ's mission to heal both physical and spiritual ailments underscores that whether rich or poor, salvation is attained through repentance, faith, and good works, using all talents to foster spiritual growth and ascend towards eternal communion with God.

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