

THE ANTIOCHIAN HOUSE OF STUDIES

The Theology of Giving and of Receiving:

An Orthodox Approach to Wealth Management as a Path to Healing and Salvation

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Antiochian House of Studies

For the Degree
Master of Theological Studies

©

Copyright
All Rights Reserved

By
Hadi El-Farr
East Brunswick, New Jersey

2025

Abstract

This thesis explores wealth management through the lens of Orthodox Christian theology, emphasizing the spiritual responsibilities associated with earning, spending, and giving. Grounded in Scripture and the teachings of the Church Fathers, it frames humans as stewards—rather than owners—of God's creation, entrusted with diligently managing resources for His glory. It asserts that ethical labor, fair compensation, and prudent spending are expressions of faithful stewardship. The study contends that wealth, though not inherently sinful, poses spiritual risks when misused or idolized. Central to the thesis is the theology of almsgiving, presented not merely as charity but as a vital path to spiritual healing, the overcoming of self-love, and ultimately, salvation. Almsgiving is shown to be essential for both rich and poor, not only in what is given, but in how it is given—with humility, sincerity, and love. By aligning one's wealth with God's commandments—especially through acts of mercy and support for the Church—believers can participate in the divine economy of grace. The thesis concludes that true wealth is found not in material accumulation, but in generous and righteous living that reflects God's love and prepares the soul for eternal communion with Him.

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

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	God assigned us as stewards and not owners of creation.	8
III.	Diligent work is a virtue and laziness is a vice	10
IV.	Work is rewarded with material possessions	15
V.	Being rich is not a sin in itself	17
VI.	Being rich makes a man vulnerable to sin	20
VII.	A man should aim to achieve salvation through a process of healing	28
VIII.	Almsgiving is vital for salvation.....	31
IX.	Almsgiving is specifically essential for the salvation of the rich	39
X.	Almsgiving should be granted to the poor and the Church	45
XI.	These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone	50
XII.	Almsgiving by the poor assists in their salvation	60
XIII.	Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing	63
XIV.	Addressing some accusations and concerns	66
XV.	Conclusion	70
XVI.	Bibliography	81

Introduction

The Theology of Giving is essential in our Christian tradition. Giving alms is the first among the three spiritual disciplines declared in the Sermon on the Mount, along with prayer and fasting (Matthew 6:1-18). "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39) is not merely a feeling we are commanded to have towards others; it is also reflected in our actions, especially when giving to the weak, poor, and needy (Matthew 25:31-46). Christ says, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40), calling us to see His face in every human and treat each person as if they are Him.

Therefore, the Theology of Giving—being merciful to others, especially the less fortunate—is essential for our salvation, as it forms the basis of Christ's judgment. It is not a coincidence that the Church emphasizes almsgiving during the Great Lent, a season for repentance and seeking God's mercy. In Greek, almsgiving is "eleēmosynē," which means "acts of mercy." How can we ask for God's mercy if we are not merciful to others?

When accounting for the four Gospels, Jesus addresses finances more than any other topic except the Kingdom of God.¹ In Scripture, material possessions are mentioned more than topics, such as love, prayer, and belief.² Wesley K. Wilmer even reported that 15% of God's word speaks of material possessions.³ So, why do the clergy not address finances as frequently as they do prayers? Unfortunately, many faithful believe that money is unrelated or even contradictory to

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

² Geleris, *Money & Salvation*, 12.

³ Wesley K. Wilmer, *A Revolution in Generosity: Transforming Stewards to Be Rich toward God* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 26-27, quoted in Geleris, *Money & Salvation*, 12.

spirituality as if dealing with possessions is irrelevant to their salvation. How can this be, when almsgiving is one of the spiritual disciplines? How can this be, when Christ emphasized how we deal with our possessions as a pillar for our salvation and a measure for our judgment? Andrew Geleris rightfully labeled Christ's discussions on finances as "soul-centric", for they aimed for our salvation.⁴ The discussion of giving should be reframed from why giving is required to address the needs of the Church and the poor to why giving is vital for the believer's purification and salvation.

There are many historical and pastoral reasons why money is not addressed explicitly in the Church as it should be. Priests might be hesitant to add a burden on their parishes, as many struggle to make ends meet. The capitalist system creates a lot of uncertainty in meeting a household's current and future financial needs, making it challenging to sustain a good living and meet future needs. To avoid financial anxiety, many priests only address giving when fundraising is needed for a particular goal, thus orienting financial discussions toward ministry purposes.⁵ However, this approach might reflect improper pastoral training, as addressing finances should primarily focus on the salvation of parish members and not merely on the needs of the Church and helping the poor.

Historically, Christians were persecuted before Constantine declared Christianity a legal religion in the Edict of Milan (313 AD). Constantine supported the Church financially and contributed to preserving its doctrine by sponsoring councils that addressed heresies, such as the Council of Milan in 316 and the Council of Nicaea in 325. During periods of persecution, the focus was on keeping the faith alive. When Christianity was supported by the empire, Church institutions and most charitable services were funded by the state, thus giving was equated to

⁴ Geleris, *Money & Salvation*, 13.

⁵ Geleris, *Money & Salvation*, 13.

paying taxes.⁶ Under Turkish rule and communism, the Church was also persecuted, and the focus remained on survival rather than finances.

In the East, many parishes have their own Awqaf (endowments), where a significant amount of assets are donated and bought, and their returns are used to address the needs of the Church. The accumulation of Awqaf has led many to lack a sense of urgency to give, as the Church is considered a “wealthy” institution or self-sufficient to a certain extent. Many Orthodox parishes in the West consist of immigrants from the East, carrying their lack of focus on finances to their new parishes.

As for the theology of receiving, it is even less addressed than almsgiving in our parishes. As stewards of God’s creation, we are asked to be productive, maintaining and adding value to the physical world. We are commanded to care for ourselves, our families, loved ones, and our neighbors. Thus, diligence is a virtue, whether spiritually or materially. Whether our work generates material possessions or is charitable, it all falls under the commandment of being good stewards of God’s creation.

Purpose

It is vital to note that receiving material possessions is a grace and a reward for our efforts, yet the true owner is God Himself. Falling into the pride of ownership and attaching ourselves to material possessions is contrary to our purpose, which is seeking salvation, restoration, and being with God for eternity. The ability to generate wealth ensures that we are not needy and can perform acts of mercy for others. Therefore, there is a complementary relationship between the theology of receiving and giving. That said, generating more wealth can make us vulnerable to sin. Thus, the

⁶ Geleris, Money & Salvation, 19.

relationship between receiving and giving may seem paradoxical. The solution to this paradox lies in how we perceive and manage our wealth. By recognizing that all material possessions ultimately belong to God and by using our resources to serve others and fulfill our responsibilities as stewards, we can balance the act of receiving with the virtue of giving. This perspective helps us avoid the pitfalls of pride and attachment to wealth, aligning our actions with our spiritual purpose of seeking salvation and eternal communion with God.

Method

This thesis explores the Orthodox perspective on wealth management, utilizing a thematic analysis—a qualitative research method focused on identifying key themes from texts. The primary themes were extracted from both the Old and New Testaments, each of which is further developed into subthemes. Special attention was given to organizing these themes logically, ensuring they are presented in a sequence that enhances the reader’s understanding and serves the purpose of the thesis.

The initial step in this process was familiarizing myself with Scriptural passages relevant to the topic. I began by reading the Scripture and then used keyword searches within a PDF version of the Bible to locate verses related to topics such as poverty, wealth, work, almsgiving, sacrifice, and laziness. This step was essential for envisioning the structure of the thesis.

The second step involved extracting these verses and categorizing them under the appropriate themes and subthemes. Since I lacked software for coding, I organized this material manually in a Word document. The third step was to review these themes, ensuring that each verse was appropriately categorized. This process was challenging due to inevitable overlaps between themes, requiring careful decisions on where each verse best fit. I also made selective choices

about which verses to include, aiming for a high level of thematic saturation. This selection process ensured that each theme and its subtopics were thoroughly explored.

The fourth step involved assigning titles to each theme and outlining the associated subthemes. Once this structure was established, I began writing the thesis. As I engaged with additional sources, the process evolved, moving from an initially inductive approach to a more deductive one, allowing for the refinement and expansion of themes.

Regarding sources, my primary reference was Scripture itself, using the Orthodox Study Bible for both the text and its commentary. Additionally, I drew heavily on the homilies of the early Church Fathers, particularly the Cappadocian Fathers (Saint Basil the Great, his brother Saint Gregory of Nyssa, and his friend Saint Gregory of Nazianzus) and Saint John Chrysostom, to deepen my understanding and support the themes identified. I also consulted various books, journal articles, and other writings, ensuring that they were authored by Orthodox Christians or those writing from an Orthodox perspective. I aimed to rely on sources from Saints, clergy, and Orthodox scholars who based their work on Scripture and its patristic interpretation.

Despite the significant time and effort invested in this work, I acknowledge its imperfections. Any attempt to address such a profound topic in our Christian life requires much more time and effort to achieve comprehensive coverage. For my shortcomings, incompleteness, and any unintended errors, I humbly ask for your forgiveness and welcome your critiques to help me improve. I hope that others will continue to build on this vital topic for our salvation.

Overview

This thesis begins by establishing the concept of stewardship, emphasizing that we are not owners but entrusted servants responsible for caring for and multiplying God's creation. Stewardship carries with it both responsibility and accountability, with corresponding

consequences. We are thus called to be good stewards, always mindful that what we possess belongs to God.

The thesis then highlights the virtue of diligence, underscoring that hard work aligns with God's commandments and reflects our acceptance of His judgment in this fallen world. Laziness, on the other hand, is identified as a vice, as we are called to strive for perfection in all things. We are meant to actively engage in God's creation, preserving and enhancing it. Failure to do so out of laziness is a sin that leads to many other transgressions. We are also responsible for meeting our needs and the needs of our families and others. Thus, poverty resulting from laziness is seen as a just consequence, whereas poverty not of our own making calls us to help the poor.

The thesis further addresses the principle that work should be justly rewarded with material possessions. A person is entitled to their wages, and delaying or denying fair compensation is a form of oppression. The more we work, the more we are compensated, and the more we may accumulate wealth. There is no shame in being rewarded for our labor, as it is our right to enjoy the fruits of our good stewardship.

This discussion naturally leads to the topic of accumulating wealth beyond our needs—being rich. Wealth, in itself, is not sinful, as nothing is inherently evil. Examples of pious, faithful, and wealthy individuals are presented to illustrate that it is possible to be rich while remaining devoted to God, using wealth for His glory, and demonstrating detachment from material possessions. However, the thesis also emphasizes that being rich can make one more vulnerable to sin. The attachment to possessions can turn them into idols, leading us away from God. Temptations such as pride, arrogance, greed, lust, oppression, and a false sense of ownership are among the dangers highlighted.

The exploration of sin naturally leads to a discussion of salvation in the Christian faith. After the fall, humanity must strive to restore the image and likeness of God within themselves. This requires a process of healing, which involves avoiding sin, living virtuous lives, and performing good works. This purification leads to illumination and, ultimately, Theosis—being with God eternally and conquering death, which was made possible through the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.⁷

Following this, the thesis explores the theme of almsgiving and its vital role in achieving salvation as one of the three spiritual practices. Almsgiving is presented as an opportunity for healing our souls and enriching our spiritual growth. The thesis emphasizes that both good works and faith are necessary for salvation. Almsgiving is particularly important for the rich, who may be spiritually impoverished due to their inclination toward sin, while the poor, through their suffering, may be spiritually rich. Through almsgiving, the rich not only relieve the poor but also heal themselves from sin.

After introducing almsgiving, the thesis discusses who should be the recipients of these contributions. Marginalized groups, especially the poor, and the Church are identified as the primary recipients, with explanations of why each is deserving. The discussion then turns to how much almsgiving should be given. While God commands us to tithe, we are also encouraged to give beyond the tithe, according to our ability and our need for spiritual healing. Although the quantity and frequency of the tithe are clearly commanded, almsgiving is ultimately a matter of the heart. Christ instructs us to give alms beyond what the Law requires, saying, “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”

⁷ 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.

The thesis then examines the manner in which alms should be given, ensuring that charitable work fulfills its purpose of healing and does not become ineffective or counterproductive, leading to sin. Almsgiving should be done in secret, without seeking pride, self-love, or status, and should be given cheerfully, willingly, and for the glory of God.

The thesis concludes by tying all these themes together and providing a roadmap for managing wealth as faithful Christians, connecting what we receive with what we give, with the ultimate goal of achieving salvation.

God assigned us as stewards and not owners of creation.

God created man—both male and female—in His image and likeness, blessed them, and established their 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). He created heaven and earth for man, placing him “in the garden to tend and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). Thus, the role of man as a steward was firmly established from the very beginning, even before the fall, and has continued ever since. This responsibility to care for and manage God's creation was inherent in humanity's purpose from the outset and remains a central aspect of our relationship with the world, despite the consequences of the fall. Merriam-Webster Dictionary accurately defines stewardship as “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care.”

It is important to emphasize that being a steward involves managing what is owned by another, meaning that man's dominion over living things does not equate to ownership.⁸ Numerous verses in Scripture highlight that all creation is under the dominion of the Creator, subject to His

⁸ 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

ownership, will, and control. We might mistakenly believe that we truly own our possessions, but in reality, they are merely gifts entrusted to us by God to manage. As King David prayed: “The earth is the Lord’s, and its fullness, the world and all who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1). He also declared, “You are blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The heaven of heavens belongs to the Lord, but He gave the earth to the sons of men” (Psalms 113:23-24). These praises by King David capture the truth that, while we are entrusted with the tending God’s creation on earth, ultimate ownership and dominion belong to God.

Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel, our Father, unto the ages of ages. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the might. You are master over all that is in heaven and on the earth. Every king and nation is thrown into confusion before You. From the first, You are the wealth and the glory who reigns over all, as the Lord and dominion of all. In Your hand is power and authority, and You are almighty with Your hand to increase and establish all things. And now, Lord, we give thanks to You, and we praise Your glorious name (1 Chronicles 29:10-13).

Additionally, being entrusted with something carries responsibility, and with responsibility comes accountability and consequences. We will be rewarded for faithfully managing what God has blessed and entrusted us with, and we will face judgment for any mishandling. In the parable of the Talents, Christ illustrates the importance of stewardship in attaining the Kingdom of God. The master gave the first servant five talents and the second two talents, each according to their ability. Both servants doubled their amounts through diligent work, and both received the same reward and praise: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:21, 23). God knows how much each of us can bear, thus He entrusts us as stewards each based on our ability.

However, the third servant, who was given only one talent, failed to increase it. Instead, he buried it for safekeeping and returned it to the master upon his return. This action angered the master, who took the talent from the third servant and gave it to the one who had doubled the five

talents. The master accused the third servant of wickedness and laziness, casting him “into the outer darkness,” where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30). The lesson from this parable is encapsulated in these words: “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away” (Matthew 25:29). Therefore, God commanded us to preserve and multiply what He entrusted to us.

Hence, God knows our capabilities and assigns responsibilities and accountabilities based on what we can bear, yet He calls us to be good stewards of God’s gifts, and failing to do so results in being deprived of the Kingdom of God. Being good stewards is preserving God’s creation and striving for its betterment and multiplication, aiming always to glorify God in our work. For “he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully (2 Corinthians 9:6). A good steward also means that he is driven by a sense of responsibility – not ownership and profitability, as “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10).

Diligent work is a virtue and laziness is a vice

As mentioned before, God created man to tend and preserve the garden (Genesis 2:15). After the fall of mankind, among the consequences, other than mortality, are sweat, toil, hunger, thirst, weariness, sorrow, pain, suffering, sickness, tribulations, tragedy, and tears.⁹ Therefore, hard work and suffering to provide became part of God’s punishment for Adam and his descent (Genesis 3:17-19). Thus, God created us with responsibilities to attend to, and after the fall, hard and enduring work became a necessity for survival, part of our punishment and purification, and a

⁹ The Orthodox Study Bible, 7.

commandment to adhere to. Being lazy, thus, is as if we are refusing God's punishment, a disobedience and prideful act.

God is merciful and will compensate the poor "either in this life or the next" if it is not his fault.¹⁰ That said, being poor due to laziness and unwillingness to work will not grant the poor compassion, for "He will not show partiality to a poor man, But He will hear the petition of him who is wronged" (Wisdom of Sirach 35:13). Many verses in Scripture correlate laziness with being poor and hunger, or losing wealth, and diligence is correlated with wealth, such as "To everyone who is careful there is an abundance, But he who is pleasure-taking and slothful shall be in want" (Proverbs 14:24).¹¹ Laziness is also correlated with lack of wisdom, disgracefulness, arrogance, and spiritual bankruptcy, where the following verses on the slothful man clearly illustrate:

A slothful man who is sent on his way says, "There is a lion in the way." As a door turns upon its hinge, So does a slothful man upon his bed. When a slothful man hides his hand in his bosom, He shall be unable to bring it to his mouth. A slothful man appears wiser to himself, Than he who satisfactorily brings back a message. (Proverbs 26:14-17)

The consequences of laziness are poverty and the loss of free will, a form of slavery, due to the dependence on others to provide. Saint Paul clearly stated: "Owe no one anything except to love one another" (Romans 13:8). Being in debt is a slavery condition that should be avoided (Proverbs 22:7). Therefore, managing finances to not spend lavishly and beyond what someone earns is important, for losing free will is a loss of God's given grace, enslavement to another man, and volatility to living a sinful life. In Scripture, poverty even caused some to sell themselves to the ones indebted to them, an actual slavery condition that should be avoided (example, Leviticus 25:39). Saint Basil instructs us to live with our means and to refrain from getting loans that we

¹⁰ The Orthodox Study Bible, 958.

¹¹ See also Proverbs 6:13-16; Proverbs 12:11

will be unable to pay, quoting Proverbs 5:15: “drink water at your own cistern”, “that is look at your own means. Do not turn to other springs, but draw forth from your own springs the comforts of life”.¹² When it comes to essential needs, Saint Basil recommends taking care of them little by little to avoid moving from a critical financial situation to a worse one and being a slave to the lender.¹³ He added that borrowing makes someone vulnerable to sins and bad traits, such as falsehood, ingratitude, unkindness, perjury, and lack of courage.

More so, being in need might lead to envy and fullness of desires, as others have what the idle wishes for (example, Proverbs 21:24). Nevertheless, neediness is an “evil runner”, which creates the desire to sin, such as theft (Proverb 6:16; Ephesians 4:28). A slothful man also lacks the knowledge of many virtues, such as lack of righteousness, self-control, and courage, which makes others contempt him.¹⁴ In commenting on the discerning, slothful, and scheming man (Proverbs 26:1-29), the Orthodox Study Bible lists St. John Cassian’s eight vices, which such men exhibit: “gluttony, unchastity, avarice, anger, dejection, listlessness, self-esteem, and arrogance”.¹⁵ Thus, laziness is a sin by itself and acts as a source of other sins. It is no surprise that Saint Paul commanded the faithful to work hard, never eat the bread for free, and be a burden on others, and those who do not work are not worthy of being provided for, as demonstrated in the following:

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor

¹² 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.

¹³ Saint Basil the Great, Homily “Against those who lend at interest”, section 1. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 92-3.

¹⁴ The Orthodox Study Bible, 840.

¹⁵ The Orthodox Study Bible, 862.

and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12)

We are called to be diligent in our lives, both spiritually and when it comes to providing for ourselves and others, for “whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). In Proverbs 6:7-12, we are called to imitate the behavior of the ant and the bee when it comes to their hard work, preparedness, and ensuring abundance. Saint Paul also emphasized hard work, minding our own business, and doing so quietly, so that the faithful will demonstrate a good example to outsiders and not be in need (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). In his epistle to Titus, Saint Paul calls him to ensure that “in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works” (Titus 2:7) and ends the epistle asking Titus to “let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful” (Titus 3:14). Hard work, thus, should be rewarded in this life or the one after (2 Timothy 2:6; Colossians 3:24).

It is also vital to note that a good Christian is expected to aim for perfection in both earthly and spiritual work as if the work is for God, and not for another man (Matthew 5:48; Philippians 3:12). The affirmation is that whatever we do, we do it for the Glory of God. Saint Paul commands us in Colossians 3:23-24 to “whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ”.¹⁶ He also said in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”.

¹⁶ See also Colossians 3:17

Being diligent is not only being productive and generating what satisfies the needs and abundance but also the method of achieving it should be ethical, reflecting the faith of a good Christian. Work ethics include being just, honest, trustworthy, and productive to the maximum of our abilities, for being deceitful, unfaithful, and lazy are sins. In the parable of the unjust steward, Jesus said “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10). If someone is not ethical in addressing earthly matters, which is comparably least to spiritual growth, then how he will succeed in seeking his salvation. Besides, being ethical reflects faith, thus being unethical is disobedience to the commandments, reflecting weakness in faith. More so, while working and generating value, we should be thankful to the Lord and always praise Him, for everything we do is for Him.

At a minimum, a man should provide for himself and his household. Saint Paul went as far as to call the lazy who fail to provide for his household a denier of faith and worse than the unfaithful, as clearly stated in 1 Timothy (5:8): “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”. In Proverbs (12:9), Salomon declared that “it is better for a man in dishonor to serve himself than for him to surround himself with honor while in need of bread”. Thus, it is the man’s responsibility to provide for his wife and children, but it is also a demonstration of love, honor, and care, which we are commanded to do (Ephesians 5:28; Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Peter 3:7). For, our wives and children are gifts from God (Genesis 2:20-24; Genesis 33:5 Psalms 127:3). Demonstrating our love is not only through words and feeling, but it should be also in “deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

To conclude this section, Scripture is clear that diligence is rewarded, while laziness leads to poverty, spiritual decay, and dependence on others. Hard work is not only a necessity but also a commandment to adhere to, reflecting our faith and obedience to God. Moreover, the ethical

manner in which we conduct our work is as important as the work itself, as it directly correlates with our spiritual integrity. Ultimately, the Christian approach to work transcends mere survival or material gain; it is an expression of our stewardship, our love for others, and our devotion to God. By working diligently and ethically, we fulfill our God-given responsibilities, provide for our families, and glorify God in all that we do. In this way, we embody the virtues of a good steward, aligning our earthly labor with our spiritual purpose, and contributing to the flourishing of both our lives and the lives of those around us.

Work is rewarded with material possessions

Before monetary transactions, wealth was measured by items of value, such as land, cattle, grain...etc. - material possessions that address human needs and sometimes provide abundance. For example, Cain, a farmer, generated material possessions by tilling the ground and harvesting the crops, while Abel, a shepherd, tended the flock, multiplying it, and reaped their meat and byproducts (Genesis 4:2). Transactions were done through bartering goods. Later, money was introduced as a medium of exchange. If a man owns a means of production and works for his own return, then this generates material possessions and the accumulation of money. If a man works for others, he also deserves a reward, a wage, from the one he works for. Wages are usually paid through money or other goods, such as cattle. More so, rewards could be nonmaterial, such as granting a woman marriage or working towards freedom from slavery. Regardless of the reward's nature, a worker should be granted a wage, "for the laborer is worthy of his wages" (Luke 10:7; 1 Timothy 5:18).

The Scripture frequently calls for fair wages and against the oppression of workers (Colossians 4:1; Malachi 3:5). In his epistle, Saint James warned the rich who do not pay their

laborers that their cries will “reach the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth” (James 5:4).¹⁷ Wages also should not be delayed, for “the wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning (Leviticus 19:13). Unfortunately, some might act as if giving a wage is a gift to the laborer, but it is actually debt and should be paid in full and promptly (Romans 4:4). Particularly, taking advantage of the poor and weak, and exercising power to deprive or postpone their pay is a sinful act and the cries of the oppressed will be heard by God, as God commanded in Deuteronomy:

You shall not withhold wrongfully the wage of the poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the resident aliens in your cities. Each day you shall pay him his wage and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his hope on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you. (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

As for the laborer, he deserves to enjoy his wage, for it is his right, his portion, and God’s gift. No remorse or guilt is attached to earning what you deserve, as long as the laborer is content, and his heart is focused on God. Also, the harder someone works, the more he deserves and the more he should be rewarded. The following verse elaborates on rejoicing man’s portion of possessions, knowing that it is a gift from God:

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)

Therefore, the more you work, whether for yourself or others, the more you get rewarded. If your rewards are more than what you and your household need, then wealth will be accumulated, and with wealth comes the responsibility of how to manage it, as it will be stressed later.

¹⁷ See also Jeremiah 22:13

Being rich is not a sin in itself

To have abundance is viewed by some Christians as a sinful status, mostly assuming that the rich are as such due to the oppression of others – causing many to be poor. This standpoint is based on the interpretation of some Scripture and the teaching of early fathers – among other saints, clergy, and theologians.

One of the most common verses quoted is when Jesus addressed the wealthy young man's concern for salvation and achieving eternal life (Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30). First, Jesus asked him to keep the commandments, which the young man claimed to do but still felt that he lacked what was needed (Matthew 19:16-20). Second, Jesus asked him to sell his possessions, give all to the poor, and follow Christ to attain treasures in heaven and achieve perfection (Matthew 19:21). The young man's reaction was sorrowfulness as he loved his wealth. Jesus then said his famous words to His disciples: "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:23-24).

Thus, why is it hard, or even nearly impossible, for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God? Is it the material possessions themselves, or the attachment to them? Various interpretations of those verses were presented. It is worth noting that the first teaching for the young man was to keep the commandments, but his heart was not content, and he knew that something was missing, for "formal observance of commandments does not make one righteous before God".¹⁸ The second teaching is that Christ knows what is in the young man's heart and asks him to leave all the material possessions and with free will follow Christ. The ask was too much to bear, as the young man was

¹⁸ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1306.

so attached to his wealth, thus, the major claim is that the sin here is not wealth itself but the love of wealth, or as mentioned in Mark (10:24) “trust in riches”, for the wealth “had such a grip on this rich man, his only hope was to sell and give away all his possessions”.¹⁹ Saint Basil comments on the rich man's attachment to wealth and refusal of Christ's prescription:

Moreover, he desired to learn by what worthy deed he might inherit eternal life – this also is deserving of acceptance. Yet all his good intent is cast under judgment by this: that he does not focus on what is truly good. Namely, after learning the lessons of salvation from the true teacher, he neither inscribes them in his heart nor puts them into practice, but rather goes away grieving, darkened by the passion of avarice...Although you say that you have never murdered, or committed adultery, or stolen, or borne false witness against another, you make all this diligence of no account by not adding what follows (that is to love your neighbor as yourself). Which is the only way you will be able to enter the Kingdom of God. 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.²⁰

Saint Paul affirms that “every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:4-5). Thus, nothing created, even wealth, is bad in itself, but goodness or badness is reflected in our dealings with it, and how we deal with wealth becomes part of our human identity, whether we are virtuous in our works or not.²¹ Saint John Chrysostom, who is known for addressing the rich and criticizing their behavior towards the love of wealth and oppression of the poor, was clear in stressing wealth as inherently not good or bad, but its misuse that is considered a wrongful act:

I am often reproached for continually attacking the rich. Yes, because the rich are continually attacking the poor. But those I attack are not the rich as such, only those who

¹⁹ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1306.

²⁰ Saint Basil the Great, “Homily to the rich man”, section 1. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 42-43.

²¹ Emmanuel Clapsis. “Wealth and Poverty in Christian Tradition.” Greek Orthodox Theological Review 54, no. 1-4 (2009): 169–87, 171-174; Dumitrașcu, “Poverty and Wealth in the Orthodox Spirituality (with Special Reference to St. John Chrysostom)”, 302.

misuse their wealth. I point out constantly that those I accuse are not the rich but the rapacious. Wealth is one thing, covetousness another. Learn to distinguish.²²

The impossibility of salvation for the wealthy was addressed later in the parable, “with men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27). Thus, being saved is a grace given to all who follow Christ in heart and deed (Mark 10:29-30). The idea to be affirmed is salvation is only through grace, and man can’t be saved except through it. This applies to the rich man, and also to any man.

There are many examples in Scripture of wealthy and righteous men. In the Old Testament, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Solomon, David, and Joseph were among the extremely wealthy and approved by God. Job, for example, was described as “true, blameless, righteous, and God-fearing, and he abstained from every evil thing” (Job 1:1), and God blessed him with many children, servants, and an abundance of possessions. Yet, when God permitted the devil to take everything from him and subject him to enormous suffering, Job reacted by saying: “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. As it seemed good to the Lord, so also it came to pass. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). Job kept his heart focused on God with no sin or charge God with folly (Job 1:22; 2:15). After his suffering, God rewarded Job with more wealth, children, and years to live, but most importantly, God rewarded job with eternal life, for “it is written that he will rise with those whom the Lord resurrects” (Job 42:18). Thus, Job is an example of an extremely wealthy man who demonstrated the love of God above all materialistic possessions and who demonstrated obedience, piety, perseverance, and living a purified life.

²² Saint John Chrysostom, “Homily on the Fall of Eutropius”, 2.3, quoted in Clapsis. “Wealth and Poverty in Christian Tradition”, 174.

In the New Testament, Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Jesus and a rich man (Matthew 27:57) and boldly asked for the body of Jesus to be buried. By doing so, he risked his life and wealth to demonstrate his faith, demonstrating that the love of God is above all earthly riches. Joses (Barnabas) sold his land and gave the money for the Apostles to distribute to the ones in need (Acts 4:34-37). Lydia, a rich businesswoman, was baptized and hosted a Christian Church in her house.²³ Many others are also mentioned in the New Testament, such as Dorcas and Cornelius, who all served the Church, demonstrated their faith in acts, and loved God above all possessions.

Therefore, material possessions are just objects, and no object is inherently bad or good.²⁴ What determines the impact of wealth on man is his behavior toward possessions and the way he manages wealth. If a man loved wealth more than God, then he would be enslaved by it, losing the grace of free will and getting alienated from God. If a man's heart is focused on God's love and he uses his riches to glorify Him and do good works, then he will be purifying himself and perfecting himself to be God-like.

Being rich makes a man vulnerable to sin

The issue with being rich is the vulnerability caused by riches to deviate a man from God and drag him to a life full of sin resulting in the loss of the Kingdom of God. We aim to purify ourselves from sins, illuminate our nous, and reach deification, to be with God for eternity. Therefore, Scripture and early fathers stressed that wealth is a major source of many sins, which

²³ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1498

²⁴ Dumitrașcu, "Poverty and Wealth in the Orthodox Spirituality", 302.

this section aims to address. Saint Basil reflects this belief due to the mishandling of material possessions:

How long shall gold be the oppression of souls, the hook of death, the lure of sin? How long shall wealth be the cause of war, for which purpose weapons are forged and sword blades whetted? Because of wealth, kinsfolk disregard the bond of nature, and sibling contemplates murder against sibling. Because of wealth, the desert teems with murderers, the sea with pirates, and the cities with extortionists. Who is the father of lies? Who is the author of forgery? Who gave birth to perjury? Is it not wealth? Is it not the pursuit of wealth? What ails you, people? Who twisted the things that are yours into a plot against you? Material things exist to assist with life, surely they were not given as a provision for wickedness? They constitute a ransom for the soul; surely they were not provided as an occasion for your own destruction?²⁵

Substituting the love of God with the love of material possessions is a form of idolatry. Rather than believing, hoping, and trusting in God, a man might fall into trusting and hoping in what they see, what is beautiful, and what is created (Wisdom of Solomon 13:5-7; Romans 1:25). In other words, man becomes a slave to what he owns, what is perishable, and what is not ultimate and absolute.²⁶ This misplacement of faith and trust is declared by the Wisdom of Solomon as “the beginning, cause, and end of every evil” (14:27).²⁷ Also, Jesus affirms that no one can serve two masters and love and be loyal to both riches and God, for “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). Saint James warned us from being attached to the world, as this will be a source of lust, jealousy, and pleasure-seeking, with powerful words:

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a

²⁵ Saint Basil the Great, “Homily to the rich man”, section 7. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 53.

²⁶ Clapsis. “Wealth and Poverty in Christian Tradition”, 173.

²⁷ See also 1 Timothy 6:10.

friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? (James 4:2-5).

The love of riches will generate greed; a lack of content in what we possess. If the heart of a man is focused on achieving abundance, this heart will never be content, for “he who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver” (Ecclesiastes 5:9). This heart is forgetful of the fact that no excess of material possessions will further satisfy his physical needs, and none of the wealth will be carried over to the life after death (Ecclesiastes 5:10;14).

Talking against the obsession with material possessions when approached by a man concerning his inheritance, Christ told him: “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). In the parable of the rich man, Christ clearly illustrates that what we own is not ours, as it cannot be taken with us after life. Thus, the aim is not to accumulate wealth in “greater barns”, but to be rich toward God, growing treasures in heaven through alms and seeking the Kingdom of God, who is the provider for all his creatures (Luke 15:16-34). To emphasize, having this strong sense of ownership replacing the sense of entrustment violates the concept of stewardship and irrational, for how we own anything if we are finite. Saint Basil emphasized this irrationality of being attached to wealth with the illusion of ownership:

It befits those who possess sound judgment to recognize that they have received wealth as a stewardship, and not for their own enjoyment, thus, when they are parted from it, they rejoice as to relinquish what is not really theirs, instead of becoming downcast like those who are stripped from their own.²⁸

²⁸ Saint Basil the Great, Homily “to the rich man”, section 3. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 46.

Christ also warns us of being anxious due to the fear of not having enough to address our materialistic needs. Saint Paul affirmed that being content with what we have, whether in being rich or poor, is a demonstration of our faith and trust in Christ²⁹:

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christa who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13)

The desire to be rich is also a trap, a source of temptations, which causes us to fall into lust (1 Timothy 6:9). Lust is a desire that cannot be satisfied, which enslaves us to focus on satisfying our physical desires and deviating us from our path to salvation. Stated differently, lust causes us to be sorrowful in this life due to the lack of satisfaction, and eternally sorrowful due to our loss of the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, obsession with material possessions is like an addiction, a loss of free will, which is a grace from God. Moreover, being discontent makes us covetous of what others have (Hebrews 13:5; James 4:5). Saint Basil emphasized the lack of content of the rich, which causes addiction, competition, and envy:

Yet this constant accumulation (of wealth) does not quell the craving, but only further inflames your appetite...Their soul is eaten with cares as they compete in the struggle of success. They have every reason to be happy and rejoice in their prosperity, but instead they weep and wail because they fall one or two degrees short of some other super-wealthy individual.³⁰

²⁹ See also Saint Basil's Homily "Will Tear Down My Barns, Translated in Schroeder, "On Social Justice", 59-71. Saint Basil highlights that although the rich man was blessed by even more riches, the decision was to tear down his barns and build larger ones, thus accumulating even more wealth rather than giving to the poor. This was an act of selfishness, greed, and anxiety. This lack of content made him deserve God's judgment. God blesses with more to "to become a source of aid for those in need". For our possessions are perishables, yet how we manage them may result in our salvation or not. Saint Basil stresses that even those perishables are not ours, they are God's, yet as good stewards, distributing them to the needy results in attaining the Kingdom of Heaven. He added "Therefore, let the end of your harvesting be the beginning of a heavenly sowing", section 2, 63.

³⁰ Saint Basil the Great, Homily "To the rich man", section 5. Translated in Schroeder, "On Social Justice", 49.

The pursuit of riches might also cause a man to deceive others to take what they have, and then abandon them after, a pure act of selfishness and opportunism (Wisdom of Sirach 13:5-6). It might also lead to cheating others for more profit and even committing theft (Amos 8:5). Additionally, the pursuit of richness causes anxiety and sleeplessness, which harms the body and leads a man to destruction³¹, both physically and spiritually, as stated in the Wisdom of Sirach³²:

Losing sleep over wealth wastes away the body, And anxiety about wealth removes sleep. Sleepless anxiety will drive away slumber, And severe illness makes an end to sleep. A rich man labors to gather money, And when he rests he fills himself with his luxuries. A poor man labors to make a meager living, And when he rests he becomes needy. He who loves gold will not be called righteous, And he who pursues profit will be led astray by it. Many are driven to calamity for the sake of gold, And their destruction has met them face to face. It is a stumbling block for those possessed by it, And every senseless man will be trapped by it. (Wisdom of Sirach 31:1-7)

Saint Basil addressed some of the ill justifications for the lack or postponement of giving, resulting in wealth accumulation against the clear commandments of Christ.³³ Some of the rich claim that they are not giving, or saving for the future, as it is uncertain, and they might end up in need of what they have saved. This reflects the lack of trust in God to provide what is best for you in your time of need. Others might justify their lack of giving as the money is needed to provide an inheritance for their children, which falls under the obligation of taking care of your family. Doing so is a bad example for children to follow, and by providing them with wealth and following

³¹ See also Ecclesiastes 5:11.

³² Saint Basil made a similar comment “There is one thing in which we poor differ from the rich: freedom from care. We laugh them to scorn when they lie awake at night while we sleep, and when they are constantly tense and worrying, we are relaxed and at ease”, Saint Basil the Great, Homily “Against those who lend at interest”, section 3. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 94.

³³ Saint Basil the Great, Homily “To the rich”, section 7. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 53-55.

the same lead, the rich are causing their children to sin, which is another sin on their account.³⁴ Others, enjoy their money and save it, justifying that they will give some or all of it as an inheritance to the poor after their death, assuming that this will lead to their salvation. Those anxieties and justifications for accumulating wealth and depriving the poor of well-needed alms are refuted in Scripture and early fathers.³⁵ Besides, good works are meant to be done in the present, in our lifetime in the fallen world, and not after death, where it is too late to achieve salvation. Also, who will guarantee that the money left for the children and the poor will be utilized according to the will of the deceased?

Riches, also, make a man proud and arrogant, and God resists the proud and gives grace to and lifts the humble (James 4:6, 10). This pride might make a man feel independent from God, strong due to his possessions, and even a follower of his passions without accounting for the dominion of God (Wisdom of Sirach 5:1-3). Simply, some rich men end up so proud, feeling invulnerable with no fear of God. Some rich even develop abominations towards the poor, as they believe that they are of a lower statute (Wisdom of Sirach 13:19). Unfortunately, this pride is enforced by society, as friends and acquaintances of the rich support him if he is shaken and listen to his words as if they are of wisdom, even if they are not (Wisdom of Sirach 13:19-22).

Also, people tend to be unfair in excusing the rich man for wrongdoings, while they tend to easily accuse the poor (Wisdom of Sirach 13:3). Thus, some people might sin due to the rich man's influence, status, and their adoration of him, leading them to forget God commandments

³⁴ Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Letter to the Ephesians. Translated in Rhee, "Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity", 98.

³⁵ Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew. Translated in 14. Rhee, Helen. Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2017, 95.

and committing transgressions. More so, the rich and the ones influenced by his status might end up enacting injustice in judgment by not being partial to the poor, breaching God's commandment: "In righteousness, you shall judge your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:15).³⁶

Scripture, additionally, stresses the sinful act of the rich in oppressing and taking advantage of the poor (Wisdom of Sirach 13:4; Amos 2:6; 8:4). The oppression of the poor provokes God, and mercy upon the poor honors Him (Proverbs 14:32). Some rich men accumulate wealth by taking advantage of the poor, and by doing so they demonstrate a hardness of heart, and "the man who hardens his heart shall fall into evils" (Proverbs 28:15). In days of famine, Saint Basil asks the rich not to hold back grain, resulting in higher prices, thus taking advantage of the poor rather than assisting them during hard times.³⁷ Saint Basil also criticized the practice of the rich in lending the poor with interest, knowing that they would not be able to pay their debt back draining them into poverty even further.³⁸ He condemned the rich that rather than helping the poor by granting them what they need or at least providing them with a loan with no debt: "Though you have an obligation to remedy the poverty of someone like this; instead you increase the need, seeking a harvest from the desert".³⁹ The sad reality of oppressing the poor, is that the rich is demonstrating that he is the one who is actually poor.⁴⁰ Poor spiritually due to alienating himself from God

³⁶ Many other examples in Scripture such as Exodus 23:6.

³⁷ Saint Basil the Great, Homily "I will turn down my barns", section 3. Translated in Schroeder, "On Social Justice", 64.

³⁸ Saint Basil the Great, Homily "Against those who lend at interest", section 2. Translated in Schroeder, "On Social Justice", 92.

³⁹ Saint Basil the Great, Homily "Against those who lend at interest", section 1. Translated in Schroeder, "On Social Justice", 91.

⁴⁰ Saint Basil described the greedy rich: "You are poor indeed and bereft of all goodness: poor in love, poor in kindness, poor in faith towards God, poor in eternal hope", and then he ordered the rich to "make your brothers and sisters sharers of your grain; give to the needy today what rots away tomorrow. Truly, this is the worst kind of avarice:

(Proverbs 28:16). Poor because he has taken the comforter from his soul, he did not allow the Holy Spirit to heal and comfort him (Ecclesiastes 4:1). Thus, it is no wonder that in Ecclesiastes (5:12), “wealth kept for its owner to his hurt” was considered a sickness, which needs to be healed. The following quotations from Saint Basil’s homily to the rich emphasize how wealth is a cause of oppression.

What neighbor, what confidant, what friend is not swept away? Nothing withstands the influence of wealth. Everything submits to its tyranny, everything cowers at its dominion. Those who have already been exploited would rather avoid suffering some further injury than seek reparations for past injustices. Leading yokes of oxen, the wicked plow, sow, and harvest what is not their own. If you dispute with them, they come to blows with you; if you complain, they accuse you of assaulting them. You will be arrested and put in prison; the false accusers are ever ready, willing to place your very life at risk. Then you will gladly pay something over and above what was already taken in order to settle the matter.⁴¹

Wherever you turn your gaze, you will clearly behold the apparitions of your evil acts: here the tears of the orphan, there the groaning of the widow, elsewhere the poor whom you have trampled down, the servant whom you have brutalized, the neighbors who you have treated outrageously. All your deeds will rise up before you; the wicked chorus of your wrongdoings will beset you on all sides.⁴²

In conclusion, while wealth itself is not inherently sinful, it undoubtedly presents significant spiritual challenges and vulnerabilities. The crux of the issue lies not in the possession of riches but in how one relates to them. Scripture and early Church Fathers consistently caution against the seductive power of wealth, highlighting its potential to lead one away from God and into a life marred by sin. Saint Basil’s reflections underscore the profound dangers wealth can pose, as it can become an instrument of oppression, greed, and deceit. The Scriptures echo this warning,

not even to share perishable goods with those in need”. Saint Basil the Great, Homily “I will turn down my barns”, section 6. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 68-69.

⁴¹ Saint Basil the Great, “Homily to the rich man”, section 5. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 51.

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

emphasizing that the pursuit of material riches can foster idolatry, undermine one's trust in God, and result in spiritual discontent. The parables of Jesus and the teachings of early Church Fathers remind us that material possessions should not be mistaken for ultimate fulfillment or security. True contentment and salvation are found in a heart devoted to God, not in the accumulation of wealth. Moreover, the misuse of wealth often manifests in behaviors such as pride, injustice, and exploitation of the poor, which are condemned throughout Scripture. The rich, when detached from God and motivated by self-interest and self-love, may inadvertently become instruments of injustice and oppression, further distancing themselves from the divine grace and mercy that they seek to attain.

Ultimately, the challenge for the wealthy is to navigate their resources with humility and stewardship, recognizing that true richness is measured not by material abundance but by one's relationship with God and the acts of mercy and justice performed in His name. By using wealth to serve others and glorify God, rather than succumbing to its potential pitfalls, individuals can align their earthly possessions with their spiritual growth and work toward accumulating eternal treasures in the Kingdom of Heaven.

A man should aim to achieve salvation through a process of healing

God created man in His image and likeness—both male and female (Genesis 1:26-28). This was the original state of humanity: God-like and full of glory. God formed man's body from dust and breathed into him the breath of life, making him a living being with a body, soul, and the grace of the Holy Spirit. He granted man dominion over all earthly creatures, entrusting him with the role of steward.

The fall of mankind occurred when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, resulting in the loss of their original glory and the realization of their nakedness

(Genesis 3:6-7). By eating the forbidden fruit, they violated God’s commandment, fully aware of the consequence: death—a spiritual death through separation from God and the loss of the grace of the Holy Spirit (Genesis 2:16-17).⁴³ This knowledge of good and evil subjected humanity to sin, separating us from God and depriving us of the Tree of Life, which symbolizes eternal life.

The act of disobedience was a sinful choice made with free will—an expression of self-love, pride, and covetousness. Saint Maximus identified self-love as the root cause of all passions, replacing the love of God.⁴⁴ The consequence of this ancestral sin is mortality, and the fear of death fosters an inclination toward committing sins. It is important to note that the Orthodox Church teaches that man is not born with sin but with a propensity to sin due to the consequences of the fall.⁴⁵ Beyond death and sin, a third consequence is suffering: “sweat, toil, hunger, thirst, weariness, sorrow, pain, suffering, sickness, tribulations, tragedy, and tears”.⁴⁶ Man is still called to be a diligent steward, but whereas this role was free of suffering before the fall, it now requires enduring the hardships and challenges of a fallen world. This suffering helps us to heal from our spiritual sicknesses, that is from our sins, being away from God.⁴⁷

Therefore, what is our goal in this fallen world? It is to restore our original state before the fall. This restoration requires overcoming the consequences of the fall—conquering death and reestablishing communion with God. This also requires us to replace our self-love with the love of

⁴³ The Orthodox Study Bible, 7.

⁴⁴ John Zizioulas, *Illness and Healing in Orthodox Theology*, trans. J.W. Lillie (Alhambra, California: Sebastian Press, 2016), 29.

⁴⁵ The Orthodox Study Bible, 7.

⁴⁶ The Orthodox Study Bible, 7.

⁴⁷ Liviu Pecteu, “Orthodox Saints Speaking on Illness,” *Romanian Journal of Artistic Creativity* 5, no. 3 (2017): 45–55, 45.

God – healing from the self-love disease that causes all sins and being again with God.⁴⁸ Such restoration was made possible only through the Incarnation of the Word, and the suffering, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the Perfect Man and Perfect God.⁴⁹ Our faith in Christ, His passion, sacrifice, and resurrection, is the cornerstone of our healing from sin and our journey toward being restored to God’s image and likeness. Said differently, Christ acts as our Physician, the Healer of our souls and bodies, and we as His patients are called to follow His prescriptions, which were revealed to us.

By sending us His Lamb—His Sacrifice—God demonstrates His ultimate and unconditional love. This love is incomprehensible, as God’s love cannot be fully understood or compared to human love.⁵⁰ The nature of the Creator is beyond comparison with that of the created. What we can grasp is what has been revealed to us through the suffering, death, and resurrection of God the Son, and the grace, comfort, and purification offered by the Holy Spirit.

By conquering death, Christ opens the doors to our salvation, an act of mercy that is beyond measure. In response, we are called to extend mercy to others as if each person were Christ Himself. After the resurrection, it is up to us, with our free will, to place our faith in Christ, to know Him, and to follow His path of righteousness, suffering, and mercy in order to attain salvation.

⁴⁸ John Zizioulas, *Illness and Healing in Orthodox Theology*, trans. J.W. Lillie (Alhambra, California: Sebastian Press, 2016), 30-31.

⁴⁹ John Meyendorff, “New Life in Christ: Salvation in Orthodox Theology,” *Theological Studies* 50, no. 3 (September 1989): 481–99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398905000304>, 494.

⁵⁰ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., Ltd, 2005), 33-37.

It is crucial to recognize that our attempts at righteousness, love, suffering, and acts of mercy are merely imitations of God's love, mercy, righteousness, and Christ's suffering. We are infinitely inferior and incomparable to Him. Saint Paul beautifully describes the essence of faith and fellowship in Christ's suffering, righteousness, and detachment from earthly attachments, all while holding hope in the resurrection, in these verses from Philippians:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:7-11).

God does not need our acts of mercy and is totally independent of the created. The acts of mercy, our demonstrated love to Him and our brethren (all mankind), are for our salvation. Almsgiving, in addition to prayers and fasting, are spiritual disciplines to assist us in our healing process, the healing process from sin, the healing process that leads to our purification, the illumination of our souls, and the attainment of Theosis, that is the everlasting ascend towards communion with God.⁵¹

Almsgiving is vital for salvation

Almsgiving, understood as “doing acts of mercy,” is a cornerstone of Christian life, deeply rooted in Scripture, Orthodox Tradition, and Liturgy. Alongside prayer and fasting, almsgiving is one of the three spiritual disciplines emphasized in Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1-18) and holds particular significance during Great Lent. The Orthodox Church teaches that

⁵¹ 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>

almsgiving is not merely a charitable obligation but a vital practice for our spiritual growth, remission of sins, and ultimate salvation. It embodies the love of Christ, who identified Himself with the poor and needy, as illustrated in the Gospel reading on Meat-fare Sunday, where the righteous are separated from the unrighteous based on their acts of mercy (Matthew 25:31-46). These acts are not only expressions of compassion but also fulfill Christ's great commandment to love our neighbor, reflecting our love for God. The connection between almsgiving, forgiveness, and spiritual detachment from material wealth forms a pathway to salvation, emphasizing that faith, while essential, must be accompanied by works. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus concluded on the commandment to “love your neighbor”, as the “first and greatest of the commandments, the sum of the law and the prophets”, especially when it comes to showing mercy to the poor:

I must conclude that love of the poor, and compassion and sympathy for our own flesh and blood, is its most excellent form [of love]. No better sacrifice can be offered to God than mercy, since no other thing is more proper to God, before whom mercy and truth march [Ps 89:14 (88:14 LXX)] and to whom mercy is to be offered rather than condemnation. And God, who makes just recompense and weighs our mercy with his balance and scales, will repay human kindness with the same kindness.⁵²

Almsgiving is first mentioned among the three spiritual disciplines declared in The Sermon on the Mountain (Matthew 6:1-18). The Orthodox Church places great importance on this discipline during Great Lent, in addition to praying and fasting, due to its vitality for our remission of sins and salvation. Saint Basil warns us to neglect almsgiving while practicing praying and fasting, for all are needed for salvation:

I know many who fast, pray, sigh, and demonstrate every manner of piety, so long as it costs them nothing, yet would not part with the penny to help those in distress. Of what

⁵² Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 14: On the love of the poor. Translated in Rhee, “Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity”, 78.

profit to them is the remainder of their virtue? The Kingdom of Heaven does not receive such people.⁵³

Saint Gregory Nyssa charged the fasting faithful to give generously to the poor, hungry, and ill. Out of fear of God, He instructs them to treat the poor evenly, as if they are taking care of themselves and their family. He encouraged them to take the opportunity to help them, curing the hunger of the poor and the greed of the fasting people: “With self-control, avoid two contrary evils: your own gluttony and the hunger of your brothers and sisters...Grab the afflicted one as Gold”.⁵⁴

On the third Sunday of the three-week period before Great Lent, we celebrate Meat-fare or the Sunday of Judgment. Christ is the righteous Judge, who will separate the sheep (righteous) from the goats (unrighteous) based on their deeds. This Sunday’s Gospel reading is Matthew 25:31-46, where Christ clearly states that almsgiving is the measure of man’s judgment. The ones who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, host the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned, are the ones who will “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). Almsgiving to the needy are acts of mercy to Christ himself, for Christ said “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). Acts of mercy, therefore, are the fulfillment of the great commandment of Christ to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39), seeing Christ in everyone, especially the poor, needy and weak.⁵⁵ Based on works, the sheep will be rewarded eternal life, while the goats who do not perform acts of mercy are doomed to everlasting

⁵³ Saint Basil the Great, Homily “to the rich man”, section 3. Translated in Schroeder, “On Social Justice”, 46.

⁵⁴ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, On the love of the poor. Translated in Rhee, “Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity”, 72.

⁵⁵ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1319.

punishment (Matthew 25:46). Saint Gregory of Nazianzus commented on Matthew 25:31-46 with fear:

Do you think that kindness to your neighbor is not an obligation upon you, but a matter of choice? Not a law, but merely an exhortation? I wish that this were so very much myself, but I am terrified by the goats summoned by the sovereign Judge to be on his left hand with his rebukes against him [see Matt 25:31-46]. They are condemned to be put on that side, not because they have committed theft, sacrilege, or adultery, or have done something else forbidden, but because they have not cared for Christ in the person of the poor!⁵⁶

The following Sunday, at the onset of Great Lent, we celebrate the Sunday of Forgiveness, also known as the Cheese-Fare Sunday. This Sunday's Gospel reading is Matthew 6:14-21, where Christ instructed us, first, to forgive others, so the Father will forgive us, thus our forgiveness of others is the precondition to receive God's forgiveness. Second, the reading tells us how to fast, not like hypocrites. The third theme instructs us to trust fully in God, which is attaching ourselves to God; the true treasure.⁵⁷ Trusting in God mandates that our hearts should not be focused on earthly treasures but heavenly treasures (Matthew 6:19-20). There is a connection between the Sunday of Judgment and the Sunday of Forgiveness, and the connection is to attain God's forgiveness and mercy, we need to be forgiving and merciful of our fellow man. A heart that is focused on God is a heart unattached to materialism, a heart that is full of love, a heart that cannot be hard on others, a heart that demonstrates love and mercy to others through giving, and a heart that is repentant and worthy of salvation.

Some claim that faith is the only precondition to be saved, basing their argument on verses such as "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift

⁵⁶ Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 14: On the love of the poor. Translated in Rhee, "Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity", 84.

⁵⁷ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1278.

of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10). The Orthodox Church refutes such claim, for first and foremost man is saved “by” grace, as God’s grace is infinite and uncreated. Faith comes second, for it is limited and can grow, thus we are saved “through” faith. That said, “Good works flow out of authentic faith”, so the ones who receive the gift of eternal life will surely do good works. Thus, “we are not saved by good works, but “for” good works”.⁵⁸ Our original nature is good, and we were created originally for good works, yet we are also created with the grace of free will, which gives us the freedom to do good works according to our original nature or do sinful acts according to our fallen and disobedient state.

Therefore, there is a unity between grace, faith, and works, and the connection is inseparable; we are saved by grace, through faith, and for good works.⁵⁹ It is also true that Saint Paul was always worrisome of the faithful to boast of their good works, for the motive of works should be pure in our hearts; “that your charitable deeds may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly” (Matthew 6:4). Moreover, Saint Paul himself mentions works as the basis for judgment; “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Saint Paul never excluded works, as an example⁶⁰, he said in Galatians (6:9-10): “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we

⁵⁸ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1600.

⁵⁹ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1600.

⁶⁰ Other examples, Titus 3:8; Hebrews 10:24; Hebrews 13:16.

shall reap if we do not lose heart”.⁶¹ Consequently, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith”. Hence, for the ones that claim salvation based on faith only, their claim is a misinterpretation and selective of Scripture. Besides, such a claim disregards the importance of repentance and abstaining from sinful acts, as part of our struggle to acquire the grace of salvation.

Saint James focused on the importance of man’s works for his salvation, as he is justified by it and not only by faith (James 2:23). For even the demons believe, so the believer is saved due to his righteousness and alms.⁶² He even denounces the faith to be dead, if a man’s works does not reflect mercifulness to the needy:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus, also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:14-17)

More so, acts of mercy assist us in growing spiritually, where we demonstrate our detachment from riches, prioritizing our love for our neighbors, which is our love for God. By doing so, we are imitating God’s love and generosity, and ascending ourselves towards Theosis. Saint Gregory of Nyssa spoke of the effect of mercy giving: “Mercy and good deeds are works God loves; they divinize those who practice them and impress them into the likeness of goodness, that they may become the image of the Primordial Being”.⁶³ Therefore, almsgiving to the needy

⁶¹ See also 1 Timothy 6:17-19, when warning the wealthy Christians from pride and trusting in riches, encouraging them to share what they have, give alms, and do good works.

⁶² The Cappadocian fathers and Saint John Chrysostom share the same understanding when it comes to the vitality of good works to be saved. For example, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus says: “action is a good thing...because it receives Christ as its guest and cares for him, revealing the power of love by its good works”, Oration 14: On the love of the poor. Translated in Rhee, “Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity”, 78.

⁶³ Quoted in Geleris, Money & Salvation, 31.

should be looked at as an opportunity to experience God's love and ascend toward Him, and not as an obligation fueled by fear of punishment despite our sorrow to lose wealth. Saint John Chrysostom said "The rich exist for the sake of the poor. The poor exist for the salvation of the rich".⁶⁴ In his letter to the people of Antioch, Saint John Chrysostom was calling for total equality, for why life necessities such as air, water and sunshine are equally available for all, and money is not common to all? He justifies this due to the greed of the rich and their stealing from the poor. Then, he reminded himself that if all is common, then there is no opportunity for almsgiving and charitable works.⁶⁵ Thus, having all material possessions in common limits our ways to achieve salvation, and also goes against the imperfect fallen world. The following is part of Tobit's instruction to Tobias, and stresses the importance of almsgiving to achieve salvation:

Do almsgiving from your possessions to all who do righteousness. When you do almsgiving, do not let your eye be envious. Do not turn your face away from any poor man, so the face of God will not be turned away from you. Do almsgiving based on the quantity of your possessions. If you possess only a few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. You are storing up a good treasure for yourself in the day of necessity. For almsgiving delivers us from death and prevents us from entering into the darkness. Indeed, almsgiving is a good gift for all who do it before the Most High. (Tobit 4:7-11)

According to Saint Maximus the Confessor, the root of all passions is self-love, thus, who "He who drives out self-love, the mother of the passions, will with God's help easily rid himself of the rest, such as anger, irritation, rancor and so on. But he who is dominated by self-love is overpowered by the other passions, even against his will".⁶⁶ The commandment "You shall love

⁶⁴ Quoted in Geleris, Money & Salvation, 31.

⁶⁵ Saint John Chrysostom, To the people of Antioch. Translated in Rhee, "Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity", 88-89.

⁶⁶ST Maximus the Confessor, "St Maximos the Confessor: Four Hundred Texts on Love," orthodoxchurchfathers.com, n.d., <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/philokalia/st-maximos-the-confessor-four-hundred-texts-on-love.html>, Second Century, 8.

your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39) serves as a prescription to heal the disease of self-love, which is the source of all sins. In the Sermon on the Mount, almsgiving is presented as the first among spiritual practices. Acts of mercy, therefore, most clearly demonstrate love for others and, in turn, have the greatest healing effect on self-love. Consequently, the more you express love for your neighbor through almsgiving, the more you purify yourself from self-love and advance on the path to salvation.⁶⁷

To reiterate, of course, almsgiving and acts of mercy are not merely optional charitable deeds but essential components of our spiritual journey and salvation. The Orthodox Christian faith emphasizes the profound connection between faith, good works, and salvation. While righteousness and avoiding sin are critical, God also calls us to actively demonstrate our faith and love for Him through our merciful actions toward others. As Christ teaches, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). This divine promise highlights that our forgiveness and mercy toward our neighbors will be met with Christ's forgiveness and mercy toward us. Moreover, our efforts to imitate God's love and generosity, though they may fall short of His infinite grace, play a vital role in our spiritual purification and healing. These acts help us to restore our original nature, created in the image of God, and bring us closer to Theosis. As Saint Gregory of Nyssa and Saint John Chrysostom remind us, almsgiving and good deeds are means through which we ascend toward God, becoming more like Him in love and compassion. Thus, the rich and the poor, the giver and the receiver, are bound together in a spiritual economy where

⁶⁷ 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, 376; Junghun Bae, "John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Therapy of the Soul" (Ph.D. Thesis, 2018), https://acuresearchbank.acu.edu.au/download/2f3b0fb4db1546ba8564858189f562e6072692637aa8e46acaa5d889930f3d03/3705951/Bae_2018_John_Chrysostom_on_almsgiving_and_the.pdf, 209.

the practice of mercy leads to salvation for all.⁶⁸ Therefore, let us embrace almsgiving not out of obligation or fear, but as a sacred opportunity to experience God's love, participate in His divine nature, and fulfill His commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Almsgiving is specifically essential for the salvation of the rich

The rich man, though wealthy in material possessions, is often poor in spirit due to his inclination toward sin. In contrast, the poor tend to be closer to God, making them richer in spirit. The rich man requires greater effort to achieve spiritual healing because his lack of suffering and detachment from God often leads to material possessions becoming an idol. On the other hand, the poor man, through his suffering and lack of material wealth, often has a heart that is more inclined toward God, making his spiritual healing more attainable. Saint James, the brother of Christ, emphasizes this contrast, highlighting how the poor tend to be rich in faith, while the rich often struggle with spiritual poverty.

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? (James 2:5-7)

In commenting on the previous verses The Orthodox Study Bible highlights how the poor, through their suffering, are more likely to repent and turn toward God.⁶⁹ Their experiences of worldly emptiness lead them to focus on spirituality and salvation, rejecting materialism in favor of seeking the Kingdom of God.⁷⁰ This orientation toward God makes them rich in the fear of God,

⁶⁸ Dumitrașcu, "Poverty and Wealth in the Orthodox Spirituality (with Special Reference to St. John Chrysostom)", 301.

⁶⁹ See also Archpriest Chad Hatfield, "Sin, Sickness, and Salvation," *Christian Bioethics* 12, no. 2 (August 1, 2006): 199–211, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803600600805583>, 202.

⁷⁰ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1676.

which naturally progresses to the love of God, inspiring them to avoid sin and practice acts of mercy (Tobit 4:21). In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Lazarus suffered from extreme poverty and illness, yet his suffering made him wise, content, and patient (Luke 16:19-31).⁷¹ On the contrary, the lack of suffering of the rich man, living a lavish and selfish life, leads him to be wicked and uncompassionate, not helping the poor. The results for both were clear in the parable. The poor and virtuous man was given the honor of being accompanied by the angels to Abraham's bosom, enjoying eternity in the Kingdom of Heaven, while the rich man was sent to eternal torments in Hades. Both judgments were final, and especially for the rich man, there is no hope for salvation after death.

That said, as demonstrated earlier, being rich does not always result in downfall, nor does being poor always lead to salvation. If a rich man's heart remains focused on God, humble, and detached from wealth—using his riches for virtuous acts and almsgiving—the doors to salvation are open to him. Even though he has the potential to oppress, boast, and succumb to various temptations, he chooses not to, thereby passing a greater test, as highlighted in the following verses.

Blessed is a rich man who is found blameless, And does not chase after gold. Who is he? And we shall call him blessed, For he has worked wonders among his people. Who has been tested by it and found perfect? He has ground for boasting. Who was able to transgress but did not transgress? Who was able to commit evil but did not do it? His good things will be strengthened, And the assembly will talk of his almsgiving. (Wisdom of Sirach 31:8-11)

Christ blessed the poor and the hungry (Luke 6:20-21), and woes the rich and full (Luke 6:24-25). That said, reading one or a few verses while neglecting others is a mistake. For in Matthew (5:3), Christ blessed the “poor in spirit, that is”, that is not only the materially poor but

⁷¹ ST John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P Roth (Yonkers, New York: ST Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2020), 37.

also the one who has the heart of the poor – a heart that is dependent on God, humble, virtuous, and merciful.⁷² Also, Christ blesses the merciful, righteous, and pure in heart (Matthew 5:6-8), thus if those are true for a rich man, then the blessings also apply. Admittedly, the odds are lower for a rich man, but nothing is impossible. Besides, to achieve social justice, the poor need to exist and the rich too, for almsgiving requires a giver and receiver, and visa-versa. Thus, the poor provide an opportunity for the rich to achieve salvation, and the rich imitate God's generosity on his fellow icon of Christ, resulting in the relief of the poor and strengthening their faith and trust in God. This reciprocal relationship between the poor and the rich resembles the communion of the brothers and sisters in Christ, the compassion to all humans as Icons of Christ, and the communion of the faithful with Christ and His Church, following His commandments and imitating His love, generosity, and compassion and offering for His Glory, thanking Him for His gifts, and working for salvation, which without His sacrifice, it was not possible.

Christ came to heal not only physical ailments but primarily spiritual sickness, which manifests as living in sin. In response to the Pharisees' criticism for associating with sinners and tax collectors—who were despised in society—Christ said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Matthew 9:12).⁷³ He further declared, “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’. For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, for repentance” (Matthew 9:12). Thus, the Son of Man came to “seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10), a declaration by Christ to Zacchaeus, who was a rich tax collector and redeemed

⁷² The Orthodox Study Bible, 1273.

⁷³ See also Mark 2:17.

himself in front of Christ by saying, “Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor, and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold” (Luke 19:8).

Notice that Zacchaeus’s heart was healed through his generous actions, yet he remained wealthy. Christ did not demand that Zacchaeus relinquish all his possessions, unlike the young rich man (Matthew 19:21) or Levi the tax collector (Luke 5:27-28). This illustrates that Christ, as the Divine Physician, prescribes what is necessary for each individual’s healing, emphasizing faith and good works to demonstrate one’s attachment to God, not material possessions. The goal is not to eradicate wealth but to transform the hearts of the wealthy who are attached to earthly treasures to be dominated by the love of God. Perfection may be unattainable in its fullness now, as we are incomparable to the Creator, but gradual transformation through His grace leads us closer to it.

Returning to the concept of stewardship, the wealthy should recognize that their possessions are entrusted to them by God. While their wealth may result from hard work and wise decisions, it is ultimately God’s providence and judgment that enabled its accumulation. Andrew Geleris points out that prerequisites for wealth include physical and mental health, intelligence, favorable personal circumstances, and luck—all of which are gifts from God.⁷⁴ Therefore, wealth is both a product of human effort and divine grace. Scripture reveals that the purpose of wealth is not merely to satisfy personal needs but to support acts of mercy and the Church. Material possessions cannot be taken into the afterlife; as Scripture states, “We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Timothy 6:7). For those mature in faith, the focus should be on accumulating treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20), recognizing that material wealth is an illusion compared to the true value of communion with God. In reality, although

⁷⁴ Geleris, *Money & Salvation*, 50-51.

material possessions assist us in this life and for our salvation, they are finite and nontransferable to eternal life.⁷⁵

Some might argue that accumulating wealth is necessary for personal and family needs, such as retirement or inheritance. However, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs us not to worry about material needs but to trust in God and seek His Kingdom first (Matthew 6:31-34). Saint Paul echoes this sentiment, advising us not to be anxious (Philippians 4:6), and Saint Peter encourages us to cast our anxieties on God because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). Saint Basil further challenges those who use such excuses to avoid acts of mercy, warning that they face judgment similar to those who are unsocial, uncompassionate, and unmerciful:

Yet while it is uncertain whether you will have need of this buried gold, the losses you incur from your inhuman behavior are not at all uncertain... as you are burying your wealth, you entomb with it your heart... But when you have the opportunity to exchange corruptible things for the Kingdom of Heaven, you shed tears, spurning the one who asks you and refusing to give anything, while contriving a million excuses for your own expenditure.⁷⁶

In the Parable of the Sower, Christ illustrates that the seed sown among thorns represents those who "hear the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22). These individuals are described as being choked by "cares, riches, and pleasures of life," which hinder their ability to truly hear the word (Luke 8:14). Conversely, the seed sown on good ground symbolizes those who "hear the word and understand it," and who "bears fruit and produces, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matthew 13:23). Christ describes such a person as one who hears the word with a noble and good

⁷⁵ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Letter to Timothy*. Translated in Rhee, "Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity", 99.

⁷⁶ Saint Basil the Great, *Homily "to the rich man"*, section 3. Translated in Schroeder, "On Social Justice", 45-47.

heart, keeps it, and produces fruit with patience (Luke 8:15). This parable underscores the earlier points: genuine faith leads to acts of mercy, and God rewards such faithfulness both materially and spiritually. Andrew Geleris describes this as a choice for the wealthy to elevate their standards of giving rather than merely increasing their standards of living.⁷⁷ This choice reflects spiritual maturity, where faith results in generosity and righteousness. Paradoxically, as one matures spiritually and becomes more generous, one receives more in return.

To conclude this section, the rich man, despite his material abundance, often faces greater spiritual challenges due to his attachment to wealth, which can become an idol, leading to spiritual poverty. Conversely, the poor, through their experiences of suffering and material lack, may find their hearts more readily inclined toward God, making their spiritual healing more attainable. However, being wealthy does not inherently preclude one from salvation. If the rich person's heart remains humble, focused on God, and detached from their material possessions, they can achieve spiritual healing and salvation. The key lies in how one uses their wealth—whether to elevate their standards of giving rather than merely their standards of living. As such, the relationship between the rich and the poor is not merely transactional but a reflection of the communal and reciprocal nature of faith, where both groups play a role in each other's salvation. Ultimately, Christ's mission to heal both physical and spiritual ailments underscores the need for repentance, faith, and good works. Whether rich or poor, the focus should be on aligning one's heart with God, demonstrating mercy, and using one's resources in a way that fosters spiritual growth and assists in our journey for salvation.

⁷⁷ Geleris, *Money & Salvation*, 52.

Almsgiving should be granted to the poor and the Church

In the teachings of Christ and His Orthodox Church, the call to aid the poor and marginalized is central to the Christian life. The emphasis on suffering as a pathway to salvation and the transformative power of compassion underscores a profound commitment for the faithful. Christ's ministry was characterized by a profound empathy for the poor and suffering, a theme that resonates deeply throughout Scripture. From the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount to the teachings and actions of Jesus, the divine imperative to care for the vulnerable is evident. This mandate is not only a reflection of God's own concern but also a guiding principle for the faithful, as seen in both the Old and New Testaments. By examining the divine call to support the needy, we understand the profound connection between mercy, justice, and spiritual growth, which the Church continues to uphold today.

Christ always sided with the poor and weak, for suffering leads to salvation. The Orthodox Church has always taught that suffering has the potential to assist the faithful in progressing through the process of reaching Theosis.⁷⁸ Moreso, being merciful and active in relieving the suffering of others leads to salvation. At the beginning of His sermon on the mountain in Matthew (5:3-12), Christ started with the Beatitudes, blessing the poor in spirit⁷⁹, sorrowful⁸⁰, meek, hungry,

⁷⁸ Archpriest Chad Hatfield, "Sin, Sickness, and Salvation," *Christian Bioethics* 12, no. 2 (August 1, 2006): 199–211, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803600600805583>, 199.

⁷⁹ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1273, explains that in Hebrew poor means both, the materially poor and the Faithful. Poor in spirit means the one who has the heart of the poor, that is having the same attitude of the righteous poor who is totally dependent on God and not focused on materialistic possessions and earthly attachments.

⁸⁰ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1273, explains that the mourning here refers to the ones who are suffering in life, but also the ones who are mourning the suffering of others, the fallen state of this world, and their own sins. This type of sorrow is part of repentance, conversion, and virtuous actions, leading to infinite joy. The ungodly mourning is not included, though, such as the sadness that leads to despair and wrongful actions.

and thirsty for righteousness⁸¹, and persecuted. Their suffering will be rewarded with the Kingdom of heaven, comfort, inheritance of the earth, fullness, and Kingdom of heaven respectively. Those beatitudes describe “the joys of true discipleship, the blessed way of life”.⁸² In Luke (6:20), Christ blessed the poor, hungry, sorrowful, excluded, and hated for the Son of Man’s sake. In Matthew, the merciful, pure-at-heart, and peacemaker, all are active in doing righteousness, reducing the suffering of others, and reaching a high spiritual state, are also rewarded by obtaining God’s mercy, seeing God, and being called the sons of God respectively. Luke added the woes, the unspeakable destruction, and the utmost misery for the rich, full, laughing, and receivers of flattery; vices that are punished if they do not sacrifice their earthly blessings in showing mercy to others.⁸³

In Scripture, numerous categories of individuals are identified as weak, needy, vulnerable, and suffering, and we are commanded not to afflict but actively assist them. In contemporary terms, these groups can be considered as protected classes for whom we must demonstrate mercy to promote social justice. For instance, God explicitly warns against oppressing widows, orphans, and strangers, and taking advantage of their vulnerability through injustice (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 10:18; Deuteronomy 24:17). Such actions are condemned and even lead to divine curses (Deuteronomy 27:19). Instead, we are instructed to provide for these individuals and show mercy, ensuring that "the Lord your God may bless you in all the work you do" (Deuteronomy 14:29). Additionally, we are commanded to leave the edges of our fields unharvested so that widows, orphans, and strangers can gather the leftovers (Deuteronomy 24:19). Other vulnerable

⁸¹ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1273, explains that here the reference is not to merely the physical hunger and thirst, but also to the spiritual hunger and thirst, where the faithful is craving for what is right before God.

⁸² The Orthodox Study Bible, 1274.

⁸³ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1375.

groups include the physically sick and imprisoned. Christ's ministry included healing the blind, lame, crippled, and mute, demonstrating His compassion for those suffering from physical ailments. He also emphasized care for those in prison, showing concern for their well-being and acknowledging their suffering as part of our moral and spiritual duty. These biblical mandates highlight a profound ethical responsibility to support and uplift those who are marginalized and in need. By adhering to these principles, we contribute to a more just and compassionate society, reflecting the divine call to care for the most vulnerable among us.

A major category that requires our giving is the poor, encompassing those who are hungry, thirsty, and naked. Additionally, widows, orphans (the fatherless), the sick, and strangers—who often find themselves in dire need—also require our acts of mercy, including financial support. In essence, many of these groups fall under the broader category of the poor. God consistently sides with the poor and underscores the importance of aiding them. In His boundless love, God the Father sent His only begotten Son for our salvation. Though Christ, the Almighty, could have been born into wealth and influence, revealing Himself as a powerful King with infinite riches, He chose a different path. Instead, He entered the world in poverty, enduring suffering to achieve our salvation. As Saint Paul explains, “I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:8-9). This passage highlights the profound nature of Christ's humility and sacrifice, and it sets a powerful example for us to follow in our own acts of giving and compassion toward those in need. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus praised simplicity, humbleness, and contempt, for Christ chose to be incarnated and live as a poor man:

Humility is a good thing, and there are many examples of this on various sides; chief among them is the Savior and Lord of all, who not only humbled himself as far as taking “the form

of a slave” [Phil 2:6] or simply submit his face to the shame of being spat upon, and let himself be “numbered with transgressors” [Isa 50:6; 53:12; Luke 22:37] – he who purged the world of sin – but who also washed the feet of his disciples dressed as a slave.⁸⁴

God has a special concern for the poor and marginalized, a theme that is consistently reflected throughout both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God demonstrates His deep empathy and commitment to the poor in numerous ways. He listens to their cries, acts as their refuge and helper, and rewards their patience and suffering (Psalms 9:10-19). The Lord recognizes the sincerity of their hearts (Psalms 9:38) and promises to establish them in salvation (Psalms 34:10). Furthermore, God stands with the poor against their oppressors and will redeem their souls from exploitation and injustice (Psalms 71:13-24).

The Scriptures also instruct us to honor the poor, emphasizing that dishonoring them is equivalent to sinning while showing mercy to them brings blessings (Proverbs 14:20-21). God’s disapproval is pronounced against those who oppress and humiliate the poor, indicating that such actions provoke Him directly (Proverbs 14:31; Proverbs 17:5). Saint Gregory of Nyssa taught on respecting the poor: “Do not despise these people in their abjection; do not think they merit no respect. Reflect on who they are and you will understand their dignity; they have taken upon them the person of the Savior”.⁸⁵

Supporting those whom God advocates for is both a commandment and a blessing, as Proverbs affirms: “He who shows mercy to the poor will himself be supported” and “gains victory and honor,” while “he who buys him takes away his soul” (Proverbs 22:9-10). This divine

⁸⁴ Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 14: On the love of the poor. Translated in Rhee, “Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity”, 77.

⁸⁵ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, On the love of the poor. Translated in Rhee, “Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity”, 73.

attraction to the poor is not limited to the Old Testament. Jesus' ministry in the New Testament continues this theme, showing a profound commitment to the marginalized and downtrodden, reflecting God's enduring concern and care for those in need. Saint Gregory of Nyssa emphasized how the Lord Jesus Christ hears the poor, giving them his own person, and assigning them as the doorkeeper of the Kingdom:

For he, the compassionate one, has given them his own person in order to shame the unmerciful and the haters of the poor – just as people lift up images of the emperor against those who would do them violence, putting their despisers to shame by the likeness of the prince. The poor are the treasures of the good things that we look for, the doorkeepers of the kingdom, opening its gates to the merciful and shutting them on the harsh and uncharitable. They are the strongest accusers, the best of defenders – not that they accuse or defend in words, but that the Lord beholds what is done towards them, and every deed cries louder to him who searches all hearts than the herald's trumpet.⁸⁶

In addition to the needy, the Old Testament specifies that the Levites have the right to receive a portion of the tithe and alms, as they serve God through their work in the temple (Deuteronomy 14:29; 26:12-13). This principle extends to those devoted to serving the Church and supporting its ministries. Furthermore, the Church is responsible for distributing what it receives to the poor based on their needs and the Church's discernment and priorities, as seen in Acts 4:34-37.

Andrew Geleris mentioned four reasons why tithe and charitable donations should preferably be given to the local parish rather than directly to the poor or various organizations. First, the tenth is a commandment to be given to the Church. Second, when giving to the Church, the donor is giving to the Glory of God in secret, and the needy receive the gift without any focus on a specific individual to thank, rather, rightfully, his thanksgiving will be focused on God.

⁸⁶ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, On the love of the poor. Translated in Rhee, "Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity", 73.

Besides, the poor man's dignity will be preserved. Third, if a person gives directly and openly, this might create unhealthy interpersonal dynamics and relationships, ruining the heart of the donor and creating awkwardness, which might also ruin the heart of the receiver. Fourth, spiritual maturity arguably might be higher at the collective level, and setting priorities on how and where to spend the money might be more comprehensive, wiser, just, and objective.

The biblical mandate to support the poor and marginalized reveals a divine alignment with those who suffer and a call to act with compassion and justice. Through both Old and New Testament teachings, we see a consistent emphasis on the importance of aiding the vulnerable, whether through direct support or, even better, through the Church's collective efforts. Christ's own life and teachings exemplify this call, as He chose to identify with the poor and teach His followers the true meaning of mercy and righteousness. As modern Christians, reflecting on these scriptural principles guides us in our own acts of charity and service. Ultimately, our commitment to the poor and needy and Christ's Church reflects our spiritual maturity and our journey towards Theosis, embodying the love and justice that God calls us to manifest.

These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone

The practice of offering to God has been a central aspect of worship throughout the history of salvation, from the earliest days of humanity to the present. Far from being a mere obligation, these offerings embody our relationship with the Divine, reflecting our gratitude, devotion, and desire to align ourselves with God's will. In scripture, Tithe is a commandment and quantifiable. Otherwise, we are required to offer acts of mercy according to ability. Then, the issue of how much is raised, which is what this section aims to address.

The practice of offering to God has been a central aspect of worship throughout the history of salvation, from the earliest days of humanity to the present. Far from being a mere obligation,

these offerings embody our relationship with the Divine, reflecting our gratitude, devotion, and desire to align ourselves with God's will. The significance of offerings in Scripture is profound, revealing not only the nature of our worship but also the condition of our hearts. This discussion explores the theological foundations of offering as an act of worship, tracing its roots in biblical history and its continued relevance in Christian life today. By examining key examples from both the Old and New Testaments, we gain insight into how offerings are not about fulfilling God's needs but about transforming our own hearts, detaching from materialism, and growing in spiritual maturity.

As emphasized earlier, offerings to God are not commanded because He has any need of them. God is almighty, immortal, and sovereign over all creation, infinitely superior to us and beyond our comprehension. Thus, our offerings are not to fulfill His needs but to express our praise, thanksgiving, and desire to imitate His infinite love and generosity. They provide us with an opportunity to cleanse ourselves and receive the gift of salvation. In Scripture, offerings were either presented directly to God or given indirectly to our neighbors, who bear the image of Christ.

The first recorded offerings in the Bible are those of Cain and Abel. Cain brought an offering of fruit, while Abel offered the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions (Genesis 4:1-7). God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's. Cain's offering lacked sincerity; he gave out of obligation, not from a pure heart. His heart harbored passion, greed, envy, hatred, arrogance, and attachment to material possessions. Instead of responding to God's rejection with humility and repentance, Cain allowed envy and hatred to fester, ultimately leading him to murder his younger brother, whom he should have loved and followed in offering the right worship to God. Despite this, God, in His mercy, offered Cain a chance for redemption, yet Cain chose to sin further and

wander away “from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden” (Genesis 4:16).

Throughout the Old Testament, many others—Noah, Abraham, Job, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, and Elijah—worshipped God with burnt offerings, which are cited more than 300 times in Scripture.⁸⁷ Knowing that God does not need those offerings, it seems that those practices are wasteful, where such resources could be repurposed for better use, such as feeding the poor. That said, the real purpose of those offerings is to detach ourselves from material possessions and to refocus our hearts on God, worshiping, praising, and thanking Him. They imitate God’s love, generosity, and sacrifice by doing so. Therefore, out of the abundance that God entrusted to us, we symbolize our love to Him through offering what is essentially His. There is always an abundance to share with the poor and needy, and those blessed with resources are called to provide for them.

God the Father sacrificed His only begotten Son for our salvation, so our sacrifices, no matter how valuable, pale in comparison. No offering can ever come close to matching His sacrifice for our salvation. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, demonstrated this when she anointed Jesus’ feet with costly oil and wiped them with her hair (John 12:1-3). When Judas Iscariot, motivated by greed, suggested selling the oil and giving the money to the poor—though he intended to steal from it, as he controlled the money box and used to take from it (John 12:6)—Jesus replied, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me” (John 12:7-8). Jesus recognized Mary’s act as one of heartfelt worship, not wastefulness. She demonstrated her love by offering the best of what she owned, from

⁸⁷ Geleris, *Money & Salvation*, 41.

a heart detached from the love of riches. Sacrificial offerings were always meant to be the best of what was owned, given freely, and without obligation, guilt, or grief.

In the Old Testament, offerings of firstfruits (crops) and firstborn animals were required, alongside other mandatory, voluntary, and occasional offerings, though specific quantities were not always prescribed. These offerings primarily served as acts of worship, devotion, gratitude, and thanksgiving to the Lord, with each fulfilling various purposes. Some offerings were intended to atone for sins, support the priests, or foster fellowship among believers through shared meals.⁸⁸ Others were directed toward fundraising for specific projects⁸⁹ or seeking blessings from God⁹⁰, such as healing from illness or an abundant harvest.⁹¹ While the primary outcomes of these offerings were spiritual, they also addressed earthly needs and desires.

Notably, the most significant purpose for many offerings was to seek forgiveness for sins, especially on the Day of Atonement, an event that "prefigures the once-for-all self-sacrifice of Christ, our great High Priest".⁹² Christ offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of all, conquering death and making it possible for humanity to be redeemed and reconciled with God. Thus, no further animal sacrifice is necessary. What is asked of us now is to have faith, avoid sin, live virtuously, and offer acts of mercy.

⁸⁸ Example, Leviticus 23:10, where the fruits of the first harvest were ordered to be brought to the priest; Examples Leviticus 16; Deuteronomy 12; Exodus 29. The offerings were a means to reconcile with God and forgiveness of sins, in addition, to restoring harmony among the believers.

⁸⁹ Exodus 35, where offerings were made to construct the Tabernacle. Ezra 2:68-69, where offerings were collected to build the second Temple.

⁹⁰ Example, Genesis 28:20-22, where Jacob asked the Lord for food and clothes.

⁹¹ Example, Proverbs 3:9-10: "Honor the Lord from y our righteous labors, And offer Him the firstfruits from the fruits of y our righteousness, That y our storehouses may be filled with abundance of grain, And y our winepresses may gush with wine.

⁹² The Orthodox Study Bible, 140. See also Hebrews 4:14-5:10; 10:19-22.

In addition to the offerings of firstfruits and firstborns, Scripture commands other forms of material giving. For instance, God instructed that the land should not be harvested completely. If any crops or fruits were left behind, they should not be collected afterward (Leviticus 19:9-10; Leviticus 23:22). This directive also applied to trees, such as olive trees and vineyards. The purpose of this commandment was to provide for the poor, orphans, widows, and strangers (Deuteronomy 24:19). Moreover, in the seventh year, the land was to be left fallow, and whatever it produced was to be left for the poor (Exodus 23:10-11). This form of giving is indirect, as the needy benefit without the landowner's direct involvement, preserving the dignity of the recipients and preventing the giver from boasting.

Another example is God's command regarding lending: the wealthy were directed to lend to the poor without charging interest and in accordance with their needs (Exodus 22:24; Leviticus 25:35-37; Deuteronomy 15:7-11). Furthermore, if a debtor could not repay, he was not to be enslaved but hired as a worker until the debt was settled or released in the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:39-40). Additionally, all debts were to be forgiven every seventh year (Deuteronomy 15:1-2). Attempts to evade these laws, such as neglecting land care in the year before the sabbatical or withholding loans as the Year of Jubilee approached, were condemned as sinful and contrary to the spirit of the law (Deuteronomy 15:9). Loans were to be given willingly and compassionately, without regret or reluctance (Deuteronomy 15:7-11). These laws on debt and lending aimed to foster social justice, encourage acts of mercy, and promote a sense of community while mitigating oppression and alleviating suffering.

Other instances of giving in Scripture are for specific purposes, such as contributions for constructing temples or churches (Exodus 35:4-9; 1 Chronicles 29:1-9), supporting evangelization, ministries, and the faithful communities (Acts 4:34-35; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14; Romans 12:13; 2

Corinthians 8:3-4), as well as seeking blessings like healing from diseases and safe childbirth (Leviticus 12-15). These offerings, whether requested or voluntary, reflect devotion to God, gratitude, trust, and a spirit of cheerful giving.

Additionally, some offerings are linked to vows, where individuals pledge to offer something in return for divine intervention to meet a specific need or desire. For example, Jacob vowed to worship God, build Him a temple, and give a tenth of his possessions in exchange for divine protection and provision until he returned to his father's house (Genesis 28:20-22). Another instance is Hannah's vow that if God granted her a child, she would dedicate him to the Lord's service (1 Samuel 1:10-11). Such vows are voluntary and signify serious commitments. If God fulfills the request, fulfilling the vow becomes a solemn obligation. Failing to keep a vow, once made, is considered a sin and carries consequences (Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Ecclesiastes 5:4-6).

Mentioned 54 times in the Bible, the tithe—or tenth—ranks as the third most frequently referenced commandment for giving, following burnt offerings and firstfruits. The tithe, which is ten percent of one's income, is a commandment meant to express gratitude, strengthen our relationship with God, and provide an opportunity for divine blessing. It is given to God, specifically to the Church, and is considered "holy to the Lord" (Leviticus 27:30). The tithe serves to support the needs of priests and assist the resident alien, fatherless, and widow—essentially, the poor and needy (Deuteronomy 14:29). Like all offerings, the tithe should be given with a cheerful heart, and in return, the Lord promises blessings both spiritual, such as joy, deeper prayer, and a closer relationship with Him, and material, including increased income (Wisdom of Sirach 35:1-10).

While the tithe is a Divine and Holy commandment, it is also an opportunity for spiritual growth and devotion. It is both a materialistic issue and, most importantly, a spiritual issue.⁹³ While the tithe is a divine commandment, it is also an opportunity for spiritual growth and devotion. However, Christ cautions against a mere mechanical adherence to the tithe, pointing out that focusing solely on it while neglecting "the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith" is hypocritical (Matthew 23:23). Therefore, faith, justice, and mercy are also essential, and our giving should extend beyond the tithe based on our ability and the needs we encounter. The law should guide us thoughtfully, not merely as a checklist but as a means to embody a deeper spiritual commitment.

Christ consistently emphasized the importance of giving to the poor, weak, and needy. However, His concern extends beyond merely addressing the needs of others; He is equally focused on the salvation of the giver. Throughout Scripture, Christ highlights the virtue and necessity of generosity. In some instances, He calls individuals to relinquish all their possessions and follow Him, essentially asking them to give up 100% of their wealth. This radical call is not made to everyone but is directed toward those who require such a profound shift to cleanse their hearts. For some, their attachment to worldly treasures impedes their spiritual growth and the pursuit of heavenly treasures. Christ's call aims to purify their hearts and redirect their focus from material wealth to spiritual richness.

The Cappadocian fathers and Saint John Chrysostom leaned towards giving and receiving wealth among all so all would be ultimately equal, achieving ultimate justice. Saint John Chrysostom went as far as declaring money should be of common ownership, like air, water, and

⁹³ Geleris, Money & Salvation, 69-70.

sunshine.⁹⁴ Saint John believed that as we get baptized, we are transformed and start our participation in the Kingdom of Heaven, where all should be dignified and equal citizens in His Kingdom.⁹⁵ The Cappadocian fathers and Saint John many times called to give all to Christ, to achieve perfection, following the parable of the rich man. For God wants 100% of your heart and total detachment from self-love.⁹⁶ That said, they realize that this level of perfection is too much to ask for, so the least should be that the rich should continue giving until there is no needy, that is no one should not be able to address their necessities within the community, as Saint Gregory of Nyssa and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus elaborate:

All things belong to God, our common Father. We are all the same stock, all brothers and sisters. And when people are siblings, the best and most equitable thing is that they should inherit equal portions. The second best is that even if one or two take the greater part, the others should have at least their own share. But if one man should seek to be absolute possessor of all, refusing even a third or a fifth to his siblings, then he is a cruel tyrant, a savage with whom there can be no dealing, an insatiate beast gloatingly shutting its jaws over the meal it will not share.⁹⁷

Either we must give everything away for Christ's sake, so that we may become his true followers, taking up our cross; so that we might confidently soar towards the world on high, well equipped and unencumbered; so that we might gain Christ at the cost of everything else, exalted through humility and made rich by our poverty. Or we must share our goods with Christ, so that our possession of them may at least be made holy by our possessing them well, by sharing them with those who have nothing. Even if I were to sow for myself alone, I would still be sowing what others would later eat.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies on the First Letter to Timothy. Translated in Rhee, "Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity", 102.

⁹⁵ Emmanuel Clapsis. 2011. "The Dignity of the Poor and Almsgiving in St. John Chrysostom." *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 56 (1-4): 55-87.

⁹⁶ Thomas Zell, "The Trail of the Tithe," Holy Cross Orthodox Church, 2024, <https://www.holycrossoca.org/newslet/1602.html>.

⁹⁷ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, On the love of the poor. Translated in Rhee, "Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity", 74.

⁹⁸ Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 14: On the love of the poor. Translated in Rhee, "Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity", 81.

The tithe, as a commandment, is relatively straightforward to fulfill because it is quantifiable, with clear frequencies and designated uses.⁹⁹ However, beyond the tithe and other scriptural instances of giving, charitable contributions are encouraged in proportion to one's wealth and the needs of the recipient. The specifics of how much and how often to give are often not clearly defined. We know that giving is a spiritual discipline that aids in our healing and helps us achieve salvation. However, almsgiving in Scripture contrasts with the modern capitalist focus on quantification and precise instructions, where duties and rights are explicitly defined.

Scripture defines excess as any wealth beyond our necessities, such as food and clothing. However, necessities also encompass shelter, healthcare, education, transportation, and other essentials. The way we meet these needs can vary widely. For instance, I might fulfill my need for food with either inexpensive or costly ingredients, both of which nourish my body. Similarly, I could choose a basic, used car for commuting or a more luxurious model, both serving the same purpose. Education can be provided through free schools or prestigious institutions, each offering varying quality and prospects. These decisions involve addressing not only our own needs but also those of the poor. What constitutes an acceptable standard of living? Are we called to give in a way that matches the poverty of others? Are we to give without considering future needs or emergencies, potentially leaving ourselves in a vulnerable position? Moreover, as illustrated in the Parable of the Talents, we are commanded to be good stewards and multiply our resources, which raises the question of how much we should keep for investment. Those aspects of giving, receiving, keeping wealth for various purposes, and maintaining an ever-productive stewardship are not

⁹⁹ Thomas Zell, "The Trail of the Tithe," Holy Cross Orthodox Church, 2024, <https://www.holycrossoca.org/newslet/1602.html>.

easily quantifiable. The Cappadocian fathers and Saint John Chrysostom were against lavish spending, a position consistent with Christ's model and in much of the Scripture. Even if someone has the resources, they are encouraged to live modestly and humbly.¹⁰⁰ In contemporary terms, if you need a car for transportation, then get a good one, but do not get a fancy one, even if you can afford it. This modest living will spare money to give to the poor. But also here, how do we quantify the acceptable budget for a good car and which among the cars are considered a luxury, again we are stuck with the issue of quantification.

If we seek clear answers and definitive guidelines for all these concerns, akin to the commandments found in the Old Testament, we may find it challenging to achieve. Our approach must shift from materialism, capitalism, conformism, and structuralism toward focusing on spiritual maturity and healing. This process involves both personal and communal dimensions, reflecting the holistic nature of the Church.

On a personal level, we need to actively reflect on our spiritual condition and strive for continuous ascension toward perfection. Faith and spiritual practices, including almsgiving, play a crucial role in our healing and purification. We are called to struggle and reflect, aiming to purify ourselves continuously. Communally, we should seek guidance from our priests and spiritual fathers, who can offer insight into our spiritual progress, including the practice of giving. Salvation is both a personal journey and a communal responsibility. We must consider how to assist others, both spiritually and financially, alleviating suffering wherever possible. Every person is an Icon of Christ, and our commitment to alleviating their suffering fosters social justice, strengthens our faith, and enhances our trust in God.

¹⁰⁰ Dumitrașcu, "Poverty and Wealth in the Orthodox Spirituality (with Special Reference to St. John Chrysostom)," 300.

There is no manual for achieving salvation or for the practice of almsgiving. While God has provided many guidelines, going beyond these requires a matter of the heart. We must seek guidance from the Holy Spirit, our spiritual mentors, and our community, approaching this with humility and a sincere desire for perfection. Total knowledge and certainty remain elusive due to the complexities and imperfections of our world. Nevertheless, we do our best to manage our wealth responsibly, striving to improve our understanding and practices. We must heal from sin and detachment from anything but God, entrusting our anxieties to Him, who knows our hearts, our suffering, our intentions, and our deeds.

In Scripture, offerings serve as a powerful means of expressing our love, gratitude, and reverence for God. They are not merely acts of giving but profound opportunities for spiritual growth, reflection, and healing. Through offerings, we are called to detach from worldly possessions, align our hearts with God's purposes, and embody the love and generosity that Christ Himself exemplified. As we engage in this sacred practice, we are reminded that true worship is not measured by the quantity of our gifts but by the sincerity of our hearts. In a world often dominated by material concerns, the teachings of Scripture call us to reorient our focus toward the treasures of heaven. Ultimately, our offerings are not just about what we give, but about who we become—faithful stewards, devoted worshippers, and, above all, children of God who seek to live in His grace and restore our nature as His image.

Almsgiving by the poor assists in their salvation

Should almsgiving be practiced with the ones with excess, or are the poor asked to give too? If almsgiving is an opportunity for the rich to heal, then are the poor required to seek such an

opportunity? This section aims to address the giving by the poor, following the example of the poor widow in the Gospel of Mark and Luke and the poor widow in Zarephath.

In the Gospel of Mark (12:41-44)¹⁰¹, a poor widow gave two small coins, a modest donation, to the Temple treasury—her entire livelihood. Compared to the much larger offerings of the rich, her contribution might have seemed insignificant. Yet, Christ declared to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had her whole livelihood.” Christ did not instruct the widow to take back her money but rather highlighted her sacrificial giving as a model for others. Her gift, though small in amount, was immense in its significance, demonstrating that true generosity is measured by the sacrifice involved rather than the size of the gift. Thus, she gave more in proportion to her wealth, revealing an abundance of love which will result in an abundance of heavenly treasures. Notably, she is qualified to receive a portion of the tithe due to her poverty, but instead of asking for money, she gave all that she had. The story of the widow in Zarephath, who offered Elijah the last of her supplies despite her dire circumstances, further illustrates this principle (1 Kings 17). Her act of faith and generosity, despite the risk of starvation, resulted in a divine reward of endless flour and oil until the end of the draught. She even risks her son’s life, trusting in God’s promise and helping the stranger in need. Both widows' stories teach us that God values the sacrifice behind our giving more than the value of the gift itself.

Scripture provides numerous examples of both the poor and the rich contributing generously. In 2 Chronicles 24 and 4 Kingdoms 12, King Joash organized a collection to repair the Temple, and all the people contributed willingly. Similarly, in Exodus 35 and 36, the Israelites

¹⁰¹ Also in Luke 21:1-4.

gave generously for the construction of the Tabernacle, and this spirit of generosity continued with the building of both the first and second temples (1 Chronicles 29; Ezra 2:68). All contributed according to their ability. Saint Gregory of Nyssa commented on all the Israelites contributing to the Tabernacle, regardless of whether they were rich or poor, each according to their means, for Moses did not deprive anyone of the opportunity of giving:

Moses did not take the offerings for the Tabernacle from one benefactor but from the whole people; the rich brought gold, another silver; the poor brought animal skins, and one still poorer the hair of goats.¹⁰²

In the early Church, believers sold their possessions to support the community, ensuring that no one was in need (Acts 4:34-35). Some even endangered themselves to fall into poverty and prioritized helping the community. They even went as far as denying their ownership of possession, as they had all things in common. Saint Paul praised the deeply poor Macedonian churches for their abundant, free-willing, and joyful giving, even beyond their means, as a model for others to follow (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). This collective effort highlights the importance of community and mutual support among the faithful.

If all members of the Church practiced such generosity, no one would be so destitute as to be unable to meet their tithe obligations or contribute to charitable causes, even modestly like the widow. Those with more resources have a responsibility to assist the less fortunate, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to give. Preferably, this could be done indirectly through the Church, or direct giving. Saint John Chrysostom commented on the excuses that some provide, so that they

¹⁰² Saint Gregory of Nyssa, On the love of the poor. Translated in Rhee, “Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity”, 73.

get excused from giving, such as poverty, that this is an insult to God and not the nature of Christians, for all can do good works for His Glory:

Nothing is more frigid than a Christian who does not care for the salvation of others. You cannot plead poverty here, for she who cast in her two mites will be your accuser [Luke 21:1]. Peter said: “Silver and gold I have none” [Acts 3:6]. Paul was so poor that he was often hungry and lacked the necessary food. You cannot plead lowliness of birth; for they [the apostles] too were ignoble men of ignoble parents. You cannot allege lack of education: for they too were “unlearned men” [Acts 4:13]. Even if you are a slave therefore and a run-away slave, you can still do your part, as exemplified by Onesimus... You cannot plead infirmity; for Timothy too often had infirmities.¹⁰³

The disciples of Christ, who left their material possessions to follow Him, exemplify the ultimate sacrifice in giving. They did so willingly to serve the Lord and spread His Gospel. As mentioned earlier, Christ prescribed giving all personal wealth to those who needed such prescription for salvation. That said, the Church does not impose burdens on the poor but supports them according to their needs. The Church does not oppress the poor if they do not have excess to sacrifice but has to provide them with a portion of the tithe and even more, according to what is available. However, the spirit of giving is always encouraged, even if it falls short of a full tithe, for tithing and almsgiving with pure heart results in healing. Better yet, if the needy were provided with enough to address their immediate need and a bit more to harvest the opportunity and rewards of giving, then this results in the spiritual growth of both, the giver and receiver.

Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing

In addition to the amount of sacrifice, God instructs us on how to perform our acts of mercy, which will be the aim of the section. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ commanded us to carry out our charitable deeds in secret, stating, “Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in

¹⁰³ Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles. Translated in Rhee, “Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity”, 97.

heaven” (Matthew 6:1). He admonished against “sounding a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men” (Matthew 6:2). He even advised us not to “let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Matthew 6:3). The Orthodox Study Bible explains that hypocrites are akin to actors who display false piety to impress others rather than honor God.¹⁰⁴ They put on a façade of compassion but lack genuine kindness. Their reward is the fleeting praise of people and nothing more. Jesus also emphasized the importance of avoiding hypocrisy in prayer and fasting (Matthew 6:5-18). Therefore, all spiritual disciplines should be performed sincerely and in secret, focusing on pleasing God rather than seeking attention or praise from others.

We are called to approach almsgiving with humility and pure intentions, aiming solely to glorify God rather than seeking personal pride, self-love, or status. Boasting and seeking recognition undermine the essence of almsgiving, which is fundamentally about healing the soul and achieving salvation. As Scripture says, “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). True rewards come from the Lord, not from human accolades (Colossians 3:23-24; Matthew 6:19-21). Jesus justified the humble tax collector over the Pharisee who boasted of his fasting and tithing (Luke 18:10-14). Christ declared, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14).

Giving should stem from a generous heart and be done freely, not out of obligation. Saint Paul instructed us in 2 Corinthians 9:7 to give cheerfully and willingly, not reluctantly or under compulsion.¹⁰⁵ We should not harbor resentment over the loss of wealth (Deuteronomy 15:10), as

¹⁰⁴ The Orthodox Study Bible, 1277.

¹⁰⁵ See also 1 Chronicles 29:9; 2 Corinthians 8:2-4.

our offerings lead to treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). While we are promised multiplied rewards for our giving (2 Corinthians 9:6; Proverbs 3:9-10), a pure heart with good intentions remains content and not motivated by earthly gains. Jesus encouraged inviting the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind to our feasts, rather than our friends, relatives, or wealthy neighbors because the impoverished cannot repay us, whereas others can (Luke 14:12-14). Thus, we should not seek repayment for our acts of mercy; rather, we aim to receive God's blessings, especially in eternal life.

Furthermore, our giving should be driven by compassion and love, as "let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). The Lord commands us to "Render a just judgment; show mercy and compassion each to his brother. Do not oppress the widow, or the orphan, or the foreigner, or the poor. And let not one remember in his heart any wrong of his brother" (Zechariah 7:9-10). We must respect the poor and preserve their dignity (Proverbs 14:31), and when offering help to others, we should be mindful to act justly and fairly (Isaiah 58:6-7).

Not adhering to these prescribed behaviors in almsgiving can lead to the sins of the rich man who, being attached to material possessions, neglects acts of mercy done for the glory of God. A righteous act with improper intentions negates its benefits and leads to spiritual harm. Therefore, both the manner of giving and the amount given are crucial for our salvation.

In conclusion, the essence of almsgiving lies not in the visible magnitude of our offerings but in the purity and humility of our intentions. By adhering to Christ's teachings on secret generosity and avoiding the pitfalls of hypocrisy and boastfulness, we can truly embody the spirit of compassion and righteousness. Almsgiving should arise from a heart that seeks only to glorify God and not to gain personal recognition or reward. As we strive to live out these principles, we are reminded that our true reward comes from God and that our acts of mercy should be driven by

genuine love and respect for those in need. Through sincere and humble giving, we imitate God's infinite generosity and love, which is offered to us as a grace with no expected return or condition.

Addressing some accusations and concerns

In this section, I will take the opportunity to address some common accusations of our faith, which are related to this topic, yet do not serve the objective of the thesis. In discussions about my thesis with some atheists, agnostics, and uncommitted believers, I encountered several accusations, which I had the urge to address briefly, leading the way for others to address them in more detail.

The first accusation is that faithful Christians are selfish. The accusation stems from the belief that we seek personal salvation through our works rather than doing good for its own sake. In my humble response, I acknowledge that we do fear God and tremble before His judgment. Indeed, we seek to be with Him for eternity, restoring our nature and overcoming death. However, the faithful perform good works out of love for God, and true believers abide by Christ's commandment to love every human being as an Icon of Christ. Therefore, our good works aim to glorify God, which inherently means loving others and performing acts of mercy for them.

Thus, our motivation is not driven by self-love or a desire to achieve salvation for selfish reasons. A heart focused solely on itself is misled. Instead, our motivation is to sacrifice and love others as a path to salvation. Moreover, salvation is both personal and communal. While we strive for purification, this cannot be accomplished in isolation. Faithfulness and righteousness are essential, but they are insufficient on their own. We must also demonstrate our love for our brothers and sisters in humanity through acts of sacrifice and mercy. In our defense, how can we be accused of selfishness in our pursuit of salvation when the very path to this salvation demands that we love all people and perform acts of mercy for everyone?

Another common accusation is the attempt to classify Christians as either socialists or capitalists. Those who accuse us of being socialists often point to parallels between socialism and the teachings of Scripture, as well as the early Church Fathers, who advocated for sacrifice for the community, equality among all, social justice, and encouraged the rich to give generously to the poor. On the other hand, those who accuse us of being capitalists draw connections between capitalism and certain Scriptural teachings, as well as current practices that emphasize diligent work, freedom of choice, and a conservative stance on issues such as family, abortion, and sexual morality. Additionally, the approach of some Protestant churches toward wealth, combined with the lavish lifestyles of their pastors, reinforces the perception of a capitalist nature within the Church in the eyes of these accusers.

In our defense, while there may be some superficial parallels, the accusations against us are largely unfounded. First and foremost, our approach to life is centered on glorifying God, with our ultimate goal being in communion with Him. Our stance on earthly matters, though significant for our salvation—such as the stewardship of our resources—is not driven by worldly aims.

Second, it is true that the Church has consistently advocated for social justice and alleviating the suffering of the poor, but always through peaceful means and free will. The rich are encouraged to give generously, but voluntarily, while the poor are urged to be content and patient. The Church does not support a struggle between social classes that would fragment society and pit its members against one another.

Moreover, the Church upholds the principle of freedom of choice, as without freedom, there is no true accountability. Good works, to be meaningful, must be done with intention, not compulsion. When it comes to matters of faith that influence social policy, our guidance comes

from Scripture and Tradition. Our aim is to glorify God, not to appease human opinion. What is commanded by God cannot be compromised merely to appear liberal or modern.

In summary, the Church does not concern itself with contemporary classifications of economic or political systems, nor with their associated policies. The Church's positions are grounded in Scripture and Tradition, with the primary focus being the glorification of God and the salvation of the faithful. Whether this pleases or displeases others is of little consequence.

Another accusation is that what the Church asks of people for their salvation is impossible to achieve. Critics argue that the Church demands perfection, making its expectations impractical and never-ending. To this accusation, I offer little defense, for it is true that Christ calls us to perfection, and we do indeed strive for it. While we are imperfect and our fallen nature inclines us to sin, this personal and communal struggle is essential for our purification.

It is true that some religions offer clearer and more straightforward requirements for salvation, often through adherence to specific laws with well-defined instructions. Christianity, however, does not confine itself to such limiting frameworks. It is easy to follow a rule like tithing, which is clear and quantifiable, but loving your neighbor demands much more sacrifice, and there is no limit to how deeply we are called to love. When we reach a certain level of love, we are encouraged to go even further. This journey toward perfection is our ongoing struggle; we aim to purify our souls until we attain illumination and Theosis.

Thus, it is not easy to be a Christian. We are called to give our utmost in our quest to be with God, for He is worthy of our best efforts and sacrifices. There is no limit to how much we should strive and labor to be united with Him.

As we have previously discussed, salvation is through both faith and works. Some argue that many nonbelievers perform good works, sometimes even more than some Christians. This is

true; doing good works is not limited to the faithful. However, the accusation that God is unfair in granting salvation to the faithful who do good works while not doing so for the unfaithful who do the same requires a deeper understanding.

God is both just and merciful. While we strive to reflect His justice and mercy, His judgment and mercy are beyond our comprehension. Therefore, we are not in a position to judge whether someone will be saved or not. We know only what God has revealed to us in Scripture and through His Church, guided by the Holy Spirit.

When someone does good without faith, they are not doing so for the glory of God. Therefore, they are not seeking to be with God, which raises the question: why propose the accusation of unfairness? If someone does not seek God, why argue about God's fairness in judging their salvation? Scripture clearly teaches that Christ is the door, the way, the truth, and the life (John 10:9; 14:6). This is what has been revealed to us, and we follow what has been revealed. The final judgment and mercy belong to God, and God alone.

There have been several other accusations, but I am focusing on those discussed in this section. The key point I want to assert is that, as faithful Christians, we should never be ashamed of our faith. We must have the courage to address accusations directly and resist the temptation to twist our beliefs to fit others' arguments or to conform to modern societal norms and ethical constructs. Christ Himself said:

“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

Conclusion

Wealth management involves the careful consideration of how we spend, save, and invest our resources. It encompasses income, expenses, and the responsible investment of any surplus. This thesis explores wealth management from an Orthodox Christian perspective, with a particular focus on the theology of receiving and giving.

The central argument is that earning income through hard work is just, and the more diligently one works, the more income one rightfully deserves. Regarding expenses, we are responsible for meeting our own needs and those of our families. It is crucial to manage our spending prudently, avoiding a life of excess and extravagance. Any surplus should be invested generously and cheerfully in acts of mercy. The objective is to focus on accumulating treasures in heaven rather than on earth. Through almsgiving, we not only express our love for others but also curb our self-love and foster spiritual growth. By investing in almsgiving, we seize the opportunity to contribute to our own salvation, demonstrating our commitment to both God and our neighbors.

Before examining these theological aspects, it is essential to establish the biblical concept of stewardship. From the beginning, God entrusted humanity with the responsibility to preserve, enhance, and multiply His creation, with the ultimate goal of glorifying Him rather than ourselves. Scripture reminds us that God is the true owner of all creation, and we must not fall into the illusion of ownership. As stewards, we are both responsible and accountable for adhering to God's commandments concerning His creation. Failure to do so carries significant consequences. Therefore, the first section of this thesis concludes that we must humbly and diligently care for God's creation, recognizing that it belongs to Him and avoiding the sin of presuming ownership.

Next, the thesis established that our role as stewards of God's creation is intrinsically linked to the virtues of diligence and productivity in our work. Scripture consistently calls us to be

diligent, making it clear that laziness is a sin and a violation of God's command. By embracing diligence, we not only fulfill God's commandment but also express our obedience to Him. Moreover, we are called to uphold ethical standards in all our endeavors, ensuring that our work reflects our spiritual integrity. Through hard work, we fulfill our responsibilities, care for our families and loved ones, and contribute to the well-being of humanity and all of God's creation. In doing so, we exemplify true stewardship, honoring the divine mandate entrusted to us.

Afterward, the thesis illustrated that workers are entitled to fair wages and timely payment, as prescribed by Scripture. Any delay or unfair treatment regarding wages is viewed as sinful and is met with divine disapproval. Moreover, earning one's due is a rightful reward and a manifestation of God's provision, free from guilt, provided the laborer remains grateful and focused on God. The principle that diligence is rewarded is reinforced, as those who work hard should receive compensation that reflects their effort. That said, the accumulation of wealth, when achieved, carries the responsibility of managing it wisely, ensuring that it is used in a manner that honors God and His creation, which also reflects good stewardship.

Moving forward, the thesis argued that being rich is not a sin in itself. The notion that wealth is inherently sinful is a misunderstanding of both Scripture and Orthodox Christian teachings. The Bible does not condemn wealth itself but rather the improper use or attachment to it. The difficulty for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God is not a matter of wealth being inherently bad, but rather the potential of wealth to dominate one's heart, replacing the love of God. Scripture provides examples of wealthy individuals who were righteous and maintained their faith, such as Job, Abraham, and Joseph of Arimathea. These figures demonstrate that it is possible to be both wealthy and virtuous, provided that one's heart remains focused on God rather than on material possessions. The ethical use of wealth, therefore, involves managing it responsibly, using

it to glorify God, and prioritizing spiritual over material gain. Wealth, when approached with humility and used for the betterment of others, aligns with Christian teachings on stewardship and righteousness. It is the attitude and actions of individuals—whether they love and serve God with their wealth or allow it to become an idol—that determine their spiritual state. Thus, wealth is not condemned but is a tool that can be used for good or ill depending on one's relationship with it and with God.

Then, the thesis argues that while possessing wealth is not inherently sinful, it does present significant spiritual risks and challenges. The key issue is not the wealth itself but how it is handled. Both Scripture and the teachings of early Church Fathers warn about the seductive power of material riches, which can lead people away from God and into a life filled with sin. Wealth often becomes a tool for oppression, greed, and deceit. Biblical teachings emphasize that the pursuit of material wealth can lead to idolatry, erode one's trust in God, and cause spiritual dissatisfaction. The lessons from Jesus and the early Church Fathers remind us that true fulfillment and security come not from material wealth but from a heart dedicated to God.

Furthermore, the misuse of wealth often leads to behaviors like pride, injustice, and the exploitation of the poor, all of which are condemned in Scripture. When the wealthy are motivated by self-interest and self-love rather than by the love of God, they may become agents of injustice and oppression, moving further away from the grace and mercy they seek. Ultimately, the rich must use their resources with humility and a sense of stewardship. True wealth is not measured by material possessions but by one's relationship with God and acts of mercy and justice. By dedicating their resources to serving others and honoring God, rather than falling into the traps of greed and pride, individuals can use their earthly wealth to invest in the eternal treasures in His Kingdom.

At this point, the thesis pauses its exploration of the theology of receiving and giving to focus on the concept of salvation within our faith., as it serves the rest of the thesis's topics. The journey toward salvation is fundamentally a process of healing, restoring humanity to its original, God-like state marred by the fall. By embracing the transformative power of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, we endeavor to overcome the effects of sin, suffering, and death. The Incarnation of Christ provides us with the means to restore our broken relationship with God, transforming our self-love into a genuine love for Him. Through His suffering and resurrection, Jesus offers a path to healing, inviting us to follow His example of righteousness, mercy, and sacrificial love.

Our response to this divine grace involves a commitment to spiritual disciplines such as almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. These practices are not merely acts of piety but essential components of our healing journey, guiding us towards the purification of our souls and the ultimate goal of Theosis—union with God. As we navigate our lives in a fallen world, our faith and efforts to emulate Christ's love and mercy become vital in our quest to restore our divine image and attain eternal communion with God. This process of spiritual growth and healing is our purpose in this fallen world to achieve salvation by His grace.

After briefly addressing salvation in our Orthodox doctrine, the thesis progresses to highlight the essential role of almsgiving in achieving salvation. Almsgiving is an indispensable element of the Christian faith and spiritual life, integral to our journey toward salvation. It transcends mere charity, embodying the love and compassion that Christ demonstrated through His life and teachings. Rooted in Scripture and Orthodox Tradition, almsgiving is closely intertwined with prayer and fasting, forming a triad of spiritual disciplines essential for spiritual growth, the remission of sins, and the attainment of eternal life.

The importance of almsgiving is highlighted by the teachings of the Church Fathers and the Scripture, which emphasize that acts of mercy are not optional but essential for salvation. Christ's identification with the poor and the instruction to serve others reflect the core of Christian love and righteousness. By giving generously and compassionately, we align ourselves with the divine example of Christ, moving closer to the divine nature and fulfilling the great commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves, thus conquering our self-love.

Furthermore, almsgiving serves as a means of overcoming self-love, a root of sin, and advancing toward Theosis. It is not only a reflection of our faith but also a practical expression of our commitment to live according to God's will. As we embrace almsgiving not out of obligation but as a sacred opportunity, we participate in the divine nature, experience God's boundless love, and contribute to the spiritual well-being of ourselves and others.

Ultimately, the practice of almsgiving, along with faith and righteous works, helps us restore our original nature and deepen our relationship with God. It bridges the gap between faith and action, demonstrating that true Christian life is a harmonious blend of belief and deeds. By committing to acts of mercy, we align ourselves with the eternal truths of the Gospel and move steadily toward salvation, embodying the love of Christ and fulfilling our call to be stewards of His grace.

Building on the concept of salvation and the vital role of almsgiving in achieving it, the thesis moves forward to stress the importance of almsgiving for the salvation of the rich. The rich, despite their material wealth, often struggle with spiritual poverty due to their attachment to possessions, which can become an idol. In contrast, the poor, through their suffering and lack of material wealth, often develop a deeper, more genuine faith, making their spiritual healing more attainable. This is illustrated in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where Lazarus's earthly

suffering leads to eternal reward, while the rich man's lack of compassion results in eternal punishment.

However, wealth itself does not impede salvation. If the wealthy remain humble, focus on God, and use their resources for acts of mercy and the support of the Church, they can achieve spiritual healing and salvation. The true measure of wealth lies in how it is used—to elevate standards of giving rather than merely increasing standards of living. Scripture teaches that material possessions are temporary and cannot be taken into the afterlife. Instead, they should be used to foster acts of mercy and support the Church, reflecting God's generosity. The relationship between the rich and the poor is reciprocal, where both contribute to each other's spiritual journey towards salvation. Ultimately, Christ's mission to heal both physical and spiritual ailments underscores the importance of repentance, faith, and good works. Whether one is rich or poor, the goal should be to align one's heart with God, demonstrate mercy, and use resources to foster spiritual growth and eternal communion with Him. Through God's grace, both wealth and poverty can become means for spiritual enrichment and salvation.

After establishing the essential role of almsgiving in the salvation of the rich, the thesis addressed to whom these alms should be given. Old and New Testaments underscore the profound importance of aiding the poor and supporting the Church. The teachings of Christ and the Orthodox Church consistently emphasize that mercy towards the vulnerable is not merely an act of charity but a fundamental aspect of spiritual growth and salvation. Christ's ministry exemplified this commitment, showing profound empathy for the suffering and marginalized. Scripture reveals a divine mandate to care for those in need, including the poor, widows, orphans, and the sick. These teachings highlight that true discipleship involves not only alleviating physical suffering but also embodying spiritual principles of humility, compassion, and justice.

The Church, as the steward of these teachings, plays a critical role in distributing aid and maintaining the dignity of those who receive support. By giving to the Church, believers contribute to a broader, more organized effort to support the needy, ensuring that resources are allocated wisely, and that the dignity of recipients is preserved. Ultimately, our commitment to supporting the poor and the Church reflects our spiritual maturity and our journey towards Theosis. It is through these acts of mercy and justice that we manifest the love of God in our lives, echoing the divine call to care for the most vulnerable and to live out the teachings of Christ.

Moving forward, the thesis addresses how much alms should be given. the practice of offering to God, whether through tithes, alms, or other forms of giving, extends far beyond a mere obligation or ritual. It embodies our relationship with the Divine, reflecting our gratitude, devotion, and commitment to God. Throughout Scripture, offerings are portrayed not as a means of fulfilling God's needs—since He is self-sufficient—but as opportunities for us to express our love and detach from materialism, thereby growing spiritually and maturing in our faith. The true measure of our giving lies in the sacrifice and sincerity behind it, rather than the monetary value of the gift itself. Whether the giver is rich or poor, the essence of the offering is found in the heart and the willingness to share, reflecting the boundless love and generosity that Christ exemplified.

After Christ's sacrifice, the need for blood offerings is no longer required. The tithe, as a commandment, specifies clear frequencies, but Christ calls us to give beyond the mere requirements of the law. As He said, "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." The amount of giving should reflect one's wealth. Scripture and early Church Fathers sometimes urge us to give all we have, while at other times, they advise giving as needed to meet the needs of the poor or to achieve a form of social justice where everyone has equal wealth. However, recognizing that such a level of sacrifice might be overwhelming for many believers,

the Fathers encouraged them to give what they can. Thus, the amount of alms to give is ultimately a matter of the heart. Believers should strive to give as much as they are able, aiming to heal and purify their souls. This practice of giving may be gradual, with each act of generosity contributing to spiritual healing and growth.

The thesis investigated the practice of giving by the poor for their healing. The examples of almsgiving by the poor, such as the widow in the Gospel and the widow in Zarephath, underscore a profound spiritual truth: true generosity is measured by sacrifice rather than the magnitude of the gift. Both widows demonstrated extraordinary faith and devotion through their willingness to give all they had, despite their dire circumstances. Their stories teach us that the value of giving lies in the heart's intent and the sacrifice involved, rather than the material amount contributed. Scripture and early Church practices reveal that generosity is not reserved solely for those with abundant resources. Both rich and poor are called to give according to their means, and the early Christians exemplified this through their collective efforts to support the community.

The Church recognizes the financial limitations of the poor and does not impose undue burdens on them. Instead, it supports their needs while encouraging them to give according to their capacity. This spirit of giving, even if it falls short of a full tithe, contributes to spiritual healing and growth. The principle of giving, regardless of one's financial standing, fosters a cycle of mutual support and divine reward, enriching both the giver and the receiver.

Ultimately, almsgiving by the poor, as well as by the rich, is a manifestation of faith and love. It embodies the essence of Christ's teachings on generosity and sacrifice, emphasizing that the true measure of giving lies in the willingness to part with what one has, regardless of how little it may seem. Through such acts of faith, both the poor and the rich can participate in the spiritual journey of healing, purification, and salvation.

The final, and extremely vital, point that this thesis emphasizes is the manner in which alms should be given. It is not only the act of giving that holds significance but also the spirit and intentions behind it. The way in which almsgiving is carried out reveals the depth of our compassion and the authenticity of our devotion. Christ's teachings instruct us to perform acts of charity with humility and sincerity, avoiding public displays and seeking no personal acclaim. True almsgiving should be driven by a desire to honor God and support those in need, rather than to gain recognition or approval from others. In essence, the focus should be on giving freely and cheerfully, with a heart full of compassion and love. By adhering to these principles, we ensure that our acts of mercy are genuine and impactful, contributing to our spiritual growth and fulfilling our duty to care for others in a manner that is pleasing to God.

That said, if our acts of mercy do not adhere to the principles of how to give, they may undermine our spiritual healing, producing the opposite effect of their intended purpose. Instead of fostering selflessness and reflecting God's love, improperly executed acts of mercy can reinforce self-love and hinder our healing process. To truly heal and embody God's love, our giving must align with the principles of humility and sincerity, ensuring that our acts of charity genuinely reflect divine compassion.

The thesis aimed to integrate various themes related to wealth management from an Orthodox Christian perspective, drawing extensively on Scripture, the teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers, Saint John Chrysostom, and other contemporary Orthodox scholars. By engaging with these sources, the work seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Orthodox Christianity approaches wealth, stewardship, and generosity.

In conclusion, God calls us to be diligent stewards and hard workers, generating abundance through our efforts for His glory. We are tasked with using our earnings to meet our needs modestly,

ensuring we live with dignity rather than in luxury. Living modestly often results in a surplus, which may be invested in leisure or further wealth generation. However, our primary focus should not be on accumulating earthly treasures but on seeking treasures in heaven.

Almsgiving, as highlighted in the Sermon on the Mount, stands out as the most effective investment for spiritual growth. It is a practice deeply rooted in our faith and serves as a powerful antidote to self-love. By giving generously to others, particularly the poor and the Church, we mirror God's boundless love, demonstrating that our hearts are aligned with divine love rather than earthly concerns. This practice enriches our spiritual maturity, purifies our souls, and guides us toward illumination and Theosis. Ultimately, there is no greater investment than the promise of eternal communion with God, restoring His image and likeness within us.

Limitations

As a proud father of a boy and a girl, a caregiver for my elderly parent, and someone who holds two jobs while staying actively engaged with both my professional community and parish, time was a significant limitation. Another challenge was accessing certain sources, as I lacked the budget and time to obtain them. Due to these time constraints and the specific focus of the thesis, I intentionally chose not to include some themes that would have been interesting to explore.

Another significant challenge I faced was confronting my own imperfections. My academic training in business studies, with a particular emphasis on data analysis, emphasized objectivity and data-driven results. As a result, I rarely write from the heart and seldom engage with matters of faith. This left me lacking confidence in addressing such topics, largely due to my awareness of both my known and unknown sins, as well as a profound fear of God. These factors caused me to doubt my ability and spiritual maturity to take on this subject.

The reader may notice a transition in my writing—from an objective approach grounded in scripture to a more personal, heartfelt expression. I needed time and spiritual struggle to determine whether I was worthy to write on this topic. Even now, I still question my worthiness, but I proceeded with a continuous spiritual struggle. In addition to scriptural readings, prayer, and contemplation were instrumental in helping me complete this thesis. With a reverent fear of God, I reconciled myself through submission to Christ and confessed my imperfections, which are reflected in this work. Therefore, I humbly ask for God’s forgiveness first and foremost, and I seek your forgiveness for any shortcomings. I also welcome any recommendations for improvement. Please feel free to reach out with any suggestions.

Future scholarly work and practical needs

We are blessed in our Church to have many scholars who have addressed this topic, but much more work is needed. Specifically, there is a need for further exploration of how Scripture applies to wealth management in our contemporary society. Several books have been introduced recently, some of which are mentioned in this thesis, but there remains a need for more. While we have robust guidelines, as humbly noted in this thesis, more practical resources are necessary to help the faithful and their spiritual fathers navigate the complexities of today’s economic landscape. These resources should ideally incorporate current terminologies and address the unique challenges of our time. Also, the Church should sponsor and edit such works to ensure their usage by the faithful.

The capitalist system in the United States, with its many imperfections, often leads to anxiety and is widely imitated across the globe. For instance, the faithful are concerned with planning for a secure retirement, funding quality education for their children, providing an inheritance for loved ones, investing to sustain and grow their businesses in a competitive market,

saving for periods of unemployment, preparing for emergencies, and even setting aside funds for leisure activities, among many other priorities. Alongside these concerns, they also seek to secure their salvation, recognizing the need for spiritual guidance in managing their wealth. Striking the right balance between fulfilling essential responsibilities—many of which are biblically mandated, such as caring for one’s family—and engaging in tithing and almsgiving can be challenging.

We all understand that God calls us to perfection, and the Christian path to salvation involves suffering and sacrifice. Therefore, we need capable spiritual fathers to guide our spiritual growth. The Church as a whole, especially our bishops, priests, spiritual fathers, and Orthodox scholars, must assist us in contextualizing our faith within the realities of modern life and ensuring that the needs of the faithful are adequately addressed.

Bibliography

1. Bae, Junghun. “John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Therapy of the Soul.” Ph.D. Thesis, Australian Catholic University, 2018.
https://acuresearchbank.acu.edu.au/download/2f3b0fb4db1546ba8564858189f562e6072692637aa8e46acaa5d889930f3d03/3705951/Bae_2018_John_Chrysostom_on_almsgiving_and_the.pdf.
2. Borovoy, Vitaly. “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>.
3. Chrysostom, ST John. *On Wealth and Poverty*. Translated by Catharine P Roth. Yonkers, New York: ST Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2020.
4. Chad Hatfield, Archpriest. “Sin, Sickness, and Salvation.” *Christian Bioethics* 12, no. 2 (August 1, 2006): 199–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803600600805583>.

5. Clapsis, Emmanuel. 2011. "The Dignity of the Poor and Almsgiving in St. John Chrysostom." *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 56 (1–4): 55–87.
6. Clapsis, Emmanuel. "Wealth and Poverty in Christian Tradition." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 54, no. 1–4 (2009): 169–87.
7. 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
8. Dumitraşcu, Nicu. "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>.
9. Geleris, Andrew. *Money and Salvation: An Invitation to the Good Way*. Yonkers, New York: ST Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2022.
10. Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., Ltd, 2005.
11. Meyendorff, John. "New Life in Christ: Salvation in Orthodox Theology." *Theological Studies* 50, no. 3 (September 1989): 481–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398905000304>.
12. Pectu, Liviu. "Orthodox Saints Speaking on Illness." *Romanian Journal of Artistic Creativity* 5, no. 3 (2017): 45–55.
13. Rhee, Helen. *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012.
14. Rhee, Helen. *Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2017.

15. Sonea, Cristian Sebastian. 2023. "Theosis and Martyria—The Spiritual Process of Deification and Its Implication for the Mission of the Church" *Religions* 14, no. 1: 12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010012>.
16. St. Athanasius Orthodox Academy. *The Orthodox Study Bible*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2008.
17. St Basil The Great. *On Social Justice*. Translated by C. Paul Schroeder. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009.
18. St Maximus the Confessor. "St Maximos the Confessor: Four Hundred Texts on Love." *orthodoxchurchfathers.com*, n.d. <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/philokalia/st-maximos-the-confessor-four-hundred-texts-on-love.html>.
19. Zell, Thomas. "The Trail of the Tithe." Holy Cross Orthodox Church, 2024. <https://www.holycrossoca.org/newslet/1602.html>.
20. Zizioulas, John. *Illness and Healing in Orthodox Theology*. Translated by J.W. Lillie. Alhambra, California: Sebastian Press, 2016. <https://www.mybib.com/>