**The Word of Faith**

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**Abstract**

Contemporary discussions of Word of Faith theology are often polarized between uncritical endorsement and wholesale dismissal, frequently reducing the tradition to caricatures of material prosperity and guaranteed outcomes. This article argues that such reductions obscure a more coherent biblical and theological framework grounded in Christology, stewardship, and the formation of the whole person. Drawing on exegetical analysis of key New Testament texts, particularly Romans 10:8–10, and situated within the broader witness of Scripture and the early Christian tradition, this study reframes Word of Faith as a participatory theology of trust, confession, and alignment with divine truth rather than a mechanism for material acquisition. Abundance is interpreted not as excess or entitlement but as provision ordered toward faithfulness, generosity, and participation in God's redemptive purposes. Faith is presented as a lived posture engaging heart, speech, and action under the sovereignty of God. By distinguishing theological principle from later excesses, this article demonstrates continuity between properly framed Word of Faith teaching and historic Christian emphases on restored life in Christ. The study contributes to contemporary theological discourse by offering a constructive, orthodox account of faith, abundance, and spiritual formation that resists both materialism and spiritual abstraction.

## I. Introduction

### Contemporary Controversy Surrounding Word of Faith Theology

Word of Faith theology occupies a contested place within contemporary Christian discourse, frequently invoked either as a promise of material prosperity or dismissed as a distortion of the gospel. In popular and academic settings alike, the tradition is often reduced to its most visible excesses, where faith is portrayed as a technique for securing guaranteed outcomes and confession as a form of verbal causation independent of divine sovereignty. Such representations have fueled sustained criticism from theologians and church leaders who regard Word of Faith teaching as theologically shallow, ethically dangerous, or historically disconnected from the Christian tradition.

Yet this polarized framing obscures important theological distinctions. By collapsing principle into abuse and practice into caricature, critics and proponents alike have frequently failed to examine the underlying biblical claims concerning faith, confession, stewardship, and participation in God's promises. As a result, the debate has often proceeded without careful exegetical grounding or sustained engagement with the broader theological tradition, reinforcing ideological divisions rather than fostering theological clarity.

This article contends that the contemporary controversy surrounding Word of Faith theology reflects not merely disagreement over outcomes, but a deeper confusion concerning the nature of faith itself—whether faith functions as a human instrument of control or as a participatory trust oriented toward God's revealed purposes in Christ.

### Scholarly Gap: The Absence of a Charitable and Historically Grounded Framing

Despite the volume of criticism directed toward Word of Faith theology, relatively little scholarly attention has been given to a charitable reconstruction of its underlying theological claims within the broader Christian tradition. Much of the existing literature approaches the movement primarily through sociological analysis, pastoral warning, or polemical critique, often focusing on high-profile abuses rather than engaging the theological grammar that informs faith, confession, and expectation within Scripture. While such critiques raise legitimate concerns, they frequently presuppose conclusions about the tradition without first examining its core biblical and doctrinal assertions.

Moreover, discussions of Word of Faith theology have seldom been situated within the historical development of Christian thought. The absence of sustained engagement with early Christian conceptions of faith as participatory trust, speech as confession of lordship, and salvation as the restoration of the whole person has contributed to the perception that Word of Faith emphases represent a modern innovation rather than a contested but recognizable strand within the

Christian theological imagination. This lack of historical framing has narrowed the scope of the debate and limited the possibility of constructive theological evaluation.

This article addresses this scholarly gap by offering a historically informed and exegetically grounded account of Word of Faith theology, distinguishing its foundational principles from later distortions and locating its central claims within the continuity of Scripture and the witness of the early Church.

**Central Claim and Scope of the Article**

This article advances the claim that Word of Faith theology, when properly framed, constitutes a participatory and Christ-centered expression of the gospel rather than a system of guaranteed material outcomes. It argues that the theological core of Word of Faith—faith as trust, confession as alignment with divine truth, and expectation shaped by God's promises—finds grounding in Scripture and coherence within the broader Christian tradition. By distinguishing these foundational principles from later excesses and misapplications, the study reframes Word of Faith as a theology concerned primarily with spiritual formation, stewardship, and restored life in Christ.

The scope of this article is constructive and theological rather than sociological or apologetic. It does not seek to defend specific contemporary movements or personalities, nor to catalog abuses associated with prosperity preaching. Instead, it offers an exegetical and historical analysis of key biblical texts and theological themes in order to clarify the legitimacy and limits of Word of Faith claims. In doing so, the article aims to contribute to ongoing theological discourse by providing a more precise framework through which faith, abundance, and confession may be evaluated within orthodox Christian theology.

In this study I will maintain that Word of Faith theology, properly constructed, is capable of offering believers a synergistic and Christomorphic gospel, not a simplistic blueprint for predictable prosperity. Faith that comes by trusting God, confession that aligns us to His nature, and our expectation calibrated by His Word are the biblical and theological bedrock of Word of Faith teaching. The movement that evolved from these ideas has often muddied or overstated them, however, with claims that far exceed their original intent or valid application. Distinguishing sound theological doctrine from the noise of entrepreneurial Christianity will allow us to view Word of Faith teaching for what it truly is—a theology of spiritual formation, faithful stewardship, and renewal/recreation in Christ. This article will not attempt to provide a sociological or apologetic overview of the movement or its notable personalities. Nor will it attempt to provide an encyclopedic list of abuses committed under the banner of prosperity preaching. Instead, this work will provide exegesis and historical perspective on several biblical texts and theological concepts central to the discussion, in an effort to define more clearly what Word of Faith teachers have a right to believe, and where they have gone astray.

## II. Biblical Theology of Abundance and Stewardship

### A. Abundance Defined by Divine Purpose

Biblical abundance is first established within the context of creation, where fruitfulness and increase are presented not as optional blessings but as intrinsic features of God's ordering of the world. In the opening creation narrative, humanity is blessed and commissioned to "be fruitful and multiply," situating abundance within divine intent rather than human achievement.[1] Increase is thus embedded in the structure of creation itself, reflecting God's generosity and the teleological orientation of life toward flourishing under His rule. Abundance, at this foundational level, is inseparable from vocation, responsibility, and dependence upon God.[2]

Within the covenantal framework of Israel, abundance is further clarified as a relational reality governed by faithfulness. The promises of provision, land, and increase articulated in the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are consistently tied to obedience, trust, and alignment with God's purposes rather than autonomous accumulation.[3] Covenant blessing functions pedagogically, shaping Israel's identity as a people sustained by God rather than self-generated prosperity. As Old Testament scholars have noted, covenantal abundance is conditional not in a mechanistic sense but in a relational one—designed to form a community ordered toward justice, gratitude, and reliance upon divine provision.[4]

Fruitfulness in Scripture therefore operates as both a material and spiritual category. While it includes tangible provision—land, offspring, security—it also encompasses righteousness, wisdom, and communal well-being.[5] The prophetic literature reinforces this ordering by repeatedly critiquing abundance detached from covenant loyalty, exposing how surplus divorced from obedience leads to injustice and idolatry rather than blessing.[6] In this way, Scripture consistently resists equating abundance with excess, reframing it instead as provision oriented toward God's redemptive purposes and the flourishing of the community.

Accordingly, a biblical theology of abundance cannot be reduced to numerical increase or material surplus. Abundance is defined by divine purpose: creation ordered toward fruitfulness, covenant structured by faithfulness, and provision directed toward stewardship. This framework

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[1] Book of Genesis 1:26–28. See also John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 492–495.

[2] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 528–533.

[3] Book of Deuteronomy 8:1–18; Book of Genesis 12:1–3; 22:17–18. See Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 181–189.

[4] Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 92–101.

[5] Book of Psalms 1:1–3; Book of Proverbs 3:9–10; 11:24–28. See Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 237–242.

[6] Book of Amos 5:11–24; Book of Isaiah 1:16–17; 5:8–10. See Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 65–72.

establishes the theological foundation upon which later New Testament discussions of faith, provision, and life in Christ must be interpreted, guarding against both scarcity-driven fear and prosperity-driven distortion.[7]

B. Abundance as Means, Not End

One of the defining contours of abundance in Scripture is that abundance is always means, and never end. Provision is never simply about meeting one's needs; rather it is about how we use our resources to obey God, love generously, bless others materially, support the community, etc. It is never treated in Scripture as definitional of who is "in" and who is "out."[8] Abundance, from this perspective, runs counter to both fear-based theologies of scarcity and scarcity-driven theologies of wealth. Provision is centered theologically as an expression of God's covenantal faithfulness. The wisdom literature reinforces this notion throughout Proverbs by insisting that wealth in and of itself is dangerous—unless it is leveraged for the sake of justice. Abundance only has theological meaning when it is ordered toward humility, justice, and fearing God; accumulation for the sake of accumulation itself is folly.[9]

Again, the issue is not having resources but being oriented toward the wrong ends. When provision becomes the goal it eclipses the One who provides and corrodes communal responsibility toward others.[10] The admonition gets sharper with Jesus, who tells his followers not to conflate life with abundance. Jesus says not to look at your life in terms of surplus.[11] Though Scripture never suggests Christians should embrace scarcity, it does maintain that provision should be used for the sake of generosity. God provides so that we may worship, serve, and bear with others in their need.[12] Paul seems to pick up on this tension when he talks about contentment/sufficiency/having enough. Scripture clearly teaches that God provides. God causes us to "abound" in many ways (see 2 Cor. 9:8). But Paul reorders the abundance conversation by insisting that God provides so that we may overflow in good deeds.[13] Abundance should never eclipse or replace mission or gospel formation. God does not call us to worship or obey Him so that we may have material blessing; God richly provides so that we may love others.[14]

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[7] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.22–27, on the proper ordering of goods.
[8] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 132–136.
[9] Book of Proverbs 11:24–28; 15:16–17;
Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 495–501.
[10] Walter Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 28–35.
[11] Gospel of Luke 12:15;
Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 486–489.
[12] Acts of the Apostles 2:44–45; 4:32–35;
Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 59–66.
[13] Second Epistle to the Corinthians 9:8;
Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 427–430.
[14] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.22–27.

B. Stewardship vs. Scarcity and Excess

Scripture is not concerned with wealth in quantitative terms but qualitative ones. When discussing "too much," Scripture never defines this point with exact numbers; instead, individuals and communities judge this question by the orientation of their hearts and posture of dependence upon God. Time and again Scripture assesses material wealth based on whether or not it breeds trust in God or replaces trust in God.[15] When material goods become spiritually dangerous is when they shift our dependence from God to ourselves. Wisdom and prophetic literature emphasize this exact point. God resists the rich because their hearts become closed off to the ways of God through their illusions of safety generated by abundance. Material excess which breeds autonomy lulls us into false confidence and distracts us from the counsel of God.[16] Scripture is not against wealth; it is against trusting in wealth as if we ourselves are wealthy. When provision comes from our own hands instead of God's, we have begun the process of replacing God with the very gifts God gives us.[17]

Jesus took this foundational principle to its logical conclusion by standing against scarcity anxiety as well as hoarding wealth. He simultaneously critiques riches when they dominate our hearts as well as scarcity when it dominates our fears. Jesus warns, "You cannot serve God and wealth."[23] The paradox is that you can serve wealth when you do not have enough of it. Jesus' teachings about wealth center on the hardened hearts of those who trust in riches instead of God. Jesus illustrated this principle with stories of wealth accumulation.

In every story about riches, Jesus makes clear that wealth becomes idolatrous when it narrows our relationship with God, cuts us off from our neighbor, and makes God irrelevant to providing for our needs.[18] Jesus also stood against anxiety over scarcity by calling his followers to trust in the Father for their material needs.[19] Paul instructs that we are to manage our lives in such a way that reflects our trust in God and stewardship toward others.[20] We are not to despise material possessions, but we are not to hope in them either. Idolatry is rooted in hope; stewardship is lived out in freedom.[21] Scripture contrasts stewardship with both scarcity and excess by presenting the former as the responsible management of "enough." Scarcity defines "enough" by fear, abundance defines "enough" by control, and stewardship defines "enough" by dependence upon God.