

17.03.2018 DEBT: A DAILY DECISION

“Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.” Romans 13:7, 8.

The world we live in considers getting into debt useful, even desirable, because it allows us to purchase things we desire. One statement that is often used to propagate this misleading notion is: ‘Being in debt helps you to save...’ What is not mentioned is that the money you are saving is all going to pay off your debts! Getting into debt often leads to ruin and despair, particularly for low wage earners and the very poor.

It is therefore necessary for us to have a Bible-based understanding of what God requires of us with regard to our finances. The Bible also has much to say about the injustice of a ‘debt and interest’ based economy.

DEBT IN THE BIBLE

The god of this world, satan, is the mind behind debt. He tempted our first parents to rebellion and thus enslaved them to sin and death. But the good news of the gospel is that we find the great principle of debts forgiven and slaves of debt redeemed. Christ Jesus has cancelled our debt we owe because of sin and redeemed us.

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Colossians 2:13, 14.

“Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” Romans 6:6.

Because of Christ’s example, Paul exhorts us not to be indebted in anything except in our relationship to one another. He reminds us of the 2nd great commandment: *“we are only to be indebted to love one another as God has loved us.”*

Today, satan though a defeated foe, still tempts mankind by appealing to their lusts and then tempting them to live by his principles of self-centredness and self-glory. He seeks to enslave men and women by leading them to seek after wealth, luxury and power as the means by which they may get what they desire. He is well pleased when they become enslaved to their selfish desires and get caught in a cycle of indebtedness.

“All that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.” 1 John 2:16.

A Christian therefore, who seeks to do God’s perfect will must be aware that satan is the mind behind the world system of finance, banking and economics. While we still have to live in such a world, we Christians should ensure that we touch the things of this world as lightly as possible, bearing in mind that we are to live for God’s glory, not self-glory.

Before we make any decision about borrowing and spending and lending, we must ask ourselves, *‘Is this God’s will for my money? Is God glorified by this decision?’*

And, because even our converted hearts can be deceived that we are using our money aright, we need to be sure that God has made His will clear to us regarding every use of the resources we have. We must live by the faith of Jesus... *‘Not my will, but Thine be done’*. This is particularly needful in our handling of money, for satan uses the love of money to try to shipwreck our faith. We need to remember the warning of Jesus with regard to riches and wealth.

“The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.” 1 Timothy 6:10, 11.

“Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” Mark 10:24, 25.

Borrowing and Spending

The Bible does not state categorically that it is a sin to borrow. The Mosaic Law specifically refers to borrowing and the rules with regard to borrowing e.g. Exodus 22:14.

But it does offer warnings about the danger of getting into debt. It is stern about the character of the man or woman who borrows and then does not repay a debt.

"It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay." Ecclesiastes 5:5.

"The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives." Psalm 37:21.

A Christian must be certain that his borrowing is in the will of God. He must be certain that his spending is in the will of God for him. His spending must not primarily be for self-gratification but manifested in generosity and love towards those less fortunate than himself.

"If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs... You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore, I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land'." Deuteronomy 17:7-11.

In God's economy, He ordained that the poor brethren of the Israelites be released from their debts at the end of 7 years, if they had been unable to pay back their debt. He promised great blessings to those who would follow His command (*Deuteronomy 15:1-6*).

Instant Gratification

At the root of instant gratification is SELF.

Our study this week describes many who fell into sin because of this. Esau, David, Eve...they fell into the snare of satan who tempts men and women with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

In contrast, God calls Christians to live lives of patient endurance.

"Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise." Hebrews 10:35, 36.

Our great example is Jesus. He was offered instant gratification by satan...and was tempted just as Eve was, by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. But Christ said 'No' to satan, for He had a greater mission.

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12: 2.

We, the people of God in the end-time are also called to live lives of patient endurance, looking for the grace and glory of God to be revealed in our lives. That is our great mission.

"Here is the patient endurance of the people of God who keep his commands and have the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12.

Living within Your Means

"Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, 'I will never fail you. I will never abandon you'." Hebrews 13:5, 6.

"Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So, if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content." 1 Timothy 6:6-8.

And He said to them, *"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Luke 12:15.*

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." James 4:3.

What is the main reason that people live beyond their means? SELF!

Ego and vanity demands that they keep up with their friends and colleagues. Very often this leads to wanting to prove themselves better off than their friends and colleagues. They must have better houses, better cars, and better clothes. Their children must go to better schools and have the latest gadgets that satan and the world have to offer. And when the fashion changes, as it does every year, they have to change their possessions yet again.

If they have emigrated to improve their lives, what better way to show the folk 'back home' that they have 'arrived' than to send them evidence of the status symbols of their newly acquired wealth...the new house, the new car etc.

It is a never-ending spiral of borrowing and debt. And satan laughs, for unlike God's kingdom, in his kingdom, the kingdom of the world – the bankers and the lenders do not release you from your debts at the end of 7 years. They either send in the bailiffs to re-possess your house and car and belongings or they offer you another loan so you can pay off your former debt by getting into further debt. satan is delighted to get us into both spiritual and material debt.

Contentment is the great protection against living beyond our means. If we are in God's perfect will for our lives, we will recognise that whatever state we are in, we can be content, for He is our Provider.

"Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God." Proverbs 30:8, 9.

*"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." Philippians 4:11, 12.*

Contentment is not something that comes to self-centred human beings naturally. It has to be learned. It is learned by experiencing God's faithfulness to us day by day. The one who has learned to know God is never anxious and is always content. He believes the God who says, "I will never fail you or forsake you."

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6, 7.

Generosity is also an antidote to selfish living. We can reduce our 'conspicuous consumption' by giving to those in need. God promises that such giving is regarded as investment in heaven; it will increase our income!

"Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." Luke 6:38 (see also Ephesians 4:28).

"I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed." Psalm 37:25, 26.

Saying 'No' to Debt

"The rich rules over the poor and the borrower becomes the lender's slave." Proverbs 22:7.

Why should a Christian be cautious about debt?

1. Getting into debt can suggest we do not trust God to provide for our needs; we are denying Him the opportunity to provide for us. Jesus calls this 'little faith'. "O you of little faith!"

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." Matthew 6:31, 32.

"And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things." Luke 12:29, 30.

2. Getting into debt may be a sin of presumption. We presume that we will continue to earn an income that makes it possible to pay our debts.

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'" James 4:13-15.

3. Worry over debt may take our minds off God; instead of looking unto Jesus, we worry about how to settle our debts. This may lead to unwise decisions about careers (high-paying jobs), marital partners (who will bring more wealth). High debt burdens often put a strain on marriages and the family.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...” Matthew 6:33.

“Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:3, 4.

4. Indebtedness puts a barrier between the debtor and the lender. This is particularly difficult when the debtor and lender are friends. (Proverbs 22:7).

Shakespeare penned it well: *“Neither a borrower nor a lender be; for loan oft loses both itself and friend, and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.”*

Saving and Investing

“And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth.” Deuteronomy 8:18.

The Bible is clear that saving wisely to have resources for our living is a good thing (*Proverbs 6:6-8; 13:11; 21:5*). It is equally clear that hoarding money or saving for selfish gain is not pleasing to God. (*Luke 12:16-21*).

In the gospels we are told that the Pharisees were lovers of money (*Luke 16:14*). In the last days too, men will be lovers of themselves (self-centred) and lovers of money (*2 Timothy 3:2*).

What about Investing?

This is an issue Christians need to think about seriously.

Investing our wealth in worldly institutions is nearly always interest-based. This is specifically forbidden in Scripture.

“LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

He who does not put out his money at usury (who lends money without charging interest), nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.” Psalm 15:1, 5.

See also *Nehemiah 5: 2-11, Ezekiel 18:8, 13, 17 and 22:12.*

God will punish the one who gets wealth by extortion and charging interest (*Proverbs 28:8*).

In the parable of the Talents (*Matthew 25: 14-27*) and the Ten minas (*Luke 19:11-23*), the unfaithful servant refuses to risk his master’s resources. Jesus characterises taking interest from bank deposits as ‘reaping where one hasn’t sown’ (and so inherently unjust and exploitative); it is what ‘hard’ men do.

Another risk we take when investing in worldly institutions is that we don’t know what they will do with our money. Will they invest it in companies with unethical products? Will they invest it in companies that deal with gambling, prostitution, entertainment and other activities that are in total opposition to the Christian way of life? Will they use our money to lend to the poor and desperate at interest rates that are beyond repayment?

There is one bit of advice given to us by the ancient heathen Greeks, and by the Jews in the Old Testament, and by the great Christian teachers of the Middle Ages, which the modern economic system has completely disobeyed. All these people told us not to lend money at interest: and lending money at interest—what we call investment—is the basis of our whole system. *CS Lewis. Mere Christianity: Social Morality.*

What have Christians had to say about the issue? Apart from a vague sense of uneasiness about the materialism embodied by credit-financed spending, the Christian response has been woefully inadequate. This reflects the absence of a well-developed Christian analysis of economics in general, and finance in particular. Such was not always the case. For three-quarters of her history, the church upheld the prohibition of interest found explicitly in the Old Testament (*e.g. Deuteronomy 23:19; Ezekiel 18:8, 13*) and implicitly in the New (*Luke 6:34, 35; 19:22, 23*). *Paul Mills: The Cambridge Papers.*

The Bible always urges us to invest in heaven rather than in the Kingdom of this world. Our hearts must be in heaven, and where our hearts are, our money will follow. The riches of heaven are the true riches that never fail.

“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Luke 12:32-24.

"Those who wait on the LORD shall inherit the earth." Psalm 37:9.

May we be like Jesus in our dealings with money. Let us seek always to do the things which please Him.

"Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31.

"If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." James 4:13-15.

"And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." 1 John 2:17.

Additional Notes:

Though it is best not to get into debt, we find many in society today (even among church members) in debt. A study on debt would be incomplete if we did not address how to help people in debt.

Most Christian organisations dealing with debt and poverty suggest the following:

1. Offer friendship and support that is non-judgmental to the one who is in debt.
2. Stay loyal to those who need help in clearing their debt.
3. Help them by directing them to agencies that help with debt. Go with them and help negotiate a budget that will enable them to clear their debt as well as giving them enough money to live on.
4. They may need to learn skills in budgeting. Many aid agencies run courses about this.
5. If you have the means to help, and the Lord leads you to such a decision, help the person in debt, while also expecting accountability from him or her.

Remember the words of Jesus: *"if you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto Me."*

Riches of earth I may not see,
God may prevent;
Riches of grace are offered me,
I am content.
Wealth of the world must fade and fail,
Earthly delights grow tasteless, stale,
I have the wealth that must avail—
Riches of grace.

I may not win fair honour's crown,
God may prevent;
Heavenly honours are my own,
I am content;
Children of God and heirs of grace,
Walking in light before His face,
Resting in peace in His embrace—
Riches of grace.

*Riches of grace forever endure;
Riches of grace my safety assure;
Riches of grace are fadeless and pure;
Riches of grace, riches of grace.*

ES Lorenz

God Bless

Shevanthi
