



Biblical Financial Stewardship

Part Two of Three

Many of us have been adversely affected by the economic upheaval that has recently impacted our nation and the world. We have watched helplessly as our savings, retirement accounts, real estate, and other assets have been greatly devalued. In an attempt to discern the causes of our present financial uncertainty and learn how to react to them, people are looking to financial counselors and economic experts. But God's Word not only identifies the root causes of financial distress, it also clearly reveals the remedy.

The Bible has many warnings about putting our trust in money and earthly possessions. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy that he should "*charge them that are rich in this world, that they . . . [not] trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.*" (1 Timothy 6:17)

Jesus told his disciples, "*Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!*" (Mark 10:24). And before telling the parable of the rich landowner who made foolish decisions with regard to his possessions, Jesus said, "*Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" (Luke 12:15)

1. Debt.

One huge contributor to financial troubles is debt, which a dictionary defines as "money that a person is obligated to pay to another." This includes borrowed money, bank loans, credit card balances, home mortgages, and past due bills.

Contrary to what some may think, the Bible does not forbid debt, but it does reveal what is harmful about debt. The author of Proverbs wrote, "*The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.*" (Proverbs 22:7) The person who enters into a debt becomes a "servant" to the lender. In a sense, the debtor surrenders his freedom until the repayment has been completed. He is not free to decide where to spend the portion of his income that must go to retire the debt. And the greater the debt, the more confined is the debtor's servitude. Paul warned the Corinthians, "*Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.*" (1 Corinthians 7:23)

We are told that a staggering amount of debt is tied up in credit card accounts. Part of the problem is simply deception – using a credit card is spending money we don't have. Just one glance at a statement with an overdue balance will reveal the exorbitant price that credit card companies charge for that practice.

A good way to determine if your credit card spending is under control is if you are able to pay off the entire credit card statement when you receive it. If you cannot, seriously consider cutting up your cards and living more within your means. Most of the occurrences of the word "content" in the New Testament are in reference to possessions. Paul wrote to Timothy, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*" (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

2. Forsaking Counsel.

Another major contributor to financial troubles is failure to get advice. For someone who habitually buys what he "wants" instead of what he "needs," this is a recipe for financial disaster. God's Word says, "*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.*" (Proverbs 12:15)

Here are three of the most powerful sources of counsel when making financial decisions:

- i. The Counsel of Scripture.

Written by the inspiration of God, the Bible transcends time and cultural changes. Its principles are as valid and applicable today as the day they were recorded. Its purpose has been to communicate God's plan, purpose, and direction for all generations. *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword . . . and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12) In seeking counsel for a particular financial decision, our first thought should be, "What does God's Word say?" If we find a direct answer, we need search no further. If there is no specific advice, then we should move on to the second source – godly people.

ii. The Counsel of Godly People.

God has wisely invested a wide variety of gifts and talents in His children. The Body of Christ is to function in a similar manner as a human body, where the members help, advise, chasten, encourage, support, and pray for one another. For those who are married, the first source of advice is our spouse. Subordinate to that, but still important from a biblical perspective, is the advice of parents. Then there are a host of specialists to whom we can turn, who have expertise in the area of our financial decisions. We read in Proverbs, *"Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established."* (Proverbs 15:22)

iii. The Counsel of the Lord.

One of the most important sources of wise counsel is the Lord. Isaiah wrote that *"his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor."* (Isaiah 9:6) The Psalms frequently refer to God as a counselor:

- *"I [the Lord] will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."* (32:8)
- *"Thou [the Lord] shalt guide me with thy counsel."* (73:24)
- *"I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel."* (16:7)

God's counsel is received through prayer, meditation on His Word, and listening for the Spirit's voice. Whenever we are faced with a major decision, we need to find a quiet place where we can spend uninterrupted time praying, reading Scripture, and seeking the Lord's counsel. And, be patient, since sometimes that involves waiting for His direction.

A final word of advice, to both those who seek counsel, and those who offer counsel: Continually ask the Lord for wisdom. *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally . . . and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."* (James 1:5-6)

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Crown Financial Stewardship Bible Study materials adapted for the Apostolic Christian Church can be purchased from www.acpublications.org