

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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The Greatest Hindrance to Giving to the Lord's Work (Part 1)

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God indicates that one of the greatest joys that can be received by His people is the joy that comes from giving to His work. Our first priority must always be consistent with God's priorities, which puts our local church first in our giving. However, most of us are deluged, if not daily at least weekly, from worthy Christian ministries seeking support. Many of us give to these organizations, but all too often these appeals end up in the "circular file" without even a cursory glance. Being good stewards of our resources necessitates a careful evaluation of whom we will support above and beyond the local church.

One of the greatest hindrances to giving to the Lord's work is what I call "voluntary indebtedness," which decreases our disposable income or the amount of money we have at our discretion to spend after our taxes, tithe, and other obligations. Most giving to other ministries comes out of discretionary money. Increasing our disposable income and discretionary money will necessitate either increasing our income or reducing our voluntary indebtedness.

A survey in 1998 by the Consumer Federation of America discovered that personal income had increased by \$31.3 billion, and disposable income increased by \$28 billion that year. However, the same survey indicated that personal savings were down \$9.1 billion in September that year and \$11.9 billion in October of that same year. What was the cause of this decrease? Among other things, it was due to borrowing – especially using credit cards.

This same survey found that American families carry an average balance of \$7,000 on their credit cards. This results in about \$1,000 of interest paid to the bank each year for the privilege of borrowing the bank's money to make these purchases. Many Americans, and yes, sadly, many believers in our fundamental churches have fallen into this perilous credit card trap. What a blessing it would be to be able to invest that \$1,000 in the Lord's work which pays *eternal dividends* to our account with no interest!

Probably no principle has been voluntarily abused as much as credit. The use of credit must be balanced by other principles in God's Word and brought under the authority of God. In this issue and the next, we will look at some warnings about

credit or borrowing and offer some suggestions as to how we can free ourselves from the credit card trap.

Warning number one is found in Proverbs 22:7. Solomon in his wisdom warns us that to place ourselves into a situation where we borrow money places us in the role of a slave to the lender. A person who defaulted on a debt became the slave of the one who loaned the money. In many cases, the whole family became slaves to work off the debt. Think about this. Have we become slaves to the lending institution? Are we working to pay off a debt we voluntarily incurred because we either didn't want to wait and save for the item, didn't think to pray and allow God to provide for our need in His timing (Phil. 4:19), or allowed the attitude of materialism to infect our lives?

Many of the things we put on credit and to which we enslave ourselves will either wear out, become useless and obsolete, or have less value than we can get from it before it is paid off.

As good stewards, we must seriously consider if our use of credit is going to hinder us from supporting our local church and other worthy Christian organizations as God directs. How sad it is to be enslaved to our credit cards and not be able to tithe or give a special gift to the Lord's work because we have tied up so much of our income to pay off voluntary indebtedness. We lose the blessing which comes from giving and investing in God's work and give up the eternal dividends charged to our account to pay the interest on temporal things. The Scripture is true once again when it says that "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matt. 6:21)

Next issue we will look at another warning and offer some helpful suggestions for reducing our credit card debt. This will allow us to be better stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us and receive the joy and blessing of God as we invest in His work (Phil. 4:16-17).

BBC Foundation has been ministering to churches and individuals regarding biblical stewardship since 1992. Send your questions on finances and stewardship to: BBC Foundation, 538 Venard Rd., Clarks Summit, PA 18411. Phone: (800) 451-8668, website: bbcfoundation.org; e-mail: info@bbcfoundation.org