

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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Greatest Hindrance to Giving to the Lord's Work (Part 2)

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In the last issue, we began dealing with the problem of “voluntary indebtedness” through credit card borrowing. American families carry an average balance of \$7,000 on their credit cards, paying about \$1,000 interest per year for the privilege of using the bank's money. As we study the Scripture, it becomes very apparent that all we see and all we have belong to God. As the owner of all, God has authority to delegate to others the stewardship of His possessions. As children of God and joint heirs with Christ, we must realize that whatever God has allowed us to have and earn belongs to Him. It is our responsibility as God's stewards to care for what He has entrusted to us in a manner consistent with Scriptural principles.

Last issue we saw that when we borrow on credit we become slaves to the one who lent the money. It is possible that God might have provided the need for us if we had prayed and waited for Him to provide rather than purchase something on credit. Borrowing on credit could also be an indication that we are caught in the trap of materialism or were too impatient to save and pay cash for the item.

Another principle regarding borrowing is found in Proverbs 3:27-28. This principle states that we should pay the debt back at the required time. We are not to wait or put off the payment of the debt to the lender to another more convenient time. The credit card companies are very kind to allow us to carry any unpaid balance over from one month to another. However, just because the credit card company allows us to carry over the balance it does not mean that it is wise stewardship to do so. As a matter of fact, credit card companies know that by making credit available, consumers will spend 34% more using the credit card rather than wait, save, and pay cash. Many credit card companies will allow consumers to borrow up to 250% more than they can repay. Credit card companies also know that impulse buying increases substantially with the use of credit.

Romans 8:13 says that we are to owe no man anything except to love one another. This means as believers we are not to be indebted to anyone or under any obligation to anyone other than to love them. There is no greater freedom than to know we owe no one any financial obligations. We must use wisdom to balance any borrowing we do with the understanding that God expects us to repay what was borrowed. There may be some legal remedies for not being able to repay a debt, but God expects every obligation to be paid in full. As stewards of His resources, we must operate within this framework.

What do we do if we find ourselves with credit card debt that needs to be repaid, and we are having a hard time repaying it?

Listed below are some suggestions. Some may seem extreme, but some situations demand extreme measures.

First and foremost, pray! If we are going to get out of debt, we must be committed to being wise stewards, and we must ask God to help us live by good stewardship principles and be committed to doing so. You may need someone to whom you can be accountable. It may be your wife or husband. It may be a Christian financial advisor or someone in your church whom you trust and with whom you are comfortable in sharing your financial situation.

If you just cannot control your use of credit cards—cut them up and throw them away. Then, contact the credit card company and cancel your credit line and ask for a lower interest rate on the debt you currently have. Many credit card companies will gladly lower the rate rather than risk not collecting on the amount owed.

If you have multiple cards, there are a couple of things you can do to reduce your debt. One thing you can start with is to transfer as much of the debt to the card with the lowest interest rate and cancel the line of credit on all the other cards and cut them up. However, remember that if you just stop using the credit card, it won't be canceled until you call the company and request cancellation. If this is not possible, commit to paying off the card with the highest interest. Cancel the line of credit and cut up that card. When that card is paid off, use that payment to add to the payment on the next highest card. When that card is paid off, take that payment and apply it to the next card and so on until you are out of debt.

During this time, be committed to paying only cash for your purchases. You must be sure you make only purchases that you can afford. This means you must prioritize your purchases. Do this by developing a wish list and saving to purchase items with cash. When something else comes up, decide if it is to be placed above the top item on the list or below it, but do not make any purchase without the full amount of cash in hand.

Next issue, we will look at one more biblical principle and offer a few more suggestions for getting out from under the burden of our “voluntary indebtedness” from credit card misuse.

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