

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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Greatest Hindrance to Giving to the Lord's Work (Part 3)

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In the last two issues, we looked at two different principles related to borrowing. There is no greater freedom than to know we are debt free. We must use wisdom to balance any borrowing with the understanding that God expects us to repay what was borrowed.

Credit card companies know that consumers will spend 34% more using a credit card rather than waiting, saving, and pay cash. Every time we sign a charge slip, we enter into a contract with the lender. Many credit card companies will allow consumers to borrow up to 250% more than they can repay. These credit card policies, coupled with a lack of discipline or the ignoring of biblical principles, find many Christian families on the brink of financial disaster.

What does God say about not repaying a debt? Psalm 37:21 says, "The wicked borroweth and payeth not again: but the righteous showeth mercy and giveth." This verse contrasts the character of wicked versus righteous people. A person of wicked character is one who borrows and does not make good on the debt. A person of righteous character is one who shows mercy and generosity and gives to others. It is very difficult to give (like the righteous) if we are either so far in debt we can not "afford" to give or are so far in debt that we cannot repay the debt.

The Congressional Research Service noted that the number of personal bankruptcies in 1997 (1.35 billion) was triple of that in the early 80s. The largest contributing factor to personal bankruptcy is the rising credit card debt.

Some believers have taken the position that if the debt gets too large they can declare bankruptcy and start over—this issue will be addressed in a later article. Declaring bankruptcy may be a legal remedy for not being able to repay the debt, however, as Christians, we are bound by our word to pay our debt, and God expects every obligation to be paid in full. As stewards of His resources, we must operate within this framework.

Let's look at some additional suggestions to help us reduce our credit card debt to avert a potential financial disaster.

If you are serious about getting out from under your excessive indebtedness, consider selling some assets to pay off the debt. Do you have a second or third car, a boat, or an RV? Selling one or more of these items and applying the proceeds to your debt will help a great deal in moving you toward financial freedom. You

could also hold a garage sale and put the income towards the debt.

Do you have some assets in a savings or investment account that are paying low dividends? If this is the case, consider cashing them in and using the money to pay off the high interest credit debt. You may be paying more interest on your credit than you are earning in savings or your investment.

If your use of credit is necessary, heed the following warnings. First, determine the difference between a necessity and a luxury, and purchase only the necessities. When the credit card bill comes in, pay the entire bill. Second, the first month you fail to pay the balance on your credit card, do not use it until the bill is paid in full. Third, do not make any purchase without checking with your spouse. Fourth, resist the urge to obtain more credit cards. You can survive with one or two. Fifth, throw away any credit card offers that come in the mail. Resist the temptation to even open the envelope. Sixth, do not take a cash advance on your credit card. This includes using those checks issued by the credit card company. This transaction begins to accrue interest immediately, and there are usually high fees attached to these transactions. Seventh, do not borrow for items that will depreciate before the debt incurred is paid back. Eighth, resist any urge, once you get control of your credit spending, to make a major purchase using credit.

Remember, it will take determination, commitment, and patience to get relief from credit card debt. It takes a lot longer to get out from underneath this debt than it did to get into it. But with God's help, and the use of wise, biblical stewardship principles, God will help you get out of debt. Then you will have the financial freedom to give and invest your resources in God's work. The investment in God's work will pay eternal dividends, not charge interest! If you have any questions, or are looking for some help in this area, contact BBC FOUNDATION, INC. We exist to help God's people become better stewards of the resources He has entrusted to them.

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