



Debt – A Christian Response!

The average person in Britain has a mortgage between £60000 – £100000+, has a car loan and a number of different credit and store cards. This has not always been the case!! In 1929, 95% of homes that were bought were bought for cash and only 5% were mortgaged. Many people during this time rented accommodation. In 1945 practically no cars were financed - it was considered unthinkable, even immoral. As our post – Christian culture (since the 1950's) has shifted its attitude towards debt we see that we in the church have done so also. We spend nearly every penny we have and when that isn't enough we use the credit card as our lifesaver.

We see all of this in light of Proverbs 22 v 7 “ The borrower of money becomes the lender's slave!”

Discuss – Do you think that it is possible today to live in this society without debt? (give reason for your answer)
What do you think are the consequences on us when our debts get to great?
How do you think God feels about His people being in debt?

When we turn to the bible we see that over 50 passages speak directly about debt. 20 more speak indirectly about debt. Every single one of these passages about debt, speak of debt in a **very negative light**. They speak not in a positive or neutral sense – but negatively about God's people getting into debt!! Personal debt is clearly discouraged in Scripture, though not forbidden.

Scripture warns against the practice of using borrowed funds to enhance one's standard of living

Just as God desires his people to be free from sin, he also wants his people to be unencumbered by debt. Both sin and debt are enslaving and destructive if they are not covered or eliminated. Throughout church history up until the post – Christian era of the twentieth century we see that the church has **stood against** the free use of debt as a means of living day to day!! The church Fathers, Basil, Chrysostom, Clement, Tertullian, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine all spoke clearly in prohibiting borrowing.

Charles Spurgeon wrote a treatise on debt: “ *He is both a fool and a rascal who has a quarter coming in, and on the strength of it spends five dollars which does not belong to him... Scripture says, “owe no one anything,” which does not mean pay your debts, but never have any to pay. My opinion is, that those who break the law ought to be turned out of the Christians church!*”

C.H Mackintosh in 1864 wrote – “ *Owe no man anything is a precept so plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein..... What right have I, before God and man, to wear a coat or hat not paid for? What right have I to order a ton of coal, a pound of tea, or a joint of meat, if I have not the money to pay for it? It may be said, what are we to do? The answer is plain to an upright mind and a tender conscience we are to do without rather than go into debt!!*”

Read – Exodus 22 v 25 – 27, Deuteronomy 15 v 1 – 12, Leviticus 25 v 35 – 38, Deuteronomy 28 v 12 – 13, 43 – 45, Luke 6 v 34 – 36, Luke 16 v 13.

In these passages we see a number of important principles:-

1) borrowing was only allowed to sustain life. (borrowing for basic food, clothing and shelter.) The whole focus was that God has freed his people so they must not be enslaved to debt. According to God's law debt is only to be contracted in emergencies and never as a normal process of living! Scripture declares that those who are poor or destitute (i.e living hand to mouth to a severe discomfort of his family or in life threatening situation due to starvation or exposure) are allowed to cautiously borrow.

(2) Borrowing is allowed only from a fellow believer and then at no interest. Scripture declares that a Christian should only borrow from a fellow believer as it puts someone in a position of subservience and vulnerability. It is therefore important that the one you borrow from has the same moral and ethical code as your own. When lending it must be because of poor circumstances and not laziness or frivolity. Believers are not to profit from a brother's hardship and misery. Love and compassion should motivate such a loan. **Thought:** In both the Jewish, Muslim and Indian culture much of the money that is borrowed for houses, cars, starting up business, is lent by the extended family or the wider faith community! This is not the same in the Christian culture!

3) Borrowing is only allowed over a period of less than seven years. This allowed for the periodic release from debts and slavery so that families could rebuild their lives without plunging deeper and deeper into poverty.

4) Borrowing is consistently linked with sin and slavery . And borrowing from a pagan is described as a curse.

Discuss – In light of a society that bombards us with opportunities to borrow for everything in life, (buy now, pay later) how are we to respond to this teaching set by both Scripture and the early church?