

Biblical Money Management

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Introduction.

- A. It's no secret to any of us right now that the US is in the midst of a tremendous economic crisis. By several measures, this is the most trouble that our nation's financial health has been in since the Great Depression. This downturn has sent shockwaves through all levels of our society, from the bankers in New York City to many even among our own number. It's a difficult time, and we're struggling to get through it.
- B. Now that we've found ourselves in such a miserable position, it's only natural that we should look back over the past decade or more and ask how we got ourselves into this mess. Ever since the full extent of the disaster became known, there's been a lot of finger-pointing going on. Democrats blame the excesses of the free market; Republicans blame government intervention in the market. Working-class folks blame the rich bankers, and everybody seems to blame the mortgage brokers. However, underneath all the accusations, we have to admit that the American people as a whole have to shoulder a large portion of the blame. Nobody made us use exotic mortgages to buy more house than we could afford. Nobody made us buy Hummers and big-screen TV's on credit. Nobody made us sacrifice tomorrow on the altar of today. Sometimes, we think we're the first people to go through all this, but we're not. 800 years ago, the peasants of Russia had the same problem with living beyond their means that we do. As a result, they got enslaved by their debtors and became the serfs of Russia. History is littered with examples of nations just as dumb as we have been.
- C. Just as the problem is very old, though, so too is the solution. God's word contains strategies for financial peace that are 3000 years or more old, but they are still just as relevant to us today, and they will still help us today if we follow them. With this in mind, let's look to Proverbs for tips on biblical money management.

I. Good Financial Decisions.

- A. Within this category of money management, there are some things that Proverbs identifies as good financial decisions, and we're going to begin by looking at a few of those. The first of these good financial decisions that we can make is to **GIVE TO GOD FIRST**. That's the point of Proverbs 3:9-10. Obviously, we live under a different law than Solomon did, but the basic point remains the same for us. When we're drawing up our budget, it's easy to treat giving to the Lord's work as a want rather than a need. We fill in the line items for our housing, for our food, for our travel, and for some of those nice extras, and then, if there's any money left over, that's what we give to the Lord. He gets the pocket change and maybe some pocket lint to go with it.
- B. From a worldly perspective, that's a logical way to budget, but it's not what we see in Proverbs 3. Solomon says that we need to give to God before we do anything else. He needs to be the top line on our budget, not the bottom. We decide how much He deserves from us and then make the rest of our finances work around that. If we put God first in our finances, God makes a promise here that is repeated in the New Testament as well. If we give to God first, He will see to it that we are always provided for. That doesn't mean that we can sit back with our arms folded and wait for God to deliver the money. It doesn't even mean that we can expect a Mercedes Benz like Janis Joplin. However, it does mean that if we work and trust, we will have enough.
- C. Once we've given to God first, we ought to learn to **CONSERVE, NOT SQUANDER** our resources. Consider the contrast made in Proverbs 21:20. The wise man has financial resources because he is frugal and prudent in their use, but the foolish man has nothing because he blows it. Brethren, our country that is filled with people who squander their money, and there are plenty in the church as well. Many of the financial difficulties we run into arise not because our means are insufficient, but because we choose to live above them.
- D. A year or two ago, I was talking to a brother who was telling me about a family in his congregation that came to the church looking for financial help. As part of that process, several of the brethren there went through that family's books. They quickly discovered that the family had more income than many of the Christians they were asking for help. The problem was that all the money they were bringing in just ran through their hands like water. If we wish to be wise stewards, we need to learn to base our financial decisions not on our wants, but on our resources. If we buy and buy and buy without thinking about the cost, we'll end up with nothing.
- E. Third, another path to prosperity is to **BE A GOOD EMPLOYEE**. Hezekiah touches on this in Proverbs 27:18. Because most of us who work work for somebody else, this is a principle we need to pay attention to. All of us have seen bad employees. I can remember a lady I worked with in the county attorney's office in Williamson County who demanded an assistant to help her with a job she could easily have done by herself if she hadn't been so lazy. It's like she was trying to cheat the county out of its money by working as little as possible.
- F. Friends, that's an arrogant and short-sighted way to live. Our bosses aren't dumb. They know which employees are pulling their weight and which employees are slacking. When the time comes for raises, it's the hard workers who will be at the front of the line. When the time comes for job cuts, it's the dead weight that's the first to go. Ultimately, if we want to take care of ourselves, we accomplish that by being good employees.

- G. Finally, we must also learn to **BE GENEROUS**. Solomon discusses generosity in Proverbs 11:24-25. Unlike the others, this is a problem that people who think about the way they spend money are apt to run into. We have an opportunity to help someone in need, but the money stays clenched in our sweaty little palm instead. Now, it is important to be wise as we are being generous. Giving a 20 to the corner bum so he can go buy booze with it is not giving him what he needs. However, when we see a brother or sister in need, or someone else whom we can actually help, we need to be free-hearted rather than miserly. This is equally true for those who find themselves in the position of employers. They should do their best to pay their employees generously, rather than regarding labor costs as an expense to be cut as much as possible. It's a question of what's more important to us: the dead money that we can't hold onto forever anyway, or the eternal soul of the person who has been created in the image of God. Let's love souls more than money. Let's be generous.

II. Bad Financial Decisions.

- A. However, just as there are good financial strategies that we should pursue, there are bad financial strategies that we should shun. One of the best financial resolutions we can make is to **AVOID DEBT**. Look at Solomon's warning in Proverbs 22:7. This is an ominous way to think about debt, but it's true. Whenever we go into debt for some purchase, we're signing away the right to our own labor. Until we have repaid our creditors, we are going to be working for them, not for us. We have become their economic slaves. Of course, some debt is necessary. Without the opportunity to buy my house using a mortgage, I wouldn't have gotten out of that wretched apartment complex until I turned 40. We can add other things to the category of useful debt, like car loans and school loans. However, a lot of debt is not useful. It's simply the expression of our desire to live above our means. We can't really afford to eat at Chili's for lunch every day, but we can't leave those baby-back ribs alone. We can't afford that trip to Europe, but we want to go anyway. As a result, we just put the things we can't afford on the credit card and accumulate an ever-growing balance that we pay on but never actually pay off. Consumer debt is the height of financial foolishness. Let's be wise and avoid it.
- B. Likewise, we must **AVOID DISHONEST GAIN**. The Bible promises that nothing good will come of it in Proverbs 13:11. This should be a warning for us if we are intent on a life of crime, but for most of us, that isn't a temptation. What it also warns against, though, is the dishonest gain that can come from playing the lottery or gaming down at the boats. Not only is gambling sinful, it's also a terrible way to get ahead financially. Sure, we understand that 99.99 percent of gamblers end up losing, but even the .01 percent that wins doesn't profit in the long run. Ever read any stories about what happens to the guys who win ten million dollars, or a hundred million, with that lucky lottery ticket? The typical pattern goes like this: They go out and make a bunch of huge purchases, they get sucked dry by greedy friends and relatives, they blow through all their money in two or three years, and they end up just as poor as they were before, with a whole bunch of new debt besides. They'd have been better off if the winning ticket was a loser! Let's learn from their example, and from Proverbs too. Let's avoid gambling and all other kinds of dishonest gain.
- C. Along similar lines, the wise also **DON'T LOOK TO GET RICH QUICK**. This appears in Proverbs 21:5. To be honest, when I was researching this lesson, I was surprised to find this in Proverbs. I'd originally thought that get-rich-quick schemes only showed up along with multi-level marketing, but I should have known better. Ever since the invention of money, men have been looking to turn an easy buck, and it still doesn't work. This is just common sense. If getting rich were quick and easy, everybody would be rich. All those ads on the Internet that promise \$100,000 a year for working 20 hours a week, all those sparkling business opportunities that our buddy tells us about, all of those things are designed to make somebody else rich, not us. Some people are really slow learners about this. I know brethren who bounce from scheme to scheme about once every six months, never sticking with anything, always looking for easy money they don't have to earn. Of course, it never works, and they never get anywhere. The truth is simple and uncompromising. For those of us who weren't born with a silver spoon in our mouths, the road to prosperity leads through mountains of hard work. If we're allergic to hard work, we can expect to be poor. If we're allergic to hard work but try to find an end-run around the free market, we can expect to be poorer. Don't look to get rich quick.
- D. Finally, we should listen when the Bible tells us, "**DON'T BE A SURETY**." Among many other places in Proverbs, this admonition shows up in Proverbs 22:26. There's a narrow application to this verse, and there's a broad application. In a strict sense, a surety is someone who assumes responsibility for the debts of another, like when a parent co-signs for his kid's car note. That's a problem because if the primary debtor defaults, the creditor can come after the surety. We need to be very cautious about those whom we agree to be a surety for, because if we are incautious, somebody else's mistake can be our downfall.
- E. Broadly, though, we should read this as a warning against constantly bailing other people out. All of us know people who are financial black holes. They never have any money, and no matter how much we give them, they always need more. As we said earlier, generosity is a good thing, but there's a point with people like that when generosity becomes enabling. By giving them money like that, we're only encouraging them in their foolish ways and damaging our own financial standing. Let's be wise about those whom we help.

Conclusion. However, God has agreed to help all of us spiritually. Do you need His help today?