

# Debt

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning again, and let us pray as we come to consider God's Word. Let's bow our heads. Lord, thank you so much that you are our Father, that you care for your creation, you care especially for the people you have made, and that through Christ we know that we can come to you and rely on you and hear from you, that you speak to us, that you speak into our lives, into every circumstance, into every situation.

And Lord, as we consider this topic of debt and finances, would you draw close to us? Would you enlighten us through your Word? Would you help us to have wisdom? And would you help us to go out and apply and put into practice what we learned from you this morning?

And so we do pray that you would help us to concentrate and focus on your Word in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, I want to do a quick survey. Okay. How many people, raise your hands here, have at least one credit card?

Okay, good. Now, how many of... Keep your hands raised, credit card people. How many of you have a bank account with an overdraft facility? So that means... And keep your hands raised, the credit card people.

But if you also... No, no, no. If you're a person who has a bank account with an overdraft facility, in other words, you can take out money even when you run out. Yeah? Okay. Quite a few.

[ 1 : 22 ] There's quite a few here. So I'm glad you can put your hands down now. That means that debt is a topic that's quite applicable to us this morning. Whether you know it or not, debt is something that we'll have to talk about because of how easy it is for most of us to get into debt.

That's the fact of life. It's very easy for you and me to get into debt, even if we don't intend it. You see, credit card companies and banks with their credit facilities, their overdraft facilities, they want you to be in debt.

That's how they make their money. In fact, if you have a credit card and you don't fall into debt and you pay off timelously, you're actually not a very good customer to the credit card companies.

They want you to be in debt. That's how they make their money. And so they try to make it as easy as possible by letting you have as much credit facilities as you would like.

Recently, laws have been passed to limit the amount of credit cards that you can have. But before those came into being, apparently once in America, a man made a bet with his friend to see who could accumulate the most credit cards.

[ 2 : 32 ] The guy who won the bet made history by ending up with 1,003 credit cards that he managed to open, weighing 15 kilograms. I'd like to see him carry them all around.

And entitling him to the equivalent of 17 million rand in credit. That's quite a lot. Just, you know, not by being anybody special, just by opening as many credit cards as he could.

Banks, in fact, back in the day, used to send credit cards in the post to everybody on their mailing list. So once in Chicago, in the USA, not one but five credit cards were sent to a dushant named Alice, who was also made a preferred customer in many of Chicago's top restaurants.

And even despite legislation which limited that kind of thing recently, it's still very easy for us to get credit and credit cards today, isn't it?

It's very easy for us to buy what we can't actually afford on credit without even thinking about it. We just use it. It's the easiest thing in the world. But because it's so easy, people find themselves often in very difficult financial positions, where they suddenly find that they owe more than they can realistically pay back, and they don't know what to do about it.

[ 3 : 46 ] Let me tell you some stats. Recent surveys in our own country found that over 23 million South Africans are in debt of some sort, with more than half of them struggling to pay those debts.

That's more than 12 million South Africans are struggling to pay the debt that they're in. Many surveys have found spending up to three quarters of their monthly salary just on debt repayments. Imagine that. Your monthly salary, three quarters of it go out on the first of the month just to paying your debts. And so you've got a lot of these people who've trapped themselves in a cycle of debt that they just can't get out of.

And maybe that's something you've experienced. Maybe you know what it feels like to be trapped financially. And if you're currently in that position, then I hope what John said earlier helps you to think through some of the steps you can take to get out of that trap, get out of that debt cycle. And as I say, I reiterate, do speak to John, do speak to Alan. Don't be silent about it. If you're trapped, then you have a family. Speak to them. But what I want to do now, we've heard some practical advice, is I want to consider what the Bible says about debt.

[ 4 : 56 ] What the Bible teaches about getting into debt and how we should view debt as Christians. And the Bible does have a lot to say. That's the great thing about doing a topical series like this. We don't often do it.

Often we just take a book of the Bible and we work through it Sunday by Sunday. But every now and again, we'll look at particular topics like we're doing now. And the encouraging thing is that whatever topic we look at, no matter how practical it is, God's Word has something to say. God's Word is amazing in that way. That God speaks to very practical parts of our lives. You see, our Creator has principles to teach us about everyday living, including how we deal with our finances and debt.

And it would do us all well to hear this morning, no matter what your financial situation, to hear what God has to say. So the passage I want to start with is that one that Michiel read for us earlier, Deuteronomy 15.

It would be helpful if you have your Bibles open there. Now, in Deuteronomy, what we read about is the start of the nation of Israel, which is a new community who was chosen from out of the world to live under God's laws and be His people.

[ 6 : 03 ] It was the beginning of His new community that He was creating on the earth. Only the beginning, though. That wasn't the be-all and the end-all of it.

But God's laws for the nation of Israel, which don't necessarily all apply directly to us today, still had very important principles for us to learn. And His laws for them included how to deal with sin through the sacrificial system, how to love and worship God properly.

But also very practical laws on how to live with each other as good neighbors, including the subject of money. How do we borrow and lend money in a way that pleases God?

As I said, although we're not Israelites, the principles in these laws are just as applicable for us today as they were for God's people then. And the first thing I want us to notice in this passage, these laws on lending and debt, the first thing I want us to notice is God assumes there are times when His people will need to borrow money.

You see, remember, this is still a broken world that God's people are living in. We're not yet in the new creation where there'll be no need for money at all. There'll be no bank accounts, there'll be no banks because there'll be no scarcity.

[ 7 : 12 ] Money only exists in our economy because of scarcity, because there's not enough of resources to go around. But in the new creation, there'll be no lack of good things and there'll be no need for money.

But in the meantime, in this broken world, sometimes debt will be necessary even amongst God's people. And it shouldn't be something you necessarily feel guilty for because God makes allowance for that.

And He even instructs those in Israel who have extra money to make it available to those who don't. Did you notice that? Verse 7. Look what He says. If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward them.

Rather, be open-handed and freely lend them whatever they need. So the Bible teaches here that debt itself is not wrong. It encourages lending when it's needed. It's not a sin, debt.

So if you're in a situation of debt, don't think that, you know, you've fallen out of right relationship with God. You've sinned. Because here God shows that debt is sometimes necessary.

[ 8 : 15 ] Like in today's economy, I mean, often the only way you can buy large investments, like a house or a car, is through taking out a loan. And also when people, as John mentioned earlier, have

low or erratic income, sometimes the only way they can put food on the table is, you know, by borrowing money until they have a job and they can pay it back.

And God doesn't say His people can't do that. However, that's not all He says. There is something else that comes out of this passage. And that is that while God allows debt, He doesn't want His people to stay in debt.

Did you notice that? In fact, this passage is not so much about getting into debt than getting out of it. God wants His people to be debt-free, ultimately. That's what this passage is teaching us.

So much so that He goes to great lengths to ensure that, and He makes a very surprising law. We see it in verse 1. He says, At the end of every seven years, you must cancel debts. This is how it is to be done.

Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to a fellow Israelite. They should not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the Lord's time for canceling debt has been proclaimed. That's quite something.

[ 9 : 23 ] It's quite a unique law in the nation of Israel. At the end of every seven years, so there was the seven-year cycle. People could buy and sell and borrow and lend. But at the end of seven years, no matter what debts remain outstanding, they all had to be canceled.

They all had to be cleared. And it was an ingenious law, because amongst other things, you know, it forced creditors not to trap their debtors into long-term payment plans.

They had to sort it out before the seven years came to end, otherwise they would lose all their money. And this law really, while it was practical and while it helped Israel's economy at the time, more than that, it expressed God's heart.

It expressed God's desire for His people, that He doesn't want any of them to be trapped financially, ultimately. He always gives people a way out. He wants His people to have a way out.

He wants His people to be in a position where they don't, you know, owe what they can't afford. And the reason why God doesn't want His people to be in financially burdening situations like that is really hinted at in the wisdom book of Proverbs.

[ 10 : 30 ] Proverbs also speaks a lot about money, but one proverb in particular says this. It's Proverbs 22.7. It says, The rich rule over the poor.

The borrower is slave to the lender. Now, that's just wisdom. It's something that God warned in His Word we will see in our world, in our economy.

And essentially, that's what ongoing debt tends to do, doesn't it? It tends to create a situation of slavery. I mean, if you've been in a lot of ongoing debt, you'll know exactly what this proverb means, isn't it?

Where the person you owe money to becomes, in many ways, your master, and you are bound to them until your debt is paid. And God didn't want His people to be in that situation of financial slavery.

You see, He didn't rescue them from slavery in Egypt only to become slaves to one another. No, He wanted them to be free to serve Him alone. He wanted them to realize there is only one master that they are accountable to, and that is God, the Lord, who saved them and who rescued them.

[ 11 : 40 ] And His wish hasn't changed since then for His people. You see, today, too, He wants His people to be free to serve Him in many ways, but also financially. God calls His people in the Bible to realize that their finances don't belong to them.

They belong to their true master, which is God. He wants His people to be free to think of ways to invest in His kingdom, in the growth of His kingdom, in the extension of His kingdom.

But you can't do that if your first priority every month is to pay off a whole bunch of debts. Later on, in Deuteronomy 26, God also tells His people to give to the temple of the first fruits of their monthly income.

And that's a very good principle for us as well. You know, as a way of reminding His people that all of the money they have, especially the best of it, is His. It belongs to Him. And it's for His purposes. And it's a good habit for us today as well, to make our first financial obligation every month, God and God's work in His church and the extension of His kingdom.

[ 12 : 43 ] It's just a way of reminding ourselves, this money is not mine. And you know what? I don't want to just spend all my money on stuff that's not going to last. We have the opportunity as God's people to invest our time, our energy, and our money in things that will matter for eternity.

Think about that. Why would we not want to do that? Why would we not want to spend our money on things that will still matter 100,000 years from now? But we can't do that if we're obligated to pay off a whole lot of debts on earth first, right?

And so this is the principle that God wants His people to understand about their money and about the negative impact of falling into debt, the negative impact it can have on our service to God. Now again, that doesn't mean that all debt is bad. We've seen already God makes allowance for it. Some managed debt is necessary as long as we can afford it, as long as we look at the numbers and we can plan for it.

But we must avoid getting into a situation where we get into too much debt without realizing it and we can't realistically afford it and so we become slaves to it.

[13:52] God doesn't want His people to be slaves to debt. And so how can we avoid that kind of debt? That kind of surprising debt that comes up and traps us without us realizing.

Well, the best way is really to understand what causes us to get into that kind of debt in the first place. Why do people spend more than they can afford? Especially today.

You know, debt hasn't been a problem forever. I mean, debt has always been around, but it's only in the last few centuries become a real scourge in society, a real problem that a majority of people face at one time or another.

Why? Why do people tend to spend more than they can afford today? Well, I think the main reason comes down to discontentment. I think really that's at the heart of many of society's debt problems. Discontentment. Now, there are exceptions, of course, but a majority, I would say, of debt, especially in our middle-class communities, is not taken out to cover basic needs, but it's taken out to cover once.

[14:57] It's taken out to get the stuff that we think we need to upgrade our lifestyle. Think about it. If everybody was satisfied just with what they had, there would be very little need for credit cards and loans and debt.

What's more, rich people, people that have more than they need, would be more ready to give money to those who would otherwise need to borrow if they were satisfied with what they had. If we were all just simply content, there would be far fewer debt problems. And if we learned how to be content, we would have far fewer financial problems, every single one of us, I can assure you. But we're not content, are we? We're actually profoundly unsatisfied creatures, human beings. And we live in a world that actually feeds that dissatisfaction. Studies show that the average person is exposed to over 5,000 adverts per day.

[16:00] You think, wow, that's crazy. But subconsciously, without us consciously realizing it, cars passing out, you know, as we check our Facebook feeds, the adverts that popped up, when we go to Google, when we look at the TV, when we listen to the radio, when we go to get our post from our post box, adverts, adverts, adverts, all over the place.

And we've become so accustomed to it that we don't realize how many adverts we actually see per day. But every single one of those adverts, going into our brain subconsciously, whether we notice it or not, is building this idea in our minds that we need more.

That we don't have enough. That if only I had this super fancy couch, I would be more satisfied. If only I had this flat screen TV, or actually now, what is it?

The curved screen TVs. If only I had this latest model of phone, and then I would be happy. Because my Mark IV phone is just not satisfying me. I need the Mark V.

You see, this world is constantly feeding us with this propaganda that we need more to be happy. And we need to buy stuff to be happy, even if that means borrowing money.

[17:14] And it's very difficult to be content in that kind of environment, isn't it? It's very difficult to be content in a world that every day, on an average of 5,000 times a day, is feeding us this message that we need more.

Okay, so how do we change? If that's really at the heart of many of our financial problems, how do we change? Especially in this world that we're living in, how do we combat that propaganda that we get fed every day?

How do we get into a state where we're happy enough with what we've got? It's harder than you think. How do we get into a state where we don't need to chase after what we can't afford?

What we don't really need? Well, look with me at Philippians 4, because Paul actually gives us a great bit of teaching on this. Philippians 4 from verse 11.

These are the words of Paul, who was a man who, as you probably know, walked very closely with the Lord. He dedicated his whole life to serving the Lord, to spreading the gospel. And he went through much hardship doing that.

[ 18 : 21 ] But look at what he says. This is in a section of the letter thanking the Philippians for their financial support for his mission. He writes this from verse 11. I'm not saying this because I am in need. Now, we know he was actually in need.

But he says, For I've learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I've learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

See, Paul was a man with needs, just like you and me. He had to eat. He had to have shelter when he slept. He needed basic needs. And he had times, he says, of prosperity, and he had times of poverty.

Even though he was a child of God, he wasn't spared from difficulties, financial difficulties. But he says, In all this, he has learned to be content. And he says it's a secret.

Did you notice that? He calls it the secret of being content. It's not something that we naturally know how to do. We don't naturally know how to be content. The Bible teaches here.

[ 19 : 30 ] We have to learn how to be content. We know how to want. You know, you can look at any child straight out of the womb. The first thing is wants. They want this. They want that.

To survive, of course. But we know how to want. It comes naturally to want things. Nobody's got to teach us how to want. But we've definitely got to learn how to be content with what we have.

That doesn't come naturally. It's something that must be learned. That's why Paul says, I have learned the secret. Did you know that you can actually have everything you want in life?

Just by wanting less? Think about it. If you stop wanting what you don't have and start wanting what you already do have, then you will have everything you want.

It's a very easy way to have everything you want in life. But we don't do that, do we? We want what we don't have. And so we live these constantly discontented lives and we spend more than we should on things we think we need to be happy and then we get them and we're not happy and we spend more and we take out more debt.

[ 20 : 35 ] And that is what I think is at the heart of most of our financial stresses in life. In 1 Timothy, there's another passage that Paul talks about this.

He writes to a young minister, Timothy, who no doubt would face financial difficulties. And then he gives this advice. He says, We brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. See, the way to avoid ruin and destruction is simply to be content with whatever God chooses to give us.

Paul says, We brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. That's why you never see a hearse with a trailer. You see, Paul's saying, Don't chase after getting stuff here on earth.

Because you can't take it with you. And besides, you're not going to be here for long anyway. And it's that eternal outlook which just shone through all of Paul's letters that we read in the Bible.

[ 21 : 48 ] Everything that he dealt with in life, everything that he commented on, he had this eternal gospel outlook. And that's what God's people need to have when it comes to our finances as well.

This eternal outlook is really what is at the heart of true contentment. It's the secret of being content. Not living for this world and what this world can give us.

Not trying to find our happiness and satisfaction here, but living for the world to come. Jesus puts it this way. He says, Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So ask yourself this morning, where is your heart?

Really, what are you chasing after? Where are your treasures stored? Are they stored on earth?

Are you chasing after happiness in the things that this world can give you?

[ 22 : 52 ] In the things that the adverts promise to give you? Happiness? Are you chasing for your happiness in the here and now? Or, ask yourself, is your happiness rooted in the knowledge of

what's to come, not in the here and now?

So much so that you can be content with whatever God chooses to give you in this life. No matter how much or little that is. You know, someone once wrote, this is very good advice.

He said in many ways, he was commenting on this secret of contentment that Paul talks about. And he says, in many ways, the greatest mystery of contentment is that to achieve it, we must be full of discontent.

And what he means by that is that to be content with what we have in this life, we need to be so unsatisfied with this passing world that we don't even bother to look here for happiness, but we pin our hopes firmly on heaven.

That's what he means by to achieve contentment, we must be full of discontent. We must learn not to pin our hopes here for happiness. But of course, you can only have that true contentment that Paul talks about, that God wants you to have.

[ 24 : 04 ] You can only have that hope if you know where you're going after this short life, if your hope is secure, if your hope is certain. It's only then, once you have that certainty, that you can start to learn to be content here because you're not pinning your hopes here.

But if you don't have that certainty, if there are some doubts, if you have no idea where you're going when you die, you will, by default, look to this world for everything. You will want to live for everything now.

You'll want to chase after your happiness here and now because you don't know what's to come.

And so really, only a true Christian is able to have contentment, true contentment. Only a true Christian who knows for sure where they're going when they die because of what Jesus did on the cross for them, only they will truly be able to learn the secret of contentment.

Do you have that contentment? Do you have that hope which leads to that contentment? If you do have that hope, that doesn't automatically mean that you will be content. You need to train yourself to keep on looking back at that hope, looking forward, rather, looking forward to what's to come, living for the world to come.

You need to discipline yourself to do that. Every time you feel, oh, I really want that, oh, I don't have enough money, every time you stress about your bank account, just stop. Just learn to be content like Paul was in plenty and in poverty.

[ 25 : 25 ] Maybe you don't have that assurance at all. Maybe you've been coming to church for a long time, you still, you don't know what your ultimate future holds because you haven't yet come to true faith and repentance in Jesus.

You haven't yet come to Jesus to give your life to him, to repent of your rebellion, to turn back to him as your rightful ruler and king. Well, I must ask you, what are you waiting for?

If that's, if you haven't done that yet, what are you waiting for? Writing in the sky? Do you want Jesus to send you like a post, a letter in the post? He's given you his word.

He's given you everything you need here. This is all the writing in the sky you need in God's word. What are you waiting for? Jesus has shown that he is the son of God. He has shown that he has died for your sins.

He has shown that he has opened up the way to eternal life. If you haven't yet responded to that, what are you waiting for? Please tell me. I'd love to arrange it. Please, what are you waiting for?

[ 26 : 24 ] This life is short and fleeting and unsatisfying. And you know that. And God has made you for something much better than this. And he wants you to be free of debt.

He wants you to enjoy complete freedom. But you know what? He doesn't just want you to be free of financial debt. You see, there's another reason God commanded all these debts to be cleared in ancient Israel.

And that is, as a foreshadow of the day when he would clear all his people's spiritual debts, their sins against him, that weigh down on people worse than any financial burdens.

You know, you might be in debt. You might have financial burdens weighing down on you. But you know, that's nothing compared to the burden of sin that weighs down on us. And Jesus came to earth to die for those sins to clear you of your biggest debt, your sins against God.

Which when you turn to him, no matter what your financial situation, when you turn to Jesus, you will find such contentment in this life that you won't need to seek your happiness in this world and in spending money on things you can't afford because your hope and your treasure will be in heaven.

[ 27 : 36 ] So come to him. Come to the one who has died to clear all of your debts. Learn from him. Trust in him.

And get an eternal perspective in your everyday life and experience the freedom of true contentment. That is something that I want to be praying for every single one of you to find, to know, true contentment in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray now for that. Yes, Lord, we thank you for this reminder that you don't want your people to be trapped in debt, but especially you don't want your people to be in the debt of sin. thank you, Lord Jesus, that you taught us in your prayer to pray, forgive us our debts, our spiritual debts against God.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming down, for dying, to open up the way to eternity, to a new creation where there will be no scarcity, no need, no want. We will be totally satisfied in you.

[ 28 : 40 ] And, Lord, I do pray for everyone here this morning. I pray that you would help them to learn the secret of true contentment through trusting and following Jesus Christ.

And I pray this in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.