

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,
on Sunday, November 6, 1988, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

PROVERBS 3:9

“Honor the Lord with your money.”

SIX PRINCIPLES TO HELP YOU HANDLE YOUR MONEY

In the two recent sermons on “Laying the Foundation for Financial Freedom,” we saw that the Bible has a great deal to say about our possessions; and perhaps it is appropriate that we should follow up those sermons with a message that will help you focus on some biblical principles as to how we ought to handle money.

Let us look at six principles, the first of which is

1. Work. Now perhaps you may think that that is a very pedestrian way to begin the sermon. You may have been expecting some magic formula which, if you followed it, would ensure for you untold financial blessing! Let me mention at this point one of the major misunderstandings of “Faith-Promise,” namely, the mistaken idea that if we give in the way God tells us to give, somehow God is going to give us a lot more back. Now that often happens. God blesses us in our family, in our work, in countless ways when we are honest with Him in the matter of the stewardship of our possessions. We have many in our church here who will testify to that.

But work is one of the things Scripture emphasizes time and time again. Proverbs 14:23 says this: “Work brings profit but talk brings poverty.” Proverbs 20:4 says, “If you won’t plow in the cold, you won’t eat in the harvest.” And in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 Paul says, “Even while we were still there with you, we gave you this rule: ‘He who does not work shall not eat.’” The context of that verse is interesting. There were some Christians in Thessalonica who got the notion that the second coming of Christ was about to take place at any moment. They got so excited at this glorious prospect that some of them decided it wasn’t worth while even to undertake gainful employment. The Lord was coming and they were just going to sit around and wait for it to happen! If you think their behavior was bizarre, just think of how some of the sects carry on today! And Paul was really saying to them, “Come down off ‘Cloud Nine.’ You’re living in a real world; and don’t expect other people to work and feed you if you won’t work for yourself.”

It is perfectly clear, if you don’t work in the New Testament Church, you don’t get anything to eat. This is a basic and tragic mistake in the philosophy of the so-called “Welfare State.” Now I know that many people, for various reasons, are obliged to be on welfare. But there are hundreds of thousands in this country who are nothing but “freeloaders,” and who think the world owes them a living, and the rest of us are being taxed out of existence. I tell you solemnly that if our country ever espouses the “Welfare State” concept in the way Great Britain has done, we will go down the tube. It is preposterous and it is totally unbiblical and therefore un-Christian.

Work is a key to handling finances. We simply have to know that work is the major way by which God gives to us the resources we need for living. Now suppose you're out of a job, that you are unable to find work. If you're out of work, your job is to work just as hard at finding work as those of us who have employment. That means that at least for eight hours a day you are out pounding pavements, reading want ads, making telephone calls, working as hard as you can to find work. If this principle were observed, can you imagine how it would give back to multitudes of people a sense of self-respect, and save our country billions of dollars in welfare costs.

The Bible says that a Christian must work. It is the major method God uses to ensure that our earthly needs are supplied.

The second principle I would enunciate is

2. Save. Proverbs 6:6-8 says, "Take a lesson from the ants you lazy fellow. Learn from their ways and be wise! For though they have no king to make them work, yet they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter." They save up for what they know is future need. Proverbs 21:20 says, "The wise man saves for the future, but the foolish man spends whatever he gets."

The Word of God clearly says that we need to save. I believe that those of us who were born before the Great Depression of the 1930s don't have much problem with that. Those born after the Depression may have problems with it because they don't usually know what it is like to go through such a time of poverty.

The Bible says we all need to save. Savings is a long-range process. Beware of all "get rich quick" gimmicks. Some have made a fortune that way, but multitudes have lost their shirts. If you were to save \$1,000 a year at 6% interest, at the end of one year you would have \$1,060; at the end of five years \$5,975.33; at the end of ten years \$13,971.66; and at the end of fifteen years \$24,672.56. You have invested \$15,000 in fifteen years; and because of interest, you could start now to withdraw \$2,000 a year for the next twenty years, and still have \$1,042.36 left! Now we simply need to see that kind of a picture to realize that saving is a long-range proposition.

What are the reasons why we should save? — at least seven:

- a. For education.
- b. For retirement.
- c. For sickness.
- d. To accumulate capital so that we can purchase items without going into debt.
- e. To develop a pool of resources from which we can invest to beat inflation.
- f. To develop our character.

- g. To enable us to give over and above what we promised the Lord in “Faith-Promise” to His work.

We need to understand that in saving we have to be careful that we don't end up hoarding. Who owns all that you have? If God owns everything, and you have made in your heart that total transfer of everything you have to Him, then hoarding will not be your problem. We simply need to understand that saving is a biblical principle, and those of us who love Christ ought to be people who, above all, are savers.

3. Stay out of debt. The US. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in a survey of 10,813 families in 91 cities came up with this startling fact - that the average American family spends \$400.00 more than it earns every year. Statistics prepared by the Federal Reserve Board demonstrated that the total consumer credit jumped from \$5.7 billion to \$56 billion from 1945 to 1960, and to \$160 billion in 1975. Personal debt in the United States increases by more than \$1,000 every second! And the banks of this country own more than 70% of all the cars on the road! Personal bankruptcy has increased 36%. There are now about 300,000 personal bankruptcies a year in our country.

Something is wrong, and what's wrong is that we are not following Scripture. Proverbs 22:7 says, “Just as the rich rule the poor, so the borrower is servant to the lender.” Romans 13:8 is perhaps the clearest reference in all the Bible to debt. J. B. Phillips translates it, “Keep out of debt altogether.” Now that is a clear, dogmatic statement -- “Keep out of debt altogether.” What is the best way that most of us could do that? - By having a gigantic credit card fire! I believe that for most of us in this congregation the best way we could stay out of debt would be to take our credit cards and destroy them. Now, if you need them for business or tax purposes, and if you always have money set aside already for the use you're going to make of the credit card, that's all right. But for the majority of us, we lack the discipline that we need to not just go in and buy whatever we see because we want it. We have the card why not buy the commodity? And we need to understand that that is something that for the most part we ought not to do.

Do you know that 70 million Americans carry 400 million credit cards, and that 75% of all those people only pay the basic monthly charge, which means they are being charged 18% interest on the unpaid balance? We ought constantly to remember about that 18% interest.

Can we borrow at all? Well, there are no clear Scriptures on this, so I will simply give you an opinion, but it is the best opinion I can get from experts in this field who have ability in finances far beyond what I have.

Borrowing should be limited to appreciating items, or assets with a self-liquidating debt -- a mortgaged home, land purchased on contract, or business loans, or educational loans, can be wise. But the following principles should be observed:

- a. Do not borrow if it produces unnecessary pressure or insecurity on yourself, or on your family.

- b. Do not borrow beyond your ability to repay. If you earn \$20,000 a year, a house costing \$150,000 would probably be beyond your means.
- c. Assume no personal liability, if at all possible. It is usually very unwise to put up personal security for someone else. I have seen people ruined financially in this way. (See Proverbs 6:1-5.)
- d. Do not borrow to get rich quick.
- e. Do not borrow on depreciating items. That is the “kicker” for most of us -- cars, appliances, luxuries - they are all depreciating items.

The Bible talks about debt. We need to understand that. And I am amazed at the number of Christians who are deeply, and, in some cases, uncontrollably in debt.

4. Establish a Budget. Proverbs 14:8 says, “The wise man looks ahead. The fool attempts to fool himself and won’t face facts.” Proverbs 24:3,4 says, “Any enterprise is built by wise planning, becomes strong through common sense, and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts.” Proverbs 27:12 says, “A sensible man watches for problems ahead and prepares to meet them. The simpleton never looks and suffers the consequences.” In Proverbs 27:23-27 we read, “Riches can disappear fast. And the king’s crown doesn’t stay in his family forever -- so watch your business interests closely. Know the state of your flocks and your herds; then there will be lamb’s wool enough for clothing, and goat’s milk enough for food for all your household after the hay is harvested, and the new crop appears, and the mountain grasses are gathered in.”

The Bible does not use the word “budget,” but as the passages I have cited indicate, we ought to think and plan ahead, and one of the best tools we have for the accomplishment of this purpose is a well-thought-out budget. To know what’s coming in, to set aside scrupulously what we need to meet our necessary commitments, to have a wise financial game plan so that we live within the limits of what God has given us, is to show sanctified common sense. If you don’t have any clear idea how you’re spending your money, you are just going to keep on spending indiscriminately. We need to sit down and establish a budget that we can live with. And I would hope that all of us would do that. I’m also shocked at how many people try to operate financially without preparing a budget.

5. Seek Counsel. That is a biblical principle that needs to be emphasized. In any major decision you make in your life, you need to be seeking counsel. Never make some important decisions by yourself. Especially this is true with regard to finances. I have made some dumb mistakes in this area because I did not consult people who knew much more about the subject than I do.

Now why should we seek counsel? Well, Proverbs 12:15 tells us why. It says, “A fool thinks he needs no advice, but a wise man listens to others.” But from whom should we seek advice?

- a. Psalm 16:7 says, “I will bless the Lord who counsels me; He gives me wisdom in the

night. He tells me what to do.” The first place we should go is to the Lord. Seek what He has to say.

b. Psalm 119:24 says, “Your laws are both my light and my counselors.” It is the Word of God to which we should go. Very often the Bible will give us direction.

c. We should go to our parents. There is a splendid verse in Proverbs 23:22: “Listen to your father’s advice and don’t despise an old mother’s experience.”

d. Lastly, we need to get advice from our Christian friends. Proverbs 12:26 says, “The good man asks advice from friends, the wicked plunge ahead -- and fall.” Ecclesiastes 4:12 also has an interesting message in this connection: “One standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer; three is even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.”

Do understand that we need advice; and we need to seek the counsel of others before we go off half-cocked into some important financial undertaking.

We need to work, save, stay out of debt, establish a budget, and seek counsel. Finally —

6. We need to recognize that we are stewards. A “steward” is an administrator, a supervisor, a manager, an employee -- but he is not an owner. We do not “own” anything. God owns all that we possess, and we need to engage in that total transfer of ownership where we give to Him all that we have, and then we simply use what He has given to us to bring honor and glory to Him.

There is in law an instrument called a “Warranty Deed.” It is a document by which you may cede, or yield, or transfer to someone else, property or possessions that belong to you. Jesus asks you to sign a “Warranty Deed” on which you have listed everything you possess — houses, cars, stocks, bonds, bank accounts, property real and personal — everything that you call yours. You are voluntarily acknowledging that it is yours no longer -- it all belongs to Him -- and you are simply going to be a good steward, faithfully and honestly administering your Master’s estate -- and being especially honest and trustworthy in the apportioning out of His money. St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:2 says, “It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.”

Someday we’re going to have to stand before God, and He is going to say to us: “What did you do with what I entrusted to you? How did you use it? Were you a good and trustworthy steward?”

May the Lord grant us the wisdom and the determination to be truly Christian as we work, save, stay out of debt, establish a budget, seek counsel from others, and above all, recognize that we are stewards, totally responsible to God for the administration of what He has entrusted to our charge!

AMEN.