

What the Bible Says About Debt

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The Bible has a lot to say about debt, finances and how we should treat and handle money. One thing it does NOT say is that debt is a sin. No where are we specifically told not to borrow. However, borrowing is always talked about in a negative way, as something we should avoid. It is a Biblical PRINCIPLE that we should not borrow, rather than a RULE. Let's look at some key things the Bible DOES say about borrowing:

All borrowing must be repaid. Psalm 37:21a says *"The wicked borrow and do not repay."* The implication, of course, is that we must repay anything we borrow, or we are "wicked".

Surety is foolish. There are many references to surety in the book of Proverbs, and yet it seems to be a little taught or understood principle. Surety means to deposit a pledge in either money, goods, or part payment for a greater obligation. It means to take on an obligation to pay later without a guaranteed way to repay. *"A man lacking in sense pledges, and becomes surety in the presence of his neighbor."* Proverbs 17:18 When you take on a debt of any kind, except where the item pledged for security (eg your house) will be accepted for full payment of the debt no matter what the circumstances, then you have a situation of surety. In other words, the only time you should ever consider borrowing money, is when you can get the lender to agree to a contract that says that if you are no longer able to meet the payments on the loan, then they can take possession of the item put up as security, and it will be accepted as full payment of the debt; they will not be able to claim or sue you for any additional money, even if the value of the item is less than the balance of the debt. In that circumstance, you have a guaranteed way to repay the loan; in all others you presume upon the future. If you ignore the Bible's teaching against surety, then you are putting yourself in a precarious financial position - if things don't work out quite as you had hoped, you may find yourself unable to make ends meet, and you could lose everything. At the very least, you will be under a lot of stress and pressure that could have been avoided by not borrowing.

Debt always presumes upon the future. James 4:13-16 says *"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil."*

If you borrow money, and you believe all borrowed money must be repaid, then when you take out a loan you are presuming upon the future, unless you have a guaranteed way to repay as described above. "Presuming upon the future" means that you are taking on a debt under the assumption that your income and situation in the future will be such that you will be able to continue making payments. But you don't know that.

Borrowing may deny God an opportunity. God wants to build up our faith. The Bible tells us that God will supply all our needs. When we borrow to buy something, we may be denying God an opportunity to meet our needs, or to show himself faithful, which would increase our faith. It is also easy to confuse our needs with our desires, or wants. If you are committed to following Biblical principles and not borrowing any more money, you can be sure that God will meet your needs, most likely in ways you would never dream of! In Unit 2, Lesson 32, I shared about some of the ways God met our needs when we committed ourselves to getting out of debt and doing things his way. How has he met YOUR needs in the past? Remembering past times when God has provided, will build your faith and help you to stick to your decisions to do things his way. If you haven't experienced God's provision, maybe you haven't given him an opportunity yet!

We all face an uncertain economic future! There is no real job security anymore. Businesses close or downsize every day, and jobs are lost. Accidents happen, preventing people working. National borrowing is out of control; sooner or later economies may collapse.

There is nothing we can do to prevent these kinds of things, but there ARE some things we can do to prepare ourselves, no matter what the future holds. Your best preparation for an uncertain economic future is to get out of debt!

Excerpted from Unit 3 of Goodbye Chaos, Hello Peace!