

# The Money-Go-Round: Easy Credit or Long-Term Debt?

*Personal affluence and low interest rates have bred a society which sees easy credit as a cure for many of its ills. As a result, many are deep in personal debt. What are the biblical principles that will enable us to cope with our financial difficulties?*

**P**ersonal affluence in Britain is currently at an all-time high. Things like overseas travel and abundant holiday time, which were only available to a privileged minority in earlier generations, are now commonplace. Today we have both more to choose from and an apparent abundance of funds with which to pay for our material pleasures.

Yet some of this affluence may come with a high price tag. You probably know friends or relatives who are having a tough time making ends meet. Perhaps you are too.

In particular, our young adults often fall prey to serious debt problems. 'One in five callers to the National Debt Line is under 25 and 250,000 of the people who consult the Citizens' Advice Bureaux about financial problems each year are under 30,' says Carl Bayliss of National Debt Line (which helps people sort out their debt problems). 'Credit is a way

of life to this generation. It's easily available and can be useful, but only when used responsibly.' Two-thirds of the problems younger people have with debt are related to credit cards, store cards, overdrafts, loans and other sorts of easy credit, he says. 'Budgeting is a life skill but many children never learn how to handle it' (*The Sunday Telegraph*, March 23).

## **Desire for credit**

Financial regulators warn that one in four households is struggling with debt. And it is not just young people who have to face up to difficulties with their personal finances. In Britain 'the average adult owes £3,383 on credit cards and in other loans, latest figures reveal' (*The Daily Telegraph*, Dec 13, 2002).

The Consumer Credit Counselling Service, a charity that helps people manage their debts, said in a report in October 2002, 'Debt levels are rocketing, with the average person

seeking help more than £24,000 in the red.' The report shows 'a massive 30 pc rise in the level of personal debt – that is, debts excluding mortgages and secured loans – since figures were first published at the end of 1999' (*Daily Mail*, October 30, 2002).

## **A consumer-led economy**

With world economic growth at best stagnant, and in some places in recession, ironically it is actually consumers – those going on credit-fuelled shopping binges—who have to a significant degree sustained the economy through their spending habits.

Even children, without an income earned in the workplace, are not immune to the perils of large personal spending. As an example, just consider the current craze for mobile phone text messaging. Youngsters can easily run up large bills texting their friends. For some children this can become an expensive pastime.

## A nation of borrowers

In Britain today, it seems that debt is an acceptable way to fund our way of life. Pat Boyden, a personal insolvency partner with accountant Pricewaterhouse Coopers, points out that 'many young people have been brought up by parents accustomed to borrowing. Today's youngsters need to look to grandparents, or even great-grandparents, to encounter people nervous about using credit' (*The Observer*, 10 Feb 2002). Many of them remember the devastating effect of sudden inflation in the 1930's.

The consequences of interest rates being at historically record lows are profound for both savers and borrowers. For savers, there is the disincentive of the low returns on savings and investments. For those whose retirement pension schemes are linked to the stock market, there are concerns regarding their likely value in the future.

For borrowers, there is often a misplaced confidence to borrow rather too freely at the current cheap rates, either for property purchases or for consumer goods and services.

## The need for financial literacy

Experts in personal finances say that it would pay for us all, whatever our financial positions, to become as financially literate as possible. We should work towards taking control of our personal finances and putting in place some well-thought-out plans, both short term and long term. For those in employment, this planning should include financial planning for retirement.

Anne Ashworth, the personal finance editor of *The Times*, wrote: 'Couples . . . should manage their financial affairs as if they were a business, maximising income and staying within borrowing limits –

## Useful Contacts

For help with debt or credit problems contact:

- Citizens Advice Bureaux (see local phone directory)
- Consumer Credit Counselling Service, 0800 138 1111 (0800 138 3328 in Scotland)
- National Debt Line, 0808 808 4000

or so say the experts' (*The Times*, Feb 13, 2002).

What is the average person to do if they have problems with debt? A starting point would be to familiarise ourselves with the subject and learn the basic principles of financial literacy. Magazine shelves contain several personal finance titles, and many national newspapers publish a weekly personal financial supplement. We should start with reading up on the subject and learning about the *principles* before being overwhelmed with the *products*.

For specific advice, particularly for dealing with the consequences of excessive personal debt, there is the local Citizens Advice Bureau or other help lines such as those listed in the box at the top of this column.

## Personal financial responsibility

In addition to understanding financial matters, we should be very aware of the seductive power of money and riches. As Christians we are to be examples in handling our responsibilities – of which our finances are only one. The apostle Paul set out a number of financial principles for Christians. One of these is that '*the love of money* is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced them-

selves through with many sorrows' (1 Timothy 6:10). However, money of itself is neither good nor bad, and can be used and managed wisely.

## A family affair

Personal finances should be a family affair, with experts directing advice towards couples. One relationship counsellor says that 'financial matters are one of the main problems cited by couples who seek counselling'. Another counsellor, Christine Norton, says, 'Money plays a central role in relationships. It is tied up with power, status and control. Unless there is openness about financial issues within a relationship, problems will arise. We advise really clear communication between partners about expectations and priorities, as well as honesty over spending weaknesses' (*The Times*, February 13, 2002).

Our financial responsibility includes making provision for those

## Recommended Reading

**Managing Your Finances**, for helpful biblical principles on the right use of money, keys to successful money management, budgeting, money in marriage and teaching our children about finances.

**Making Life Work**, for principles relating to marriage, child training, success in job and career as well as financial security and peace of mind.

**What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?** An often overlooked biblical principle actually helps teach us how to manage our money properly.

Please send your requests to the address shown at the bottom of page 8.

financially dependent upon us such as our children or a non-earning spouse. This may include funds for at least some of the cost of university education, having a savings plan, and ensuring we have an occupational pension or other provision for retirement.

Another financial principle Paul gave to Timothy was, 'If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever' (1 Timothy 5:8). This is an important principle which covers not just the provision of income to support family needs, but also how that income should be used.

### **Making a budget**

The basic key to personal financial management is to set up a budget, in cooperation with other family members where applicable.

In simple terms, a budget would first list family income from all sources, and would then identify how the family is going to spend that money. In setting up a budget, we should identify spending of all kinds, including funds to pay off any debts (such as credit or store cards, loan agreements, etc) and money to be set aside as savings.

Once we have identified all our items of spending, we should prioritise them. If we already have items of debt to be repaid, among our first priorities should be the mortgage or rent, council tax, utility bills, TV licence and loans secured on a property. We should also ensure we have insurance cover adequate for our circumstances.

To work up a budget, essentially all we need is pen and paper, plus records of all bills and payments. To assist in budgeting, simple programmes are readily available for those with a home PC. These will provide reminders of all the

possible expenses that we need to allow for, and will also help us keep track of our spending. The United Church of God publishes a free booklet, *Managing Your Finances*, which covers this subject in detail. Please feel free to request a copy.

In Proverbs 31 we read of a woman who efficiently ran her house-

hold, her husband safely trusting her to do it. Her budget ran from food and clothing to vineyards and the purchase of a field. This lady knew the entire needs of her household, including how best to meet those needs.

While society has changed, these basic biblical principles remain the same.

*David Fenney*

## **Financial Principles from the Bible**

**M**any scriptures caution against covetousness. Others emphasise giving and sharing. God promises to bless those who are generous and helpful to others – especially in order that the true gospel may go out to a sinful and suffering world. Please study the following passages carefully.

- Luke 12:15 – And He said to them, Watch and keep yourselves from covetousness. For a man's life is not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.
- Proverbs 15:27 – He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house.
- Proverbs 22:7 – The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.
- Matthew 19:23 – Then Jesus said to His disciples, Truly I say to you that a rich man will with great difficulty enter into the kingdom of Heaven.
- 2 John 10 – I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.
- Proverbs 11:24 – There is one who scatters, yet increases more; And there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty.
- Ecclesiastes 11:1 – Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.
- Acts 20:35 – It is more blessed to give than to receive.
- 2 Corinthians 9:6 – He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

# What Is

# God's Will for You?

*How much importance does the Creator place upon our both knowing and doing His will?*

William Shakespeare put the following words into the mouth of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark: 'To be or not to be, that is the question.'

The apostle John, pondering the same fundamental question, set out the basic boundaries of human life. 'The world passes away and the lust thereof: *but he that does the will of God abides forever*' (1 John 2:17).

So 'to be' in a permanent sense is to become part of God's family. Ultimately, 'not to be' is to cease to exist.

## The importance of God's will

John's confirmation of what happens when a person actually does the will of the Creator leads us to ask a vital question: Does God want human beings to know His will? The apostle Paul answered this question when he told the brethren at Ephesus, 'Be you not unwise, *but understand what the will of the Lord is*' (Ephesians 5:17).

In the broadest sense, the Bible reveals what God wants for the entire human race – defining His plan and purpose for mankind. This wish was expressed by the apostle Paul in these terms: 'God our Saviour; *who will have all men to be saved* and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Timothy 2:1-2, 4).

God intends the salvation He offers to eventually become universal. Yet the relatively small

number of true Christians today would render this very passage somewhat discouraging if we did not understand that God is only calling a small portion of mankind during this present age. The Bible calls them the 'firstfruits'.

Jesus instructed us in the Sermon on the Mount to 'enter in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads unto [eternal] life, and few there be that find it' (Matthew 7:13-14).

Yet in another place Christ clearly stated, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth [crucified], will draw all men unto myself' (John

*To become a part of God's everlasting family, we must first learn to get in harmony with His will – with His way of life.*

12:32). This paradox is resolved by the timing. Widespread salvation will finally come to this earth during the period of Christ's coming millennial reign and the Great White Throne Judgement, during which most of the human race will finally be granted their opportunity to be saved. (To understand further, please request our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.*)

Ideally, our Creator wants every human being to become a part of His Kingdom. Each person is important to God!

## Bending our wills to God's

And yet, in order to become a part of God's everlasting family, we must first learn to get in harmony with His will – with His way of life. We have to begin to swim upstream against the currents and illicit lifestyles of the world in which we live, learning to enter that narrow gate on a daily basis.

The Bible puts forward a number of key principles that will help us to both find and follow the way of God.

The apostle James gives a blunt warning about carelessly leaving

the Creator out of our plans. 'Go to now, you that say, today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there for a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas you don't know what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. For that you ought to say, *if the Lord will* we shall live, and do this or that' (James 4:13-14).

The perspective of eternity

should never leave our minds as we carry out our temporal duties of providing for our families and other similar responsibilities. Making God an integral part of our plans and routines is an essential aspect of our Christian responsibility.

King Solomon underscores this basic point: 'Trust in the LORD with all of your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and *He shall direct your paths*' (Proverbs 3:5-6). The apostle Paul habitually included God in his personal plans. In Romans 1:10 he spoke of his wish for a prosperous journey to Rome 'by the will of God'.

Of course, God will not make our decisions for us. Making godly choices based on our growing knowledge of the Bible is an essential part of our education for eternity. Discovering His will from the pages of Scripture is a lifelong Christian occupation.

Paul advised church members at Philippi, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12). We have our own part to play in fulfilling God's purpose. But the Creator goes on to encourage us in the next verse by pointing out, 'It is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure' (verse 13). So we are not left to our own devices. God is an active partner in the salvation process.

### **Determine to seek God's will**

Speaking of the Father, Jesus said: 'I do always the things that please Him' (John 8:29). This path took real determination and continual effort. Christ accomplished this by submitting His own will to the Father's.

Under the heaviest and most severe temptation, He prayed to God: 'O My Father, if it be possible, let

this cup pass from Me! Nevertheless not as I will, *but as You will*' (Matthew 26:39).

Then He prayed again, 'O Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me except I drink it, *Your will be done*' (verse 44).

The Father's will was for Jesus Christ to die for our sins, reconciling us to God – giving us continual access to His throne of grace. Paul pointed out that Christ 'gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father' (Galatians 1:3-4).

It will not always be easy for a Christian to carry out God's will. Sometimes it will prove downright difficult. Courage is mandatory! Prayer in patience and faith will be required.

### **'Thy Kingdom Come'**

Seeking to fulfil the will of God should include wanting our Creator's plan and purpose to be implemented throughout this whole earth. We are told to pray 'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth, as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10, KJV).

Part of our Christian duty is to

ask God to send His Kingdom of peace to this war-weary world. Both our individual and collective roles in preaching and publishing the true Gospel are also of great importance. Christ emphasised that the Kingdom will not come before the gospel is preached as a warning and witness to the nations of this world (Matthew 24:14). This aspect of God's work precedes God's Kingdom!

The Church is told to proclaim Christ's message of repentance and the coming Kingdom to the whole world (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:47).

If you would like to know the details of just how *The Good News* helps accomplish this challenging task, please write for our free brochure *This Is the United Church of God*. Getting the gospel to this world is an important aspect of God's will.

Fulfilling the will of our Creator is a lifelong task of spiritual education and learning. It involves trials and suffering as well as great joy.

*John Ross Schroeder*

## **More About God's Will**

Some of us may be well aware of God's biblical principles in general. But like the early evangelist Apollos we may also need further instruction. When Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos' powerful preaching, they realised that it was incomplete. In one or two points it lacked the full accuracy of the apostles' teaching. So 'they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately' (Acts 18:26).

That is the purpose of the free 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*. Why not enrol and discover much more about what God's Word says about the essential matters of your life? Every month you'll receive a new lesson taking you through the major themes of the Bible.

To better understand the will of God in your life, please request your first lesson today. Just ask for the *Bible Study Course*.

# *Forgiveness*

## **A Forgotten Key to Salvation**

*Many do not understand the role of forgiveness in character building.*

**F**orgiveness plays a crucial part in the process of developing holy, righteous character – God’s own trademark – built in us. ‘Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man [Jesus Christ] is preached the forgiveness of sins’ (Acts 13:38).

Forgiveness constitutes an important aspect of walking upright before God as we live by His standards. Christ’s sacrifice atones for our shortcomings in failing to adhere to God’s moral standards blamelessly (Romans 3:23). However, the death of Christ some 2000 years ago does not liberate us from living by God’s laws, which are the very foundation of sound moral standards.

Christ’s atoning sacrifice released us from the judicial penalty of having transgressed God’s laws, the code of conduct which reflects His righteous character. If we repent, we are forgiven when we fall short of the standards required of us. We are assured, and here is where forgiveness comes in, that ‘though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow’ (Isaiah 1:18).

Although real repentance requires a certain amount of character, being forgiven our sins does not, in itself, develop godly character in us. Instead it reflects the character of the one who forgives. Jesus Christ made it clear that forgiveness is an attribute that we must develop as well.

By forgiving a person who sins against you, you develop that divine character trait. Since God forgives us when we ask, we should likewise willingly and generously forgive others (Matthew 6:15; 18:35).

### **A far greater creation**

The first chapter of Genesis tells us that ‘God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them’ (verse 27). However man wasn’t automatically endowed with the Creator’s character attributes. That aspect of humanity’s purpose was to involve another creation, one with a vital spiritual dimension.

At creation, man was set apart from all other physical creatures in that he was given a mind, allowing him some limited creative power, a reflection of the unfathomable power of God Himself. This mind power is what gives human beings the ability to develop character, both good and evil.

When the Holy Spirit of God truly interacts with the mind of man, God-like character traits will be developed.

These divine attributes have to be acquired through a process of repentance and the keeping of the commandments of God, coupled with full reliance on God’s forgiveness. That is the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

The physical creation of man was only the beginning of a far greater creation, a spiritual one, where godly character development is of paramount importance. We are to become the children of God not only in name, but in nature as well. The apostle Paul makes the point that we are children of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

### **An attitude of forgiveness**

We, as the children and heirs of God, are able to develop godly character because our Creator has extended forgiveness to us upon repentance. Without forgiving others in the same way, we will go nowhere on the road to salvation. We can not attain to God’s righteous character without a spirit and attitude of forgiveness. And our own sins will remain unforgiven (Matthew 6:15; Mark 11:26).

Those who hold grudges against others are dying spiritually. It is a very dangerous practice.

A survey of surviving Japanese prisoners of war found that those POW’s who remained bitter and unforgiving damaged their own lives, and were unable to recover from their experience, while the very few who were able to forgive their captors, even without seeing repentance, freed themselves from bitterness, and went on to live a happy life.

We need to develop God’s

perfect character, which includes a merciful, forgiving frame of mind. Jesus Christ, by his atoning sacrifice, made possible 'an end of sin' (Daniel 9:24) through God's generous forgiveness.

Forgiving others for wrongs done against us may take considerable effort and courage.

Although we should always reflect a spirit and attitude of forgiveness, that does not mean condoning the sin. Nor does it mean compromising with ongoing unacceptable behaviour for which there is no sign of repentance, particularly if that behaviour constitutes a threat to life and

limb. Scripture tells us to avoid such people (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

But where there is genuine repentance we should be ready and willing to forgive others. Christ, by forgiving our sins, reflected the very mind and character of God (Philippians 2:5). So can we!

Gerhard Marx

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## Questions & Answers

**Q:** *I am from Northern Ireland and have studied your teachings and believe what you say to be correct. But I do have some questions. If hades is the grave and hell does not exist, can you explain these two verses for me? In Matthew 5:29-30, both verses end with 'cast into hell'. Revelation 6:9-11 also describes martyred saints whose spirits were with God in heaven when they died. Also will people who have not been baptised be saved? Please help me to understand.*

R H, Coleraine, Northern Ireland

**A:** In the New Testament the word *hell* is very real as the final punishment of unrepentant evil persons. These are those (hopefully) few who stubbornly persist in wickedness and refuse to repent of their sins. Matthew 5:29-30 refers to *Gehenna* as the second death in the lake of fire (see Revelation 20:14-15). However, the wicked will be immediately consumed in that fire and the flames totally terminate their lives. As the prophet Obadiah wrote, it will be as though they had not been (Obadiah 16).

Remember that the wages of sin is *death* (Romans 6:23) – the total *absence of life* with no consciousness, not eternal life in hellfire.

There are three different Greek words translated into the one English word *hell*. The three meanings are distinct, as is explained in our free booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* In particular, *hades* refers to the grave, and *Gehenna* to a fire that will burn up the wicked at the end of human history.

The crying out of martyred saints in Revelation 6:9-11 is metaphorical in meaning. A good example of this is another biblical passage in Genesis 4:10. After Cain had killed Abel, God said to him, 'The voice of your brother's blood [Abel's] cries out to Me from the ground.' Abel was already dead, but God expressed His deep feelings about this tragedy with very strong figurative language.

Many passages in the Bible show that death is a sleep from which we awake when we are resurrected by God. The 'souls under the altar' in Revelation 6 are told to rest (or sleep) a while longer until their fellow Christians are also martyred. Indeed it could also be said of them that the voice of their shed blood cries out to God. In due time our Creator will resurrect them (Revelation 20:4, 6; 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

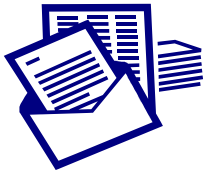
You also asked whether people who have not been baptised will be saved. Mark 16:16 tells us, 'He that

believes and is baptised will be saved.' Baptism is the response God requires when we are called to repentance and a comprehension of His truth.

But there is a missing dimension in the understanding of many mainstream Christians. They assume that today is the only day of salvation. Nothing could be further from the truth. Only the first-fruits of God, those few especially called out of this world by the Father, are called to salvation now and exhorted to repent and be baptised in water (Acts 2:38).

But the Last Great Day, the last of the annual Holy Days, tells us that there will be a great autumn harvest of salvation – a great resurrection (Revelation 20:5, 11-12) of all those who never understood God's plan and purpose during this age of man. This will be their one opportunity for salvation, to repent, to be baptised in water and receive God's Holy Spirit.

Our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* will explain these principles in much more detail. For further knowledge about water baptism, you might also request *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*, and *The Road to Eternal Life*.



# Letters From Our Readers

## The Good News

To acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 31 March, I would like to thank you very much for sending me the last two issues of *The Good News* as well as the booklets free of charge. I am hoping that you will continue to send me these publications in future. I have already shared all booklets received with interested readers and I suppose that some of them will personally apply to subscribe to *The Good News*.

*D R, Montenegro, Yugoslavia*

I thank you for forwarding *The Good News* and other booklets. In a very frightening and violent world, it is comforting to get advice and help.

*J M C, Lanarkshire*

I give *The Good News* to some of my students. You see I am a self-taught teacher and I teach children in my village and in the neighbouring village. I do this work on weekends because in fact I am a farmer.

*G B, Moldova*

I really enjoy reading your magazine from page one to the last page. Then I pass it on to friends or to the hospital desk. Today I am sending you a small donation towards your printing and publishing costs. I was thrown out of Uganda in 1972. But by the grace of the Almighty today we are all settled, our children are educated and we are safe in this country.

*Mrs S P D, Kenton, Middlesex*

## The Irish waters

I am writing to express my gratitude for *The Good News* and the first lesson of the *Bible Study Course* that you mailed to me recently. I must confess that both publications and other literature are divinely inspired. But your organisation should cast its nets in the Irish waters. There are lots of fish here waiting to be harvested for Christ.

*T E, Waterford, Republic of Ireland*

• *We are doing our best. Please pray that God would open the doors and also send us the necessary resources for a substantial spiritual work in the whole of Ireland.*

I have been avidly reading your *Good News* in prison which has been obtained on occasion from another inmate. It is a truly revealing insight into the Scriptures. Never in my life have I better understood the importance of God's salvation, His amazing plan for humankind and the necessity of obeying His commandments and holy laws.

*G T, Lisburn, Northern Ireland*

## Godly character

While I do not agree with all your doctrines and beliefs, I want to thank you for all of the booklets and magazines I have received. I have started to take extracts from your youth web magazine for my own children. The focus on

building godly character is so often missing these days.

*C E, Leicestershire*

## Views on evolution

Please do not renew my subscription unless you change your views on evolution.

*Mr R B, Twickenham*

• *Why not re-examine our free brochure Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*

## Senior reader

Thank you for sending me your excellent magazine free of charge. Sorry I haven't written to thank you before. I am a widow in my seventies and go to the Presbyterian Church.

*P W, County Donegal, Ireland*

## Confusion about churches

Thank you for this *Bible Study Course* and other materials. I would like to ask you if you are able to send me your declaration of faith because I found various churches called the Church of God.

*A H, Czech Republic*

• *We have mailed our Fundamental Beliefs booklet as well as our most recently published brochure, This Is the United Church of God. You may also want to request The Church Jesus Built. These three publications should help clarify matters.*

## How our literature is funded

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