

Lifestyle Issues – Part 6

Purpose: To establish a Biblical Approach to Contemporary Lifestyle issues

1. Introduction

What did we look at last week? Gluttony

What did we see?

Gluttony is sin. Wider in scope than simply eating too much

Related to lust, greed, idolatry – worldliness

Gratifying certain appetites of the flesh

When obesity is a consequence, medical issues follow

Applied the Biblical principles

This week, we are looking at debt

What is different about debt compared with previous issues?

Not related to something we consume.

What does that suggest concerning the principles we apply?

We may need some different ones.

First – define the issue

Second – examine the Biblical teaching – there is a lot here

Third – draw out and apply principles from Bible teaching

2. Definitions of Debt and Other Terms

2.1. *debt* \ det \ noun

[Middle English *dette*, *debte*, from Old French *dette* something owed, from (assumed) Vulgar Latin *debita*, from Latin, plural of *debitum* debt, from neuter of *debitus*, past participle of *debere* to owe, from *de-* + *habere* to have]

1 : sin, trespass [“forgive us our debts”]

2 : something owed : obligation [“I owe a great debt”]

3 : a state of owing [“I am greatly in debt”]

2.2. *in•ter•est* \in-t(?)r?st; ?in-t?-?est, -?rest; ?in-t?rst\ noun

[Middle English, probably alteration of earlier *interesse*, from Anglo-French & Medieval Latin; Anglo-French, from Medieval Latin, from Latin, to be between, make a difference, concern, from *inter-* + *esse* to be]

2 a : a charge for borrowed money generally a percentage of the amount borrowed

2.3. *usu•ry* \yü-zh?-re, ?yüzh-re\ noun

[Middle English, from Medieval Latin *usura*, alteration of Latin *usura*, from *usus*, past participle of *uti* to use]

2 : the lending of money with an interest charge for its use;

especially : the lending of money at exorbitant interest rates

3 : an unconscionable or exorbitant rate or amount of interest; *specifically* : interest in excess of a legal rate charged to a borrower for the use of money

3. What is the Biblical Teaching?

3.1. *Mosaic law encouraged lending*

Deuteronomy 15:7 “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; **8** but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need *in* whatever he lacks.

Psalm 37:21 The wicked borrows and does not pay back, But the righteous is gracious and gives.

Psalm 37:25 I have been young and now I am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread. **26** All day long he is gracious and lends, And his descendants are a blessing.

Lending was to the poor who lacked the necessities of life – to meet basic needs

Nehemiah 5:3 There were others who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine.”

3.2. Law forbade exaction of interest except from foreigners. Usury strongly condemned

Exodus 22:25 "If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest.

Proverbs 28:8 He who increases his wealth by interest and usury Gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor.

Ezekiel 18:7 if a man does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, does not commit robbery, **but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing, 8 if he does not lend money on interest or take increase**, if he keeps his hand from iniquity *and* executes true justice between man and man, **9 if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully—he is righteous and will surely live,**" declares the Lord GOD.

Psalms 15:1 O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?**5** He [who] does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.

3.3. All debts cancelled every 7 years

On the Sabbatical year all pecuniary obligations were cancelled. These regulations prevented accumulation of debt.

Deuteronomy 15:1 "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts. **2** "This is the manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the LORD'S remission has been proclaimed. **3** "From a foreigner you may exact it, but your hand shall release whatever of yours is with your brother. **4** "However, there will be no poor among you, since the LORD will surely bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, **5** if only you listen obediently to the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today. **6** "For the LORD your God will bless you as He has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you. **7** "If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; **8** but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need *in* whatever he lacks. **9** "Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,' and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the LORD against you, and it will be a sin in you. **10** "You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings. **11** "For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.'

3.4. Debtor/creditor relations

Various regulations as to the relation between debtor and creditor are laid down in the Scriptures.

3.4.1. The Pledge

The debtor was to deliver up as a pledge to the creditor what he could most easily dispense with

Deuteronomy 24:10 "When you make your neighbor a loan of any sort, you shall not enter his house to take his pledge. **11** "You shall remain outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you.

A mill, or millstone could not be taken in pledge

Deuteronomy 24:6 "No one shall take a handmill or an upper millstone in pledge, for he would be taking a life in pledge.

An upper garment, given as a pledge, could not be kept over night

Exodus 22:26 "If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, **27** for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear *him*, for I am gracious.

3.4.2. The Sabbatic Year

A debt could not be exacted during the Sabbatic year (Deut. 15:1–15 – see above).

3.4.3. The Surety

A surety was liable in the same way as the original debtor

Proverbs 11:15 He who is guarantor for a stranger will surely suffer for it, But he who hates being a guarantor is secure.

Proverbs 17:18 A man lacking in sense pledges And becomes guarantor in the presence of his neighbor.

3.4.4. The position of the borrower

Proverbs 22:7 The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower *becomes* the lender's slave.

3.5. New Testament Teaching

Matthew 5:42 "Give to him who asks of you, and **do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.**

Matthew 18:23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. **24** "When he had begun to settle *them*, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. **25** "But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. **26** "So the slave fell *to the ground*

and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' 27 "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and *began* to choke *him*, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 "So his fellow slave fell *to the ground* and *began* to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 "But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' 34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Matthew 25:26 "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no *seed*. 27 'Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival **I would have received my money back with interest.**

Luke 6:31 "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. 32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 "**If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is *that* to you?** Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same *amount*. 35 "But love your enemies, and do good, **and lend, expecting nothing in return;** and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*. 36 "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

1 Timothy 6:17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 18 *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, **to be generous and ready to share.**

Philemon 1:18 But if he has wronged you in any way **or owes you anything, charge that to my account;**

How shall we understand the following verse?

Romans 13:8 **Owe nothing to anyone** except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the law*.

Is Paul saying that all borrowing is wrong?

Would this tie in with the other passages?

See vs 7 and 8 together:

Romans 13:7 Render [i.e. pay] to all what is due [i.e.owed] them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. 8 Owe [same root as "due in vs. 7] nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the law*.

So then the sense is that we must pay our debts promptly and not let them remain outstanding, As in the NIV

Romans 13:7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then

honor. 8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

Psalm 37:21 The wicked borrows and does not pay back, But the righteous is gracious and gives.

4. **Summary of the Biblical teaching**

Lending and borrowing, even charging and paying interest, seem permissible, not sinful of themselves, but can be abused

Being in debt is not a good thing – position of slavery, bondage.

Debt seems to be principally to supply necessities of life in times of poverty – lending seems to be done to relieve this situation

Debts are not to be accumulated or exacted harshly – there is to be mercy and forgiveness on the part of the Christian lender

We are to remember how much we have been forgiven

Christians are to have a different view than the world – especially in their lending to and borrowing from one another

Stemming from freedom from the love of money and material things – holding everything in trust for the Lord

Christians must promptly pay back debts they owe in full

We may act as guarantors for loans but must be careful

5. **What principles apply?**

Since we are in a different area, we will probably need at least some different principles

5.1. ***Be holy?***

Yes. The world encourages us to be in debt to gratify the flesh – “get the car you deserve”, “No credit? No Problem!”

We may need to borrow but we must think carefully about what we are borrowing for – is it a necessity of life?

5.2. ***Do not steal***

Yes. If we borrow and do not repay, we are stealing

If we pay interest on a loan for a luxury, we may be paying a lender money the Lord has entrusted to us so we can gratify the flesh.

5.3. Do not covet?

Yes. The world wants us to covet things and wants us to have them immediately, rather than saving to buy them outright – “zero down and no repayments until 2007!”. Instant gratification panders to a covetous spirit

5.4. Be content with what you have?

Yes – see covetousness

5.5. Being a faithful steward of what the Lord entrusts

Yes. We must think very carefully about what we choose to do with things the Lord has entrusted to us

5.6. Don't be mastered by anything?

Yes – we can be mastered by a desire to possess things we do not need

5.7. Christian liberty but not a license for sin?

We are free to take loans for necessities
But not to indulge the flesh
We can easily get in debt to the point of sinfulness
Where we have borrowed for things we did not need;
Where we cannot repay the lender

5.8. Weaker brother?

Some believe it is wrong to be in debt at all as a believer
We need to be careful not to stumble a weaker brother

5.9. Submit to authorities instituted by God?

There are laws governing loans and lending

5.10. Do good to all, especially the household of faith

We are to be ready to help those who are in need – especially our brothers and sisters in Christ.

5.11. Others?

This list is not exhaustive – can you think of other principles that apply?

6. What's the bottom line?

6.1. May Christians have loans?

We may borrow money and pay interest on it
We should do so only in respect of necessities of life – to keep clothed and fed, to have somewhere to live, a car that is needed to hold down a job – to obtain a qualification for employment
But while we may borrow to buy a house, should we extend the loan to a point we can barely afford and buy a mansion?
While we may borrow to buy a car to get to work, should it be a Lamborghini we can scarcely afford?
We must not borrow more than we can repay

Luke 14:28 “For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? **29** “Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him,

We should not steward the money we have so we are paying interest on loans taken to indulge in non-essential things
Would we make ourselves someone else's slave so we could get something we didn't truly need?

6.2. May Christians be lenders?

Christians may lend but must not do so like the world
Lending to other believers (who are borrowing to meet life's necessities) they need to do so in love, mercy etc.
They may lend outside the church but should be certain the money is being used for moral purposes. Interest charges may be made.