



Biblical Personal Finance:

Earning and Spending for God's Glory

To paraphrase a question often asked by a popular financial advisor, imagine what the people of God could do if their financial houses were in order.

If the question doesn't sound very "spiritual" we might have an unbiblical notion of spirituality. More than 2,000 Scripture verses deal with money and possessions. The way we manage money is fundamentally a spiritual matter (Luke 16:10-11). On top of this, consider the problems related to poor money management. In a recent survey 46% of Americans reported suffering from debt-related stress. Financial problems can lead to marital breakdowns and contribute to unethical behavior (Prov. 30:8-9).

It never ceases to amaze me that algebra is required in school but personal finance is not. We desperately need to hear what the Bible says about personal finance.

In Ephesians 4:28 Paul boils personal finance down to two points: Earning and spending. He does so not as a financial guru but as a pastor teaching believers how to *"walk worthy of the calling with which (they) were called"* (v. 1).

Fiscal fidelity looks different from family to family. Some believers cannot work due to severe handicap. Sometimes wives contribute to the family's budget by working in the home. Still, ordinarily, earning and saving helps us to look not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others (Phil. 2:4).

Earning for God's Glory

A number of principles help us navigate the waters of earning.

Heads of Household Must Provide

Paul says something startling in 1 Timothy 5:8. *"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."* It's hard to understand Paul's phrase *"worse than an unbeliever."* What could be worse than denying the gospel and rejecting God's free grace? God's answer: Failing to provide for your family. While it is permissible for a man to delegate breadwinning to his wife for weighty and justifiable reasons, the responsibility ultimately rests on him (Ruth 3:1-4; Eph. 5:28-29).

Needlessly Burdening Others Is Sin

It has become acceptable today for people who could be helping provide for themselves, to burden others. I'll never forget the answer I heard when I once asked a man what he did for work. "I leech off the government," he said. Even though such an answer approaches the pinnacle of shame, I have stopped being surprised having now heard the answer a number of times. The Bible says, *"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."* Paul goes on to write, *"For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread"* (2 Thess. 3:10-12).

Work Is for God's Glory

Roughly 25% of our adult lives are dedicated to work. If we don't work well, much of our life displeases our Maker. Even those who do not need to work to provide for their families still must

work to glorify God. *“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men ... It is the Lord Christ whom you serve”* (Col. 3:23, 24).

This rule of God-honoring productivity also applies to young people. Children should begin laboring on behalf of the family from an early age. By their early teen years they should be pulling much of their own weight. This is important because children are developing lifelong habits. For a few generations many parents have not required their children to work. As a result, laziness and self-serving indulgence abounds. In some families a young person’s schooling is viewed as their work. When this is the case parents must see that their students are academically disciplined. Students not working hard at school should be otherwise gainfully employed so they can “eat their own bread.” The status of “student” doesn’t entitle anyone to be slothful and unproductive.

Workaholism Does Not Honor God

Very few people in our day and place are forced to *overwork* in order to survive. Instead, often workaholism is a sign of imbalance. It may indicate a retreat from family stressors. It may indicate that the family is spending more than they should and may need to downsize in order for the breadwinner to be home more. Workaholism can also be one of the many counterfeit gods we worship. The love of money, the seduction of success, and the power and glory of achievement may drive us to work too much. Even during busy times God demands rest (Ex. 34:21).

Spending for God’s Glory

According to the authors of one Reformed Catechism, Christian piety includes “the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outwards estate of ourselves and others” (WSC, Q&A 74). But what we take in is only half of the personal finance equation. We also need to spend wisely. Here are four principles for faithful spending.

Christians Are Stewards

Christians must manage money for the sake of God’s kingdom, making their resources work for his glory (Luke 16:1-13). This is true because, *“The earth is the Lord’s and all it contains”* (Ps. 24:1). We are his managers.

Handling money wisely is all about choices. Often these choices are guided by two important principles. First, we need to prioritize our spending. Stewards evaluate what is good, better, and best. Most people find it beneficial to prioritize spending with a budget. Good managers know how to cut the budget in one area to fund more important causes elsewhere. In most Christian families budgetary fat can be cut to fund needs. For example, typical entertainment expenses can go a long way toward paying Christian school expenses. Those who hold the biblical office of deacon can be a huge help in evaluating the budgets of their parishioners and offering suggestions for more prudent stewardship.

Second, we must delay our gratification. Because saving money takes time we have to make sacrifices in how we spend now. Most of us cannot live the way we want AND live the way God calls us to. Dave Ramsey’s well known encouragement toward financial wellness is, *“Live like no one else so that later you can live like no one else.”*

Christians Tithe and Give

A *tithe* is a tenth; in this case a tenth of one’s income. It is the baseline standard for fiscal gratitude among God’s people (Prov. 3:9; Mal. 3:8). Although the tithe is rooted in the Old Testament, it is unreasonable for us to suspect that this standard has been done away with in the period of greater grace in which we live today. *Giving* refers to charitable donations beyond the tithe. In both testaments believers gave through the God-ordained institution of the local church (Acts 6:1-4; 2 Cor. 9:5).

Debt Is Debilitating

Put simply, debt is the result of spending someone else’s money as if it was your own. Such spending is never free. For those in debt, unexpected expenditures become crises and the walls of debt’s pit become increasingly more difficult to scale.

The Bible warns of the dangers of debt. *“The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender”* (Prov. 22:7; ESV). This being the case, we are a nation of slaves. Americans carry an average of \$44,000 in mortgages, credit cards, auto loans and other consumer debt. Half of American families have installment loans on purchased goods. Almost half carry a credit card balance averaging around \$4,000. Over 73% of new cars are purchased on debt.

Dumping debt may not be easy. But the formula is as simple as ABCD: First, *accumulate* no new debt. Second, *bring* in additional income. Third, *change* your spending habits. Fourth, *develop* a plan to pay off your debt one creditor at a time.

Now Is the Time to Save and Invest

On average American families save somewhere between 0 and 3% of their income (Chinese households save between 25 and 50%). God says that the wise save. Conversely, *“a foolish man devours all he has”* (Prov. 21:20; NIV). Right now may seem a strange time to think about investing considering that interest rates are at an all time low. But even without interest, saving is God’s financial plan for our lives. As proof, God tells us to look to the wisdom of the ant. *“Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer”* (Prov. 30:24; NIV).

Paul’s simple outline for personal finance also helps us see the glory of the gospel. Christ’s earning and spending is our hope. He earned more than we could ever earn so that he could buy more than we could ever buy. Through his active obedience Christ has earned the right to be our Savior (Heb. 5:8-9). *“Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor that you through his poverty might become rich”* (2 Cor. 8:9). Our wise handling of personal finance is meaningful because of Christ’s earning and spending.

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