



Debt and Ministry - Why debt is the enemy to God's kingdom.

(Part one in a six-article series on the bible and money)

By Matt Schoenfeld

Debt is the enemy. OK, we all know that Satan is the real enemy, but he is sure using consumer debt to cripple the church.

Here's what I'm finding. Over the past year and a half, I have counseled many families on personal finances through my stewardship training ministry, Heartland Financial Concepts. As I've reflected on each of these counseling sessions with these wonderful families who desperately want to follow the Lord, a formula has emerged that consistently rings true – Non-Mortgage Debt = No Ministry.

Virtually every family has commented that they feel *called* to youth ministry, missions, or pastoring. However, they cannot answer the call because they are so deep in debt. How deep? Frighteningly deep.

The average non-mortgage debt of all the families who have come to Heartland Financial Concepts for assistance is just over \$39,000. Non-Mortgage Debt = No Ministry. And it is causing God's people a lot of misery.

Non-mortgage debt includes all types of debt other than your home loan such as credit cards, school loans, and car loans. It also includes what I'm calling hidden credit card debt, and this seems to be the main culprit to blocking ministry effectiveness. Hidden credit card debt is created

when people consolidate their credit card debts into a second mortgage on their home. While this tactic for dealing with debt is widely touted as a good way to lower your payments, it also has a scary downside the advertisers of such plans fail to mention.

You can lose your house.

Because your debt load is now backed by the tangible asset of your home, if you can't make your payments because of too much debt, you stand at risk of losing your home. I've seen it happen in several real-life situations. It is brutally painful.

The average hidden credit card debt of families coming to HFC for help is about \$17,000. What tends to happen all-too-often is people consolidate their credit card debts to a second mortgage, but they do not change their spending habits. As the balances on their credit cards begin to grow again, the pressure to make all the payments mounts and people are caught in a financial vice that squeezes the life, spiritual vitality, and ministry potential right out of the saints.

The ability and capacity to serve Christ evaporates in a cloud of stress, tension, added work hours to try to catch up, and anxiety as families attempt to juggle their financial plates to keep the world spinning. The end result is that overspending and lack of planning leave people in bondage to the credit card companies. Further, the cry of their hearts to serve Jesus with passion and answer His call is snuffed out by financial burdens. Non-Mortgage Debt = No ministry. How did it come to this?

Debt is the enemy of ministry. But it doesn't have to be. There is a way out of the financial fog and negative money messages our culture sends us.

More than 15% of all of Jesus' teachings dealt with money, possessions, and things. Throughout scripture, God continually warns that money is one of the main idols which can cause us to stray from following the

Lord (see Duet. 8 for one example). Both the old and new testaments are brimming with sound instruction on how to handle finances effectively. But it's not just principles to follow – it's the power of the Living Word!

To counterattack the negative money messages culture sends us, I teach The 5 Biblical Principles for Financial Success in my seminars and counseling sessions. These five simple guiding values can help us excel at managing God's money and give us the ability to serve Him with all our resources, our time, talent, and treasure. The 5 Principles are: Give Generously, Flee the Love of Money, Live Within Your Means, Plan for your future, and Use a Spending Plan.

In my next column, I will explore the 5 Principles in more detail. Through submitting our finances to Christ's Lordship and learning a simple, effective way to manage the resources God provides for us, we can find financial freedom so we can answer the call to serve Jesus. That way we can live out a different formula for our personal financial discipleship, No Debt = Powerful Ministry (in Christ's name).

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