

Prosperity in the Midst of Austerity

We are all living in an age of austerity, but some are living better than others! The British Prime Minister David Cameron has reiterated time and time again that we are all in it together, but it does not feel that way. Bank bonuses are back, lucrative contracts are still being negotiated and signed and the squeezed middle have become occupiers, protesters and social agitators. It is hard out there. In Greece suicide rates are up by 40% and more children are being put up for adoption than ever before, as parents hard pressed by the economic realities chose to give the state their children to feed. It is tough out there. But in tough times we must talk hope!

Hope comes in some surprising places, just this month the final tithing figures were released for the South England Conference for 2011 and astonishingly in spite of the recession there has been a 4% increase on the preceding year passing the £12 million barrier for the very first time. God's people have been faithful in these uncertain economic times and God will reward our faithfulness. I am reminded by the prophet Jeremiah that there can be prosperity even in the midst of austerity when he writes in Jeremiah 17:5-8:

This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the LORD. That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. "But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Once we put our trust in God and not man we can be assured of prosperity in the midst of austerity. We have no need to worry for God's blessings are not dependent on a good or a bad economy for He owns everything and according to Matthew 7: 11, If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

God is not bankrupt, He knows no insolvency, He is still Jehovah Jireh the God who provides. Let us continue to put our trust in Him and we will see prosperity materially or spiritually, in the midst of austerity.

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What the Bible Says About Money

It has been said that 'money makes the world go round'. It is the oil in the financial machinery that runs our world, but what does the Bible say about money? One of the Bible passages that is often quoted on the issue of money is, 1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all -evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Money is not only the root of all evil but it is also the fruit of all evil! William Barclay wrote in his book about money: What the Bible Tells Us About Wealth and Possessions "Money in itself is neither good nor bad; it is simply dangerous in that the love of it may become bad. With money a person can do much good; and with money he can do much evil. With money a person can selfishly serve his own desires; and with money he can generously answer to the cry of his neighbor's need. With money a man can buy his way to the forbidden things and facilitate the path of wrongdoing; and with money he can make it easier for someone else to live as God meant him to live. Money itself is not evil, but it is a great responsibility."

All the money in the world belongs to God, "...For everything in the heavens and earth is yours," says 1 Chronicles 29:11-12. The Psalmist echo's this point in Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." Even Job stated in Job 1:21: "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

So what should be our attitude towards money? The wise man Solomon says in Proverbs 23: 4-5: " Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast not but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off in the sky like an eagle."

Today our world is suffering from a debt crisis precipitated by wanton greed. Day after day we see the facade fall from the faces of companies and countries who have borrowed too much and now are facing the stark reality of bankruptcy and sovereign debt default all because of the desire to get at any price.

Debt is the new 21st century slavery! Where austerity measures enslave countries and its people to banks and financial institutions, who continue to extract its debt repayments at the cost social breakdown and civil unrest. In Greece it has been estimated the suicide rates are up 40% on this time last year, as people choose to leave this life rather than live in debt.

The Apostle Paul has the answer to our current financial crisis when he counsels us to practice the art of contentment. In 1st Timothy 6:6-8 he says "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we have brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."

The following are 7 areas of biblical financial guidance:

1. Avoid greed

Greed is not good! Greed is not godly!

"Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire" (James 5:1).

2. Reduce debt! Refuse debt!

Ellen G white says in the book *Adventist Home* page 392-393, "Debt is one of the nets that Satan sets for souls...Abstracting and using money for any purpose, before it is earned, is a snare...You ought not to allow yourself to become financially embarrassed, for the fact that you are in debt weakens your faith and tends to discourage you; and even the thought of it makes you nearly wild."

Those ancient warnings against moneylenders are just as relevant today as they have ever been, as households that have incurred credit card debts have pushed themselves to living beyond their means. Proverbs 22:7 cautions: "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender's slave."

3. Save more! Save much more!

Our children see us spend more rather than save more and they learn the same! We are good at taking them to the supermarket checkout and spending rather than taking them to the bank to deposit our savings. Children learn by example!

Corinthians 16:2 offers this advice for sticking to a savings plan: "On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come."

4. Be fair to others and work hard

Proverbs 22:16 warns: "He who oppresses the poor to make more for himself or who gives to the rich, will only come to poverty." As for employees, working hard is a recipe for success, my mother use to say "Hard work has never killed anybody" Proverbs 10:4 puts it this way, "A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich."

5. Avoid "Get Rich Quick Schemes or Scams"

If something looks too good to be true, it probably is. Proverbs 14:15 cautions that, "The naive believes everything, but the sensible man considers his steps."

Think you can get rich quick? Think again, says Proverbs 13:11. "Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow."

The Wiseman counsel's fraudsters in Proverbs 13:11 when he says that, "Wealth obtained by fraud dwindles, but the one who gathers by labour increases it."

6. Leave a legacy

What will you leave for those who are left behind when you die? Proverbs 13:22 promote the value of leaving a legacy: "A good man (woman) leaves an inheritance for his/her children's children."

7. Keep giving

In these times of austerity some may be tempted to give up on giving up to God. However there is a fail-safe way to survive and thrive in this fiscal famine, it is to remember God and His people.

Remember what Malachi 3:8-10 says: Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Proverbs 28:27 says: "He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses." Solomon adds in Proverbs 22:9, "He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor." Jesus says, to the Rich young ruler in Mark 10:21 "Go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven," "When you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:3).

Remember to give to God and for God, who gave all to us and for us!

Its God's money use it wisely, use it well, use it biblically.



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