

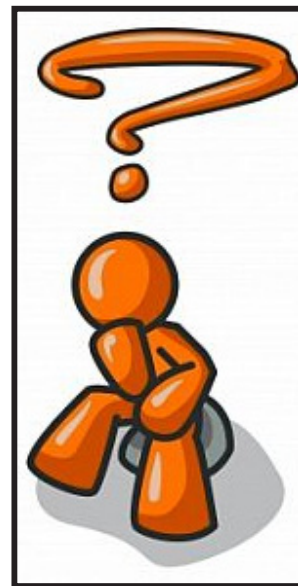
What About ... Debt and Borrowing?

By DR. DAVID A. DEWITT

Here are three general biblical principles.

1. Lending and borrowing was permitted when it was charity to the poor

Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you (Matthew 5:42). Under the Old Testament Mosaic Law, loans were permitted within Israel for the purpose of helping the poor. Lending was a form of welfare, which the lender was to consider a gift and the borrower was to pay back if he could. These loans were without interest, and they were not for the purpose of making money or living more luxuriously. They were wiped out at the Sabbatical Year (every seventh year on the calendar, not seven years after each loan). Also, all property was to be returned on the Jubilee, after every 50 years. Israelites were, however, allowed to lend money to foreigners and expect to have it returned (Exodus 22:25-26; Deuteronomy 15:1-9; Leviticus 25:10).



2. Owe nothing to anyone

Romans 13:8 says, *Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.* The question is: Does the first phrase, *Owe nothing to anyone* mean: (1) all borrowing is sinful, or (2) we should always pay our bills? The NASB translation (given here) sounds like all borrowing is sinful. The NIV translates it: *Let no debt remain outstanding*, which would say we should always pay our bills. The Greek text literally reads: Μηδενι μηδεν οφειλετε ει μη το αλληλους αγαπᾶν [literally, *No one – nothing – owe – except – to one another – love*]. The “Lowe and Nida Lexicon” says the word for *owe* means: “ought, to be under obligation.” So Romans 13:8 would read, *Let no one be under obligation to anyone except to love...*

But the previous verse (Romans 13:7) says, *Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.* At least tax and custom refer to money. Here the word for *owe* is translated *due*, and *render* means “to give back” or “pay.” So we should pay whatever money we owe. The context is paying taxes, and we will always owe taxes, we can never pay them off. We may also be forced into housing debt. But should we also acquire debt when, unlike taxes, we are not forced into it? And should we not liquidate assets to pay off debts, when we have those assets? And is Paul adding an additional requirement in verse 8, beyond taxes, to owe nothing to anyone? Solomon wrote, *Do not with-*

hold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,” When you have it with you (Proverbs 3:27-28).

3. Proverbs considers borrowing money to be unwise

Whenever you borrow, your lender becomes a senior partner you cannot simply walk away from. If borrowing puts at risk your basic livelihood (your house, bank account, retirement, savings, etc.), then it is a gamble not worth taking.

- Proverbs 22:7—*The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender’s slave.*
- Proverbs 22:26-27—*Do not be among those who give pledges, among those who become guarantors for debts. If you have nothing with which to pay, why should he take your bed from under you?* (see also 6:1-5).

Is borrowing sinful or just unwise? Is there a category of foolishness that is not sinful? Possibly. But if you read the other unwise warnings of Proverbs, the ones not related to money (like false weights, pride, greed, laziness, cruelty, and adultery), they pretty much sound like sin.

Basically, it seems that, outside of charitable acts for the poor, God does not like borrowing. I’m guessing if He doesn’t like it, you won’t like it either.