

MARANATHA MESSENGER

Weekly Newsletter of

MARANATHA BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28)

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Sunday School: 9.45 am Worship Service: 10.45 am Wednesday Prayer Meeting: 8.00 pm

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Spiritual Lessons from the Global Financial Crisis from a Biblical Perspective

Introduction

We live in a precarious world in these perilous end times when we are witnessing calamitous events from disastrous hurricanes to wars and destructive earthquakes and now the recent global financial upheavals **that require a sobering spiritual audit of our lives.** It demands a spiritual **post mortem for believers as the financial institutions do the same to clean up its act.**

Our Lord had predicted that there will be economic woes and international conflicts and disasters that will precede His imminent second coming. (Matt 24:1-13, Lk 21:1-20) The deregulation of the US financial institutions in the 1990s had led to proliferation of low interest teaser housing loans for the American public. Just like in the time of Judges, every man did what was right in his own eyes (Jud 20:25).

Last month, the US government had to bail out Freddie Mac & Fannie Mae, 2 mortgage giants that are in deep financial trouble and over these few weeks, we witnessed shot gun marriages and takeovers inked in just days and huge bailouts plans amounting to US \$700 billion were given to absorb toxic mortgage related assets. Loans at nose bleed interest rates are taken by desperate gigantic ailing set ups which were once upon a time financial titans in Wall Street. Movers and shakers of the global financial world scrambled to the US Federal Reserve to salvage banks, investment and insurance companies in a last ditch effort to calm the investors and stake holders and stabilize the markets in the global economy. At this point in writing, the US Senate is confirming a massive bailout package to save America. Bradford and Bingley, a big UK bank is being nationalised to save it from its financial woes and more are in the pipeline!

To have corporate giants like Lehman Brothers going into bankruptcy and apparently rock-solid American institutions like Merrill Lynch bought over by Bank of America is phenomenal to say the least. (At present, the future of Washington Mutual was bought over by JP Morgan for US 2 billion as its share price has dropped by 90%.) The world's biggest insurance company AIG was not spared either and had to be nationalized by the US government to boost investors confidence and to save the jobs of workers and the interest of shareholders in more than a 100 countries and numerous policyholders associated with it. All these are nothing short of an apocalyptic wake-up call and a spiritual revelation by God. The writing is on the wall as in the times of Daniel (Dan 5). We are to read and study the times and be discerning of what it means to us today in these last days of colossal decline in spiritual, moral and financial institutions worldwide.

Our Almighty God has providentially allowed events to take over us during these momentous times that we may look up to heaven and to consider our lives in the light of eternity (Rom 8:18). **God is the ultimate Regulator of our lives with His**

Holy word and if we follow His authoritative and sufficient Guide as our inerrant manual in life, we will be safe from the calamitous events in this life and the next. Let us with contrite and teachable hearts, ponder and learn some precious lessons from this crisis together.

The Christian relationship with the world

Firstly, **the world is not an eternal habitat for a believer for his citizenship is in heaven** (Phil 3:20). The Christian and the philosophy of this world are incompatible because of the moral pollution of sin. Some are concerned for the pollution of the environment, but are we equally concerned for the moral and spiritual fallout over the fall of man and the need for God?

Secondly, **Christians are not to love the world because of what the world stands for**. Love for the world is irreconcilable with love for the Father for friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4). The Apostle John says, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."* (1 John 2:15-16).

The lust of the flesh includes anything that appeals to man's fallen nature. It refers to the basic depraved nature of unregenerate man that makes him blind to spiritual truth.

Thirdly, **the temptations of the world entices our eyes to sin**. The eyes are the gateway into the mind. Advertisement (ie attractive financial instruments) appeals and entices us with impressive prospective returns. This stirs up the covetousness of the heart and the lust of the eyes which can manifest itself in financial pursuits of inordinate proportions that is contrary to God's Word. The lust of the eyes pressures us to desire and think as the world thinks. It is to see things in the light of the world rather than with the eyes of God. The Psalmist prayed, *"Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way."* (Psalm 119:37). Our eyes can get us into trouble. When we are greedy and crave for more of the worldly things than what God has allowed for us, we can be ensnared into many troubles. The pride of life speaks of vainglory and self indulgence. One who tries to out-do others in spending and getting more and more stocks, shares, bonds, houses, possessions, like flashy cars and high- end properties may end up taking on more credit and mortgages than we can afford. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life do not come from the Father (1 John 2:15-16). These things are of the world and are totally contrary to the Word of God.

Fourthly, **Christians should not love the world because of where the world is headed**. John says in 1 John 2:17, *"The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."* Some people believe that the present world system is absolutely reliable and will last forever including our financial assets and our worldly possessions but this world as the Bible teaches us are not permanent but ephemeral. The only sure thing about the present world system is that it is not going to be here forever (Isa 40:8). Only those who are saved by grace in the will of God will abide forever with the Lord in heaven. Hence believers should not get too comfortable in this world we are to lay our affections above, and must be ready to break camp literally and leave this world when called upon suddenly (Psa 90:12).

Biblical Economics

The Bible says that *"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." (1 Timothy 6:10). **An almost lunatic and obsessive crave after money can compromise our faith and cause us to suffer unnecessarily.** Money is assumed by many to be the power to harness the resources of the world, including people and their services, to get what we want. An avaricious selfish spirit is often the "ruthless and insatiable god of this world" for many. The truth is that the richer one is, the easier it is to feel that one is not desperately in need of God's mercy, guidance, provision and care. For many, it is empowering for a selfish independence from God but a constant fellowship and submission to God is a mark of true spirituality.

Money may bring one pleasures and comfort in the short run. **The high value many put on personal comfort for ourselves and the world is contrary to the Spirit of God.** Those who crave for a better life in a bigger house, a better or bigger car, an expensive country club membership may not hear God when He speaks to us. The still small voice of God is snuffed out by the loud jarring voices of pleasures, the deceitfulness of riches and cares of the world. This has the potential to choke our lives as pointed out by our Lord in Matthew 13:18-23 in the parable of the sower and the seed.

We need to prayerfully pay attention to God's Word and will consider Christ and cry to God with all our hearts. When we feel secure in our resources, we tend not to seek nor cry out to God, or focus on God's Word or prayer. We should be willing to give up riches to honour and serve the purposes of God if we really want to be obedient to God. (1 Tim 6:17-20).

Biblically-Based Financial Management

Money is not a necessary evil but the love of it is. **Whether money is a good or bad influence depends on our approach to it.** Some of God's servants in the OT were blessed of God materially in Job, Abraham, Daniel, Solomon and David and they are not obsessed with their wealth. Wealth may or may not be an integral part of that life God has for us and we are to be content with what we have. We need sound and prudent Christian money management for a believer's financial stewardship is to be accountable to God one day (Rom 14:12).

Paul said that the love of money has corrupted and twisted the lives of many people and is a root cause of much evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Those who are obsessed with or who strive to be rich desperately at all cost have often brought to themselves and others untold agonies and miseries.

The Bible contains more than 2,300 verses on how to handle money and possessions. The book of Proverbs by Solomon, an inerrant guidebook covering numerous subjects, contains financial guidance to help us manage money wisely. Let us take a look at some of the sound Christian financial principles it offers.

Christian attitude toward money

Believers must take care not to let money become overly important to us that it displace God and His will or our lives. King Solomon in Proverbs states that we should honour God first who owns everything. *"Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."* (Proverbs 3:9-10). It is biblical that we joyfully return a portion of what we receive to the One who supplies our needs with thanksgiving and be willing to surrender ourselves our talents and substance to Him. 2 Cor 9:7, says, *"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful*

giver." The biblical injunction to keep to the right spiritual priorities is clearly stated by our Lord Jesus Christ who tells us, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* (Matthew 6:33). If we put God and spiritual matters first, then we can count on Him for the other necessities of life. Phil 4:13, 19 says, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."*

Acknowledging and giving to the One who owns all helps us keep physical things in their proper perspective. **We must not allow material possessions to become so important to us that pursuing them dominate our lives to the detriment of our spiritual development and adversely affect our service for Him and to our covenant family life.**

Remember that **money makes a good servant, a poor master and an abominable god.** It can separate us from our families and God if we find ourselves caught up in an inordinate crave or insatiable desire for more possessions. Beware that wealth can intoxicate and enslave ourselves and we are rendered powerless under its influence. So Solomon says, *"Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom."* (Proverbs 23:4)

The apostle Paul gave a good reason for us to be content with what we have or do not have, *"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."* (1 Timothy 6:7-9).

The test of a man's character is how he builds up and spends his time and money before God.

Financial stability through Godly Diligence

There is a place for honest hard work when a believer labours lawfully to support his family. Paul in 1 Tim 5:8 says, *"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."* We can work hard and earn money in such a way that is pleasing to God. *"The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it."* (Proverbs 10:22) and *"Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death."* (verse 2).

Believers should earn our living by diligence, professional competence and honest work. Do not compromise your morals or integrity to make money. Paul says in 1 Cor 6:12, *"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."* Such shortcuts to gaining wealth with high risk speculation in the stock markets or deceptive means (CBT, embezzlements, corruption and bribery) are really diabolical traps Satan set to ensnare us. We should strive to have good moral and ethical principles in the workplace and be as salt and light in this world (Matt 5:16).

In addition, we are not to take advantage of someone else in the monetary sense. When we give our employer an honest day's work, we expect them to pay the day's wages and in return, Paul says, *"Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;"* (Colossians 3:22-23).

There are some who think that they can get something with nothing done. They look for a shortcut to wealth like speculation in the stock markets or gambling,

cheating (ie the melamine incident that some unscrupulous Chinese manufacturers have used in milk products causing the deaths of 4 babies and more than 60,000 of them hospitalized). They take unreasonably high risks or are guilty of ethical misdemeanour and then expect to pull through (ie it is like a student who did not study for the exams and expect to pass or do well) and those who try the luck of the lottery (or buying 4D or mahjong or speculation in the stock exchange). We will learn in due time that this brings more pain than profit or pleasure. **Godly diligence, Holy Spirit led discipline and hard work are God's ordained means of getting good rewards** (good advice for students who are preparing for their final exams soon). Gal 6:7-9 says, *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*

A more sure way **to financial security is prayerful dependence and God honouring hard and heart work.** *"He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding."* (Proverbs 12:11). Paul says in 2 Thess 3:10-12, *"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."* Note that ultimate **success is 1% inspiration, 99% perspiration, 1% intelligence and 99% diligence.**

The key to career advancement is to seek God first and His righteousness and **to develop our God given talents and skills and then do the best to glorify Him** with what we have been endowed with or given to do (1 Pet 4:10-11). *"Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men."* (Proverbs 22:29). We are to please God and not men. Concerning our work and our human bosses, Paul in Col 3:23-25 says aptly, *"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons."*

Generosity to honour God and share with others

A key to financial contentment and happiness is to share our blessings with others especially those in the household of faith (Gal 6:10). Paul testified, *"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35)

Some of **the most miserable people are those who hoard their money and almost literally worship them**, fearful that they may lose it or someone else may get some of it. Solomon gave us this prudent advice instead, *"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."* (Proverbs 11:24-25)

The book of Proverbs is filled with admonitions to share the wealth God has blessed us with to the glory of His name, the extension of His kingdom and the benefit of the needy. *"He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor."* (Proverbs 22:9).

Sound Management of our resources

Firstly, **we must humbly acknowledge that it is God who gives us power to get wealth.** Deut 8:18 says, *"But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day."* and 1 Tim 6:17 says, *"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;"* As we earn money from our God-given jobs, we must also learn to properly manage it before it is lost to poor stewardship.

Some Christians seem perpetually to have holes in their pockets. If that is true, we need to **humble ourselves before God and seriously examine ourselves** if we have neglected God as in the Old Testament. Hag 1:6 says, *"Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes."*

If money goes out as fast as it comes in, then this shows that there is a fundamental problem with us. It may be an exorbitant or flippant behaviour or a flaw in our money management policy or practices. Are we employing godless or self centred principles in managing our God-given resources? Something to think about.

Secondly, **we need to learn to pray and plan a reasonable personal and family budget** to help us to use what we earn carefully and responsibly and make any adjustment in our spending if necessary. Do not bite more than what you can chew (ie do not borrow more than what you can afford to pay one day). These are sound advice for Christian investors on the wisdom of diversifying our commitments as Solomon in Eccl 11:1-2 says, *"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth."* One notable way to is pray to God and plan together with your spouse in the long term (and children) and to cut our coat according to our cloth and to be prayerfully cautious about buying or investing on credit or with what you do not have (ie selling short with derivatives and margin trading). Remember these wise immortal words, *"The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender."* (Proverbs 22:7)

Christian Financial Temperance

There is a fundamental problem with depraved men and it is the greed factor. As a student of economics, we learnt that the basic problem in economics are insatiable wants and limited means and hence the need to make decisions. The depraved avaricious nature has driven many to make money at all cost. **The chief end of men for many is to multiply wealth and enjoy it forever ourselves** if we can (quite different from the Westminster Confession of Faith Shorter Catechism Q1 which is to glorify God and enjoy him forever). But supposed wealth may turn into wreaths and the assumed glory of richness turn into the gory of a selfish and depraved marketplace of troubled avaricious profiteers.

Thirdly, **it is important to discipline ourselves and seek the Lord first and be content.** There are many hidden persuaders in the seductive advertisements and we must be able to say no to them in our shopping sprees. Solomon aptly says, *"Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied."* (Proverbs 27:20). Once one's want is fulfilled, our eyes will turn to something else.

"The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not." (Proverbs 21:25-26).

Some people spend their money without careful prudent consideration. Beware that we do not buy things on impulse or impress people and get into financial debt. Do not let material pursuits lead you to live a life of luxury and possibly bring us into the road of financial destruction and sorrow.

Fourthly, **the secret to financial health includes fearing and putting God first.** Col 3:1 says, *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."* Pleasure seekers will not last as Solomon says, *"He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich. There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up."* (Proverbs 21:17, 20)

Fifthly, **beware of the get-rich-quick syndrome** (ie to be a millionaire before 30). Patience and hardwork are paramount too! Isaiah challenges us in Isa 40:31, *"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."* and Psa 27:14 says, *"Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD."* Some expect instant financial security and to amass material possessions that others may have taken years to accumulate. Proverbs 28:20 cautions against such an approach: *"A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent."*

True Eternal Security

Our lasting security is found not in a big bank account, equities or bonds or shares or investments in gold, property or oil or non oil products, but in Christ as our Lord and Saviour alone and in the building of a godly life for Christ and eternity. **No lasting security is to be found in worldly temporal wealth.** *"He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch."* (Proverbs 11:28). So God may providentially allow many unforeseen events that can wipe out our material wealth overnight, an accident or natural disaster, a stock-market crash, an extended illness, bereavement or death of a love one or an accident in our family to cause us to return to and focus on Him and not our temporal and unreliable assets or self. Learn to say like Psa 20:7, *"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God."* The only lasting security is a right saving relationship with our God and Maker. *"Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death."* (Proverbs 11:4).

Our Lord in Luke 21:34-36 says, *"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."*

Conclusion

What should we do then as believers in this worldwide devastating crisis? Here are some final tips.

Firstly, the Apostle Peter warns us in **apocalyptic times**, in 2 Pet 3:9-12 saying, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?"*

Secondly, we are soberly charged by our Lord in Luke 12:15 which says, *"And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."*

Thirdly, the apostle Paul's timely reminder to all of us in 1 Tim 6:6,10, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. 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."*

Fourthly, rather **we are to fear God and keep His Commandments** (Eccl 12:13-14) and **to reflect and consider God first** and do what Matt 6:33-34 says, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."*

Finally let us remind ourselves of what Paul tells us of our ultimate purpose in Life is in 1 Cor 10:31, *"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."* and our responsibility to God in 2 Cor 5:10 which says, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."*

Let us **all remember that we are fearfully made by God and are finally accountable to Him one day before the bema** as responsible stewards of the manifold grace of God. Let us seek the Lord while He may be found and live with these biblical principles in view always before it is too late as our Lord is returning soon!

Jack Sin

At the Pulpit
Theme for the Quarter:
The Pre-Eminence Of Christ In The Church"
Rev Ong Hock Khee
"Making Sure of Heaven"

[End of MM]