

DROWNING IN DEBT

by Rev. Thomas Soltis, SELC Stewardship Director

Americans used to save, but no longer. In the post World War II era, 11 % of earnings were saved. Today the average American puts away barely \$1 of every \$100 earned. In the past few years savings have plummeted...1.8% last year - nearly zero in the last few months. A pervasive "I want it now" attitude prevails. Advertising pressures to "Buy! Buy! Buy!" until it's "Bye, Bye, Bye" to personal financial stability and security. "Buy now! Pay later! You owe it to yourself!" is a powerful temptation to overspend for the unwary lacking savvy.

To live beyond one's means is not only foolish, it is a violation of God's will regarding the management of the financial resources he has given us. Christian stewardship fundamentally includes managing God's money (He owns all your money) in a God-pleasing manner. Satan, the sinful world and our sinful nature tempts us to do otherwise.

FIVE TEMPTATIONS TO OVERSPEND

1. **PRIDE** - People will respect me more in the light of increased possessions.
2. **SELFISHNESS** - I owe it to myself to accumulate things despite negative consequences.
3. **GREED** - I need that luxury car and bigger house even though I can't afford them.
4. **JEALOUSY** - My envy must be removed by not only "keeping up with the Joneses", but by surpassing them to the point they envy me.
5. **COVETOUSNESS** - Even though I don't need it and can't afford it, I simply must have it!

A SOLUTION . . . WATCH AND PRAY!

Jesus says: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." (Mt. 26:41) **WATCH!** Be on the look-out to spot pride, selfishness, greed, jealousy and covetousness tempting you to live beyond your means. After spotting them, **PRAY** to overcome the temptation to overspend. If you are psychologically a compulsive spender, seek out a professional counselor and pray that God will bless all efforts toward healing.

CREDIT CARDS

Outstanding balances on credit cards have risen more than \$800 billion - approximately \$7,200 per U.S. household. This is more than double the indebtedness of a decade ago - and it doesn't include an additional \$1.3 trillion in debt for cars, appliances and personal loans. The compounded interest on unpaid credit card bills will eventually bury a person in the dismal grave of debt.

MORTGAGES

Americans have taken on more than \$8.8 trillion in mortgages to purchase homes - up 42% since the 2001 recession. Low interest rates have led many to buy homes they really can't afford. Recent increased foreclosures (even in fashionable suburbs) indicate a mood of buying above and beyond one's means.

Make do with what you've got;

If not, you stand to lose a lot.

Budgeting will help you make do with what you've got. A general budget could include: Offerings 10%; Housing 24%; Food 13%; Transportation 8%; Education 2%; Clothing 4%; Personal Care 1%; Furnishings 1%; Medical 3%; Insurance 2%; Savings 4%; Debt 3%; Vacation 2%; Gifts 1%; Entertainment 1%; Misc. 3%; Social Security & Taxes 18%. Categories and percentages may differ due to personal lifestyles and individual circumstances.

To become a person of means, live within your means!