

Letter from Babylon



Reflections on living in a land under judgment

by 'Mishael'

There is a hidden, but escalating debt problem in Britain today. But not among the young, or materialistic: this crisis affects 'Spirit-filled' Christians and their leaders, and involves unpaid debts to other believers, to the shame of Christ and the weakening of the Kingdom. If repentance is needed in this country, it ought to start here.

My friend, director of an Evangelical academic institution, says half-seriously that he will no longer employ Christians. Why? Because they think that 'doing God's work' means arriving late, and doing what they're paid for. How many of us in churches dread delegating because 'volunteers' do the bits they choose, carelessly, if they get time, provided they get free perks? Whereas God says, 'Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might,' and '[be] prepared for any good work.'

On the other hand, Christian employers are notoriously bad payers. Principally, I mean churches. This includes not only the pitiful salaries paid to full-time staff, but the loveless 'love gifts' given to visitors. Another friend travelled 100 miles to speak on Christian counselling, and received... a box of chocolates. Try paying your train-fare with that! Whereas God says, 'The worker deserves his wages.' And that includes the sound-man as well as the speaker.

But the worst examples are among Christian movers and shakers, those who are famed for 'living by faith'. Wherever I go I hear stories of large ministries investing in expensive projects with money they haven't got, and then defaulting on payment when the

bills come in. Usually it is some unknown volunteer who has done the 'investing' and ends up impoverished, whilst the ministry leaders do the 'defaulting.' My brothers, this should not be.



It is very true that Christians are no better than others – just forgiven. But in this case we are worse than the world, so we need to ask why, and change. One reason is that Christian leaders don't necessarily know much about money. The same goes for anyone who starts a new business! The difference is that the former often refuse to learn, on the spurious basis that financial matters are unspiritual. It's that 'living by faith' thing again.

Everyone wants to be George Müller, finding tenners in the waste bin rather than planning a financial strategy for their church or ministry. But for every scriptural reference to widows and oil there are twenty about wise stewardship, sharing of resources and straight dealing. David Pawson said words to the effect that he didn't live by faith as an itinerant minister, but did a job of work which should be paid for. I like that – it reflects the Bible's words on labourers' hire, muzzling oxen and sharing all good things or first shares of the crop with teachers. Remember that the word 'fellowship' actually means primarily the sharing of financial resources!

'The last part of a man to be converted is his pocket', but it's the first point by which we are judged because it measures our love. So how does your ministry handle its finances?

'Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law.' Simple, isn't it?

