

Letter from Babylon



Reflections on living in a land under judgment

by 'Mishael'

Newcastle College recently sent me a flyer for a free 7-month distance learning course in Life Coaching. You may think 7 months is a short time to learn how to teach others how to live, but it's evidently a particularly advanced course as the co-writer is also the author of *Ten Minute Life Coach*.

This seems a particularly bizarre example of a modern belief that anything worth knowing can be understood completely if you've attended the right seminar. My wife has coined an appropriate phrase about this trend. On holiday in Greece the hotel's entertainment included a dance troupe with a contortionist, who managed to put her body through small hoops, out of smaller boxes, and into shapes seldom seen in nature. As we watched, amazed, my wife whispered, 'She must have been on a course.'

When the new GP's contract came in last year, local health trusts were confidently sending paramedics on six week courses to take over the work of doctors with 9 years of training and twenty years of experience. In our area this was extended to three months, just to make sure.

If you think about it, this thinking influences God's people, too. I'm not so much thinking about things like the Alpha Course, which are only intended as an introduction to the faith. I might, however, question how people, who have just come through their first such course and made a commitment, are sometimes then put in charge of future courses. Maybe the justification is that the Holy Spirit (programmed to be received at Session 10) gives supernatural wisdom. But spiritual wisdom is an organic thing – as Luke

tells us, even Jesus grew in wisdom and stature over years. 'Not many of you should presume to be teachers,' says James, 'because we will be judged more strictly.'

It's the same in other areas. Dysfunctional Christians have a few weeks counselling, decide to do a counselling course, and are working on others within months. Actually it's possible to be a counsellor for years and still lack wisdom – long training and supervision minimises the damage caused by inexperience and weeds out those who should be doing something else, but some churches baulk at that.

Marriage or parenting courses can be invaluable in unblocking blind alleys in relationships, but if twenty years of living with someone doesn't teach you wisdom, there must be a limit to what is likely to change after a weekend away. Certainly Christian divorces continue to escalate though courses abound.

There is, however, a course that is guaranteed to bring wisdom. The problem is it's rather long, and pretty hard. The Spirit says,

*My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,
turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding,*

*and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,
and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,*

*then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.*

*For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth
come knowledge and understanding.
Anyone got an application form?*

