

EDITORIAL

Only a few days prior to writing this editorial (mid-October 2008), I watched television images of stock market traders in London holding their heads in their hands, stunned by the biggest drop in the value of the FTSE in approximately twenty years. So it seems appropriate that I might reflect on money for a short time.

Ben Witherington, III, entitled his useful little commentary on Philippians, *Friendship and Finances at Philippi*,¹ which nicely highlights two of the key issues at stake in this letter. Although it may not appear so at first glance, there is a very real sense in which Philippians is about money. In particular, it serves as an expression of thanks from Paul to his brothers and sisters in Philippi for the gift which they sent to him. Perhaps Paul's comments to these Christians so long ago can help us to get some perspective on the recent turbulence in the world's financial systems.

It is perhaps tempting for some Christians who have no significant investments in the stock market to look on somewhat smugly and murmur, "money is the root of all evil". Of course, this is a *misquotation* of the Bible (and we only have to remember the conversation between the serpent and the woman in the garden to be reminded how dangerous that can be; look for yourself at 1 Timothy 6:10 where the **love** of money is described as the root of all evil). But besides that significant problem, this hardly seems to be a pastorally sensitive response to trying circumstances in which many Christians, churches and charities will have experienced loss as well as non-Christians. It may also be that a trial of a different kind will one day come to their own door and one wonders how they will respond then.

Perhaps a more constructive approach to events which undermine our sense of security is to focus on two closely related passages from Paul's letter which help us to think about our attitudes and actions in trying times.

The first passage is **Philippians 4:12-14**:¹² "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me."¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble." [English Standard Version]

Several features of this text seem to highlight aspects of Paul's attitude. Firstly, he recognised that sometimes life is good and sometimes it can be tough and that dealing with these realities requires a process of

¹ *Friendship and Finances at Philippi* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press Int'l, 1994).

learning. We should not be surprised if we find the lesson tough or even painful. We may not grasp it first time round. But if we are willing to learn, we can and will be taught. Secondly, he expresses confidence in the sovereign power of God at work in his life. The Christian may and must respond to loss (and profit), depending on the strength of God to deal with disappointment or undue self-reliance. Paul does not appeal to human endurance but seems to recognise that what the world throws at us would sometimes be virtually unbearable were it not for God's sustaining power. Sad stories in the news media of people crumbling under financial pressures indicate all too vividly how much we need strength that is not our own. Thirdly, Paul truly appreciates the expression of Christian love which the Philippians have shown. Perhaps one of the few aspects of a crisis which some people will be able to look back upon fondly is when Christian love is shown in the midst of the crisis, whether through compassionate words or by sacrificial actions.

But a second passage is also important: **Philippians 4:6-7** do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

While Paul appears to ask the impossible ('do not be anxious about anything'), he is simply echoing the words of Jesus on the mountain (Matt. 6:25). Now no-one will claim that it is *easy* to follow Jesus' and Paul's words, but that does not mean that we may ignore them. But Paul does not suggest that we simply sit around worrying about whether we have stopped worrying! Rather we are to take action. We are to pray. This prayer will address the matter of concern, but not without recognition of God's kindnesses already experienced. This requires trust in two fundamental realities. On the one hand, this action is pointless unless we believe that God has sovereign control over everything, even the stock market. Otherwise, why bother? But on the other hand this text demands that we believe that God can provide peace even as everything is going crazy around us. These convictions do not come easily, but I think that we can see a connection between our two texts. The more that we bring our concerns to God in prayer, deliberately putting our trust in him, the more we will be able to trust him in tough circumstances which *appear* to say that he is not present at all.

When a crisis hits, such as the loss of financial security, Christians must be able to make a Christian response, but that will rarely be to identify the reason or explanation for the tough times with any certainty. Trite judgments (such as 'this is God's judgment on you') claim a level of understanding which is simply not available to us in most cases. There may

indeed be individuals who are trying to serve God and Mammon and some financial institutions may be idolatrous to the core, and they will be held to account in due course, but there is little value in generalizing. A more fundamentally Christian response to the recent financial troubles might be for every believer to learn how to deal with whatever circumstances God places us in, depending on him in thankful but earnest prayer.

IN THIS NUMBER

I am grateful to our contributors for their essays which, I trust, will inform and challenge readers of SBET.

Our first paper is by Dr Ian Shaw of Langham Literature and International Christian College. Dr Shaw's article is a revised version of a paper delivered as the Finlayson Memorial Lecture at the 2008 conference of the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society. Dr Shaw reflects on both biblical and historical material which may enable modern Christians to respond more appropriately to the needs of the world around us.

The second paper is by Professor I. Howard Marshall, who takes the Psalms as his starting point in helping us to reflect on sound principles of biblical interpretation.

Dr Fergus MacDonald continues our focus on the Psalms with a paper (also presented at the 2008 SETS conference) which considers how the Psalms may be used effectively as a means of connecting modern people with the truth of God's Word.

Finally, Professor Kenneth Stewart of Covenant College exams the facts regarding the origins of the famous acronym TULIP, popularly used to describe Calvinism. His paper will perhaps require some reconsideration of the significance of this acronym.

As well as thanking all the contributors of articles, let me also warmly thank those who have submitted reviews (an important academic service in its own right) and, particularly, my colleagues in the *SBET* editorial and production team who have worked hard to bring this Bulletin to you. May the Lord use this journal for the good of his church and the glory of his name.

Alistair I. Wilson

Principal, Dumisani Theological Institute, King William's Town, South Africa