

Publishing Editor's column

THERE ARE MANY areas of concern in the financial world at present, and one is the extent of credit and store card debts. At one time obtaining a bank loan was a difficult thing; now credit is readily available and indeed pressed upon us, particularly in the UK and the USA. I recall in the early days of credit cards an advertisement for one stating that it "takes the waiting out of wanting". Coupled with clever marketing and advertising, the ready availability of credit has led to a situation where for many people 'must have it now' outweighs in their thinking the fact that by doing so you end up by paying much more and helping to swell the vast profits of the banks. For an increasing number of people, debts are soaring to a level where they will find it difficult, perhaps impossible, to pay them back. Even within the Brotherhood there have been those who, carried away by the 'must have it now' philosophy, have found themselves in financial difficulties when hard times have come.

The culture of instant gratification is, in fact, all-pervasive in modern Western society. I recall a work colleague years ago commenting that job advertisements always presented a very glamorous picture of jobs, with the result that young employees arrive with the expectation that they will be doing exciting and fulfilling work immediately, whereas in truth much of what you do at work, especially on the lower rungs of the employment ladder, is routine and boring. The idea of instant gratification can be seen in relations between the sexes. Pre-marital chastity is becoming a rare thing; it is almost assumed today that young people will have sex before marriage, if they ever get married at all; and all the emphasis is on dealing with the results of this, such as pregnancy and disease. In consequence our young people are put under a lot of pressure to conform to what has become the norm of our society.

I was struck a couple of years ago in reading through that remarkable chapter Acts 7, Stephen's defence, by a feature that I had not noticed before, the fact that the worthies of old mentioned in the chapter had to wait before they received what God had promised them. Abraham was promised an inheritance in the land of Canaan, but died not having received it. Joseph was promised great things in the dreams he had when he was but a lad, but went through twenty years of trials before they were fulfilled. Moses had to endure

forty years of exile before he fulfilled his Divinely ordained destiny to lead his people out of Egypt, by which time he was an old man, and he never entered the Land of Promise. David not only had to endure years of faith-testing existence avoiding Saul's attempts to kill him before inheriting the kingdom promised to him, but even then he was not permitted to build the temple he so longed to see standing in Zion.

By contrast, the Jewish leaders before whom Stephen was making his defence had it all then; the Sadducees were rich from their manipulation of the temple offerings, and the Pharisees basked in the admiration of the people for their supposed piety whilst enjoying worldly wealth. But, as Jesus said, particularly in relation to the Pharisees, "they have their reward", whereas for those who serve God in the right spirit there is future blessing from Him (Mt. 6:1-6). In the lives of those men mentioned by Stephen we can see promises and patterns of Jesus: the seed of Abraham who will inherit the land; the one who was rejected by his brethren, as Joseph and Moses were, but who will prove to be their saviour as those men were in their day; and the one who will rule on the throne of David for ever. Jesus rejected the opportunity of instant gratification before he started his ministry, refusing to use wrongly the power he had been given by providing instantly for his fleshly needs, and rejecting the use of this power to establish himself as king then and there. Instead, "for the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2).

For some readers of this magazine there is little or no opportunity to grasp the things that are freely offered in this present world, but for many of us it is all too easy to be drawn into the 'must have' philosophy of the Western world, and to push the prospect of the Kingdom to the back of our minds. Yet the immediate gratification of our desires brings only temporary satisfaction at best, and more likely disappointment. Truly, as the Preacher said, it is all "emptiness and chasing the wind" (Eccl. 1:14, NEB). In contrast, following the Lord Jesus Christ will bring us "to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 1:4), and true contentment in this life comes from making this our aim and, while we are waiting for him to appear, seeking to serve him and our fellows.

Tony Benson