

Publishing Editor's column

INSURANCE is one of the world's biggest industries, and we are constantly being urged to insure ourselves for all kinds of risks. This links with other features of current society. People want things immediately instead of waiting for them, borrow in various ways to get them, and then insure to cover their debts or enable them to get instant replacements if anything happens to their possessions. People also like to feel secure, with all risks covered; if an insurance company does not pay out for a major crisis then the state is expected to do so.

We are obliged to have some insurance if we do certain things. If we have a motor car the law obliges us to insure it; if we take out a mortgage to buy a home then the lender will insist that we insure the home. Beyond that it is very much up to the individual conscience what insurance we take out. Some consider we should place our trust entirely in God and not take out insurance at all beyond what is required. Other say that if we do this we are 'putting God to the test', which is forbidden by Scripture (Deut. 6:16; Mt. 4:7), and that we should make reasonable insurance provision, whilst still recognising the overruling hand of God in our lives. It is an area where each must act according to conscience.

On the broader scale, the existence of a massive insurance industry in the world indicates the fragility of society, as was brought home to me by a conversation I had recently with a brother who works in the industry. Some think that on 11 September the fourth plane, which crashed before reaching a target, was heading for a nuclear installation. The destruction, which would have occurred over a wide area, would have brought about claims sufficient to have brought down the world's interlinked insurance industry. This in turn would have wrecked the world's financial systems. I suppose a really major natural disaster such as an earthquake could have a similar effect, if it occurred at a major population centre. Such things as these happen without warning and illustrate what a precarious world we live in; we cannot expect to cover ourselves for all eventualities.

As well as insurance we also have assurance, as in a life assurance policy, which guarantees a certain payment on a person's death or after a certain period of time. Even this has a degree of uncertainty; payment relies on there still being a company in existence to pay out, and in times of economic crisis this might not be the case. If we want true assurance we have to turn to the Word of God. In Hebrews 6:11 we read of believers having "the full assurance of hope", based upon the promises God made to Abraham, which He confirmed with an oath (vv. 13-18). Hebrews 10:22 speaks of believers having "full assurance of faith", based on the fact that Jesus Christ has gone before us, overcoming sin and death, and has opened the way for us to obtain eternal life. The existence of insurance is an indication of the uncertainty of the present order of things, and, whatever use we make of it, only trust in God and His promises in Christ can truly protect us from what the future might bring.

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