



## Correspondence

*Comments on articles appearing in the magazine are always welcome, and should be addressed to the editor in whose section the article appears.*

# Should Christadelphians invest in stocks and shares?

**T**HE ARTICLE by Brother Russell Ebbs of the above title ([Oct. 2001, p. 383](#)) has generated a number of letters from readers, both in the UK and overseas. Regrettably, we cannot publish all these letters. What follows is a summary of the main points raised, followed by two of the letters, and then Brother Ebbs's reply to the points raised.

Virtually all the letters sought to justify the investing of money in this way, and indeed one sensed from reading them a general feeling of indignation that such an activity should be questioned. Most took exception to the use of 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 by Brother Ebbs in describing share owning as being "unequally yoked together with unbelievers". One brother expressed the view that this passage is directed at fellowship in spiritual matters and worship—a warning not to corrupt the household of faith.

However, a number agreed that caution was required in the types of shares purchased, as there are some activities that it would not be consistent with our beliefs to be seen as supporting or making a profit from, such as the tobacco and armaments industries or certain media and leisure groups. There are also companies whose policies and practices have given them poor reputations and standing. Those who made such points seemed unaware of the inconsistency of this view; that is, that owning shares does not involve being joined to the enterprise, but owning shares in the wrong type of company will cause others to view us as being joined to that enterprise in some form.

Other points raised were:

- 1 Depositing money in a bank and then leaving the bank to use it as it sees fit is no different from investing in shares.
- 2 Brethren and sisters should only invest in shares to provide a little cash "against unforeseen circumstances".
- 3 If by investing in shares one becomes financially independent, and so able to spend the majority of time on spiritual activities, then surely this should be seen as a blessing from God.
- 4 Brethren who have become wealthy because of increases in share value have been able to help less fortunate brethren and sisters and fund projects in the Truth. (Those who made this point, or the previous one, did not mention that share values can go down as well as up, or disappear altogether, as in the example of Railtrack, nor consider the question of whether one should view such losses as a message from God.)
- 5 If owning shares is a form of 'unequal yoking', what about working eight hours a day or more for an employer for money?
- 6 The wealth of men such as Abraham supports the view that there is nothing wrong with wealth, it is the ill-directed love of money which is really the problem.
- 7 If we receive shares without seeking them, because of mutual societies becoming companies, or being taken over by companies, what should we do with them? Sell them, or return them?
- 8 The use of Christ's reference in Luke 17:28-30 to buying and selling in the days of Lot is misplaced as Christ was commenting on an ordinary everyday activity and not criticising it.
- 9 Brother Roberts and other brethren invested in the bogus Sugar Refining Project that was meant to produce thousands of pounds for the work of the Truth but was in fact a total disaster.
- 10 We take out various forms of insurance, pensions and endowments to generate money to cover such things as losses due to fire, burglary and illness, and provision for retirement, but do not consider that we have 'joined' with firms which offer such financial returns, so why should owning shares be any different?

- 11 The criticism of company directors and companies was too sweeping and is not justified in relation to businesses owned and run by Christadelphians.
- 12 Buying and selling shares is just an ordinary everyday activity and does not warrant the critical scrutiny that Brother Ebbs gave it. To talk about unjust gains is far too condemnatory. Investing money at least brings employment, and manufacturing companies often develop items that are of benefit generally, such as new drugs and medicines or labour-saving devices.

Brother Ebbs brought before us a number of Scriptural exhortations regarding attitudes to wealth and the way that wealth is obtained. In connection with the words of Christ in Luke 17:28-30 he commented: “we are warned not to become swept along in the current of popular activities”; and he warned about “those things which can occupy the minds of disciples to the exclusion of the Truth’s priorities”. He encouraged us to accept that “we need to be . . . single-minded and determined in pursuit of righteousness and godliness”. The fact that wealth is both a blessing and a trial was highlighted (Mt. 19:24; 1 Tim. 6:9,10).

The Revelation clearly shows that at the time of the end, when judgement comes, the apostasy has traded her spiritual wares for material gain, and she and all who are associated with her are brought down. How we invest our money is as important as the way we invest our time and energy. In this world there is just as much corruption in commerce as there is in politics and religion. It is right that the disciple in Christ constantly examines those things in which he or she is engaged, in daily life as well as in ecclesial life.

*Trevor Maher*

[I wonder if I might](#) offer a few observations on Brother Russell Ebbs’s thought-provoking article? I shall try and be as objective (and honest) as possible.

Let me say at the outset that I am not a holder of stocks and shares, and only once have I ever speculated on them. I confess I was motivated by the desire for short-term gain on that occasion, questionable at best, but I did learn a big lesson from it. Although I gained financially from the transaction, my mind was so taken up by the day’s share price, and whether or not to sell, that it almost took over my thinking. There was a

very modest sum invested by today’s standards, but I see now that I lost far more spiritually than I gained materially, and I resolved never to get sucked in like that again. I learnt that it is our *attitude* to our money which makes the difference, and I was found wanting. Thankfully, my mind is now completely free from such worries.

We know that having riches of itself is not a sin; there are many very wealthy people in Scripture who we know will be in the Kingdom of God—Abraham, Job and David spring immediately to mind. But, as Brother Ebbs reminds us, there is great danger in putting our trust in such riches; and, if we are honest, few of us would deny that we would have to trust in God a little more if we were less well blessed materially. Men and women who remain close to God despite great wealth are rare indeed, and doubtless this is why Scripture records for us examples of those who succeeded and those who failed in it.

Many brethren and sisters will think it highly questionable, however, whether owning shares constitutes being “unequally yoked together with unbelievers”. Many of us would not think twice about buying a house of our own on a street inhabited entirely by unbelievers. Just because we have an interest in the same parcel of land as them, does this then mean that our spirituality is being compromised? Of course not. Then why should sharing ownership with such people of other things compromise us? Buying and selling shares does not necessarily link us with unbelievers, because the decision to do so is entirely our own, and need not be influenced by whatever motives they have. Similarly, owning shares no more associates us with the principles by which companies might be run than owning a house makes us responsible for (say) any ill-treatment of the workmen who built it. If we have a conscience about such issues, then we should act in accordance with it, but let us not lay such tenuous burdens on others.

Matthew 25:27 is not the Lord’s justification for having a bank account, it is a parable, teaching us that we have a responsibility for glorifying God with *everything* He has blessed us with, not just our finances. To extend the principle of being unequally yoked together with unbelievers, have we ever thought what banks do with our money? It is not kept in little cubby holes below the counter. When we lend the bank our money (which is legally what we do), typically less than ten per cent of it is kept in cash. The remainder is used by the bank to invest as it