

508 The Balances of Deceit

Last week we read in Daniel 5.27 with reference to Belshazzar – “TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting”. Belshazzar fell short, and sure enough, his end came swiftly (5.30-31). Truly, “Behold, the nations [are] as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance” (from Isaiah 40.15a, KJV) – a solid assurance for us of God’s authority over the kingdoms of this earth in these chaotic, dangerous times.

We find throughout God’s Word that the Lord requires of His people the simple quality of honesty in all things, and such honesty displays “a balanced balance” in His sight. Yet we also find man’s tendency is to do the opposite! - preferring dishonesty, deceit and unrighteousness instead, and resulting in his “honesty balance” becoming seriously lopsided; this balance can only be restored by repentance, confession and forgiveness (eg., Romans 7.17-25).

A few scriptural examples make the point. “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment ... Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I [am] the Lord your God ...” (from Leviticus 19.35-36a). “A false balance [is] abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight” (Proverbs 11.1). Regarding Israel – “[He is] a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress” (Hosea 12.7). “Shall I count [them] pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?” (Micah 6.11). “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness ... Blessed are the pure in heart ...” (from Matthew 5.6,8). “Provide things honest in the sight of all men” (Romans 12.17b). “Now I pray to God that ye do no evil ... but that ye should do that which is honest ...” (from II Corinthians 13.7), “in all things showing thyself a pattern of good works ...” (from Titus 2.7a).

Unfortunately over many decades those in political and financial leadership in “the Christian West” have turned away from such basic honesty, leading to the widespread economic shambles that now prevails. The “gold standard” used to link a nation’s currency directly to the gold reserves held in that nation’s vaults, and produced for all to see “an honest balance” which could be trusted. But for various reasons which seemed sensible at the time, that gold standard was abandoned by Great Britain in 1931, and by the United States in 1971.

This led to the so-called “fiat money” of our day, the value of which is not backed up by any physical commodity such as gold or silver, but which

rests solely upon our trusting the honesty, credibility and stability of the issuing government. Now therefore, freed from any gold standard restraint, governments and central banks can literally stamp out more coins and print more bank notes when it suits them, the process known as “quantitative easing”. When all is said and done, such money has no more genuine value than Monopoly money, resting as it does on the thin-air promise of - “This money is worth what it claims to be worth – because we say so”! In reality the whole system is ultimately based on deceit, and merits those same words written on Belshazzar’s wall – “Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting”.

So it is little wonder that there have developed the very serious economic and social troubles now being faced across the western world, made worse by the war in Ukraine, by high energy prices, high inflation, rising interest rates, and jaw-dropping government debts. To add to this grim mix is the recent, widespread assumption that the government must pay the bills of any or all who say they cannot pay their bills for themselves. We see just how far society has come from the basic biblical teaching regarding financial responsibility, which resides first with the individual, then with the family, and then with the church family (egs., Matthew 25.34-40 / Acts 6.1-6 / Romans 12.13 / Ephesians 4.28 / I Thessalonians 4.11-12 / II Thessalonians 3.10-12 / Hebrews 6.10).

How very far the West has travelled away from the solid scriptural standards of honesty which used to be far more prevalent in public and private life! So - “[It is] better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. [It is] better to trust in the LORD than to put confidences in princes” (Psalm 118.8-9).

In the light of the current, disturbing situation, we do well to examine our own relationship with honesty; to pray for the new British government after its spectacularly inept start; and to have our “conversation honest among the Gentiles” (from I Peter 2.12a), a conversation which speaks, as and when appropriate, of the “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all ...” (from I Timothy 2.5-6). For in this sole Mediator, God the Father freely gives us, not the balances of deceit, but the perfect balances of His perfect truth.

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