

How can wealth disguise a death wish? (21:6)

The acquisition of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death.

THE TEXT (NASB)

The acquisition of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death.

The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.
KJV - Proverbs 21:6

INTRODUCTION



Dishonesty in financial matters is not just unprofitable—it's subtly suicidal.

This proverb speaks of death for deliberate dishonesty: A grim warning against deceiving anyone for personal gain. The Bible doesn't demand capital punishment for theft, but the wages of sin are death. Further, those who've been robbed may take extreme vengeance—especially the government.

If you carelessly falsify something in business, stop, correct it, and change your procedures, despite the embarrassment, or you'll find yourself navigating in opulent ignorance to your own demise.



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COMMENTARY

Translation: *Treasures*



Note the word “treasures” is plural, not the singular “treasure.” It may seem a trivial point, but I suspect that lying to get “treasures” implies habitual dishonesty. The text sounds the alarm, not against some accidental slip, but ongoing and then habitual deceitfulness.

The Hebrew word for “treasures,” אוצר (ô•şār, pronounced “ō-tsar”), also appears in Proverbs 8:18-21. It does not refer to basic daily needs, like food, clothing, and shelter, but to coffers and storehouses, extra wealth above and beyond our daily needs. So it’s more dangerous to lie for luxuries than for necessities. Most can forgive those who steal from pure hunger.

Honesty and Death

The acquisition of wealth through deceit is like a mirage—but worse. A mirage leads to disappointment, but pursuing wealth dishonestly leads to death. Thieves may not die immediately, but they are heading that way. The more we stretch the truth, the greater the danger.

Honesty and Haste

The transitory nature of dishonest riches is abundantly clear with two words, “fleeting” (here now, gone tomorrow) and “vapour” (mist or fog). Those who look for security in stolen wealth will be disappointed. One small gust, and all is gone. Commentator Matthew Henry says that those who enrich themselves by dishonest practices never find the satisfaction they seek. Plagued with instability, they are perpetually uneasy and in constant haste.

Honesty and Simplicity

I find it hardest to be honest when it comes to taxes. Part of my problem is the complex maze of the Income Tax Act: Intricate, patchwork, ever-changing laws, regulations, and interpretations. If it was a building, it would be condemned as unfit for human habitation. The playing field is not



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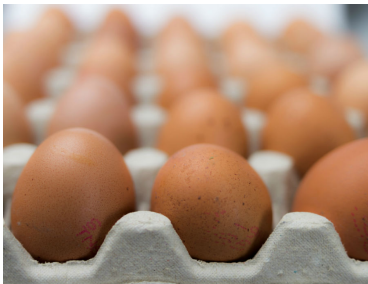
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level, but sloped to favor the government and hamper the taxpayer. In contrast, in reality, transparency in business dealings promotes honesty and expresses trustworthiness. Complexity is often a cover for dishonesty. Yet honesty is the best policy. Keep things simple!

Honesty and Elaborate Planning

Dishonesty is coupled with scheming. A crime can be executed with elaborate planning and precise timing. From a dramatic perspective, this may seem a clever masterpiece, but from the LORD's perspective, it's the demonic use of the wonderful human mind for trivial purposes. Criminals may be ingenious, but not wise. They end in ruin, despite all their shrewdness. We read a warning in Isaiah 30:1-2 when many Israelites tried to ignore God's solutions and planned instead to flee to Egypt, seeking a salvation without God.

Buyer, Seller, Preacher, Taxpayer



Other temptations? As shoppers, we can misrepresent an item for purchase, just to get a lower price. This common tactic is described in Proverbs 20:14, but this text says it will backfire, causing more harm than good. As sellers, we extol the product or inflate its benefits just for a sale. As preachers, we need to heed the warning of classic commentator John Gill: "Do not preach false doctrines in the church of God, simply to increase donations." As taxpayers, we should just pay our taxes.

Aside from speeding, tax evasion is probably our most common crime. According to this proverb, under-the-table business to duck the taxes will cause more trouble than it's worth. The end does NOT justify the means. Instead, the means colours the end, and that colour may be black.



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus never tried to acquire monetary treasures, whether honestly or dishonestly. He never even asked for money. But do not misunderstand this.

Jesus was not against treasures. In fact, He advised His followers to “store up treasures” for the future. In one of His discourses on money, He promoted genuine, safe, and secure long-term wealth.

He spoke of storing up treasures, money bags, in heaven where assets are safe from the ravages of inflation, market fluctuations, thieves, and investment fees (Luke 12:33).

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite translation and think about it often.
- Don't deviate from the truth when buying or selling. Don't make false claims about a product or service, whether you are a buyer or a seller.
- Be honest if you can't be content. Never stoop to dishonesty just to get more.
- Work hard to keep your business dealings simple.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



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KEY WORDS

contamination, death, dishonesty, haste, honesty, planning, price, business, satisfaction, security, taxes, treasure, worse life (quality)

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Tax-Driven Ted?



Death and taxes: The only things we can be sure of! Certainly that's the way Tax-Driven Ted sees it. Whereas others pay some or little attention to taxes, he is consumed by tax minimization. Ted is tax obsessed. Why? For many Canadians, if left unmanaged, taxes eliminate over 50% of income. In Canada tax freedom day falls in July.

Tax freedom day is the day of the year when you have paid all your taxes and can now keep the rest of the money you earn. Tax-Driven Ted will spend money just to get a write-off. He fails to seriously evaluate the underlying economics behind the decision and chooses to focus on the tax consequences. He loves to borrow money to invest simply because he can write off the interest costs of amount borrowed. This investment technique is called leveraging and is commonplace.

Ted doesn't believe he should pay any taxes. After all, the government wastes money. It's extremely inefficient. He uses every angle to reduce taxes. He's always looking for loopholes, credits, or write-offs. *His focus is not on customer satisfaction but on tax reduction.*



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He goes on trips and conferences so that he can take the tax write-offs. He loves limited partnerships investments and other tax shelters. For some investors tax considerations are secondary, but for Tax-Driven Ted, they come first.

