

Money or morals—what's better? (19:22)

What is desirable in a man is his kindness, and it is better to be a poor man than a liar.

THE TEXT (NASB)

What is desirable in a man is his kindness, and it is better to be a poor man than a liar.

The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar. KJV - Proverbs 19:22

INTRODUCTION



Integrity is more important and much happier than wealth.

It's a message seldom heard in our materialistic society.

If it's true, then what should you pursue more, riches or righteousness?

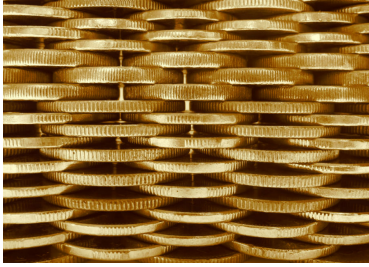


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COMMENTARY

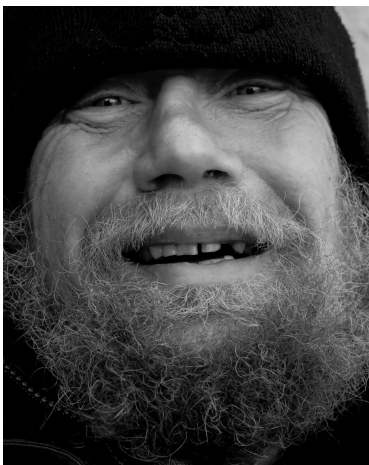
Principle vs. Principal



The text deals with the ancient battle between riches and righteousness, money and morals, principal or principle. A principle is a fundamental law or truth, a guiding inspiration for right conduct and happiness. One such principle is integrity, a primary requirement for long term business success. Guiding principles are powerful but invisible. However, in the world of finance, principal is a capital sum—distinguished from profit or interest. The principal of an investment is both significant and visible. People are often pulled in two different directions: Respect for principle and the respect for principal.

The battle of moral values versus monetary values is constant life struggle. This proverb focuses on integrity in the realm of charitable giving. Let's look at it closely, because the first part of the text is difficult to translate.

Translation



First note the difference between the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and King James Version (KJV). The NASB translates the first part of the text to identify kindness as a man's



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primary virtue. So this could be taken as advice for a young lady to look for a kind, loyal man, rather than a rich man without kindness. On the other hand, the KJV translates it more abstractly, with kindness being a primary and admirable motivation, independent of financial resources. Both translations seem logical and morally sensible.

Second, and strangely, in both translations, the first and second phrases do not seem to be related. The first part deals with kindness, and the second, with honesty. But both deal with ideal objects of our aspirations, two intangible aspects of righteousness—kindness and truth.

The Hebrew word for poor is רָשׁ (rāš, pronounced “rash”). In this proverb, rāš refers to those from the lower financial class. Young David uses it in describing his unworthiness to marry King Saul’s daughter (1 Samuel 18:23). And the prophet Nathan later uses it in his story, related to the now-King David, about a rich man and poor man. The rich man had many flocks, and the poor man had one little ewe lamb, stolen by the rich man (2 Samuel 12:3).

Classic Paraphrase

Many commentaries suggest that the underlying message of the text is this: Offering kindness is highly admirable for a man, but when he does, he must follow through, even if it makes him financially poor. In other words, once you make a promise to help, keep that promise, even at great cost. Don’t let your own loss distract you from kindness and loyalty. Put kindness ahead of riches and keep your word with consistency and honesty, even when it hurts.

People Before Profits

Matthew Henry comments on this proverb in his Concise Commentary (1706):

A poor man, who wishes you well, but can promise you nothing, because he has nothing to be kind with, is better than a liar, than a rich man who makes you believe he will do mighty things, but, when it comes to the setting to, will do nothing... [Poor men are better than] men of high degree [who] deceive those whose expectations they raised.

I like the way my friend Bruce and his son Cory, put it in the slogan for their professional accounting practice: “Where Money Matters, but People Count.”



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus doesn't think much of wealth, but it has some benefits.

In Luke 16, Jesus reveals his attitude towards money. He uses it as a tool to assess management skills in order to determine if people can be trusted with real treasures (Luke 16:10-11 NASB). This is not to say that money isn't valuable, only that its value is fleeting—temporary, not everlasting.

Jesus often told his followers to forgo the short-term benefits of principal, for the long-term benefit of principle.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Make sure you keep financial pledges to the poor.
- Don't raise expectations in the poor unless you are certain you will fulfill them.
- Be a promise keeper. Don't be a dictionary; put principle ahead of principal.

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



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KEY WORDS

better life (quality), charity, dishonesty, honesty, integrity, management, poor (rāš pronounced “rash”)

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Generous Genevieve?



Generous Genevieve loves to give and has a big heart. Sometimes she chuckles to herself as she gives her gifts. Now here's a secret about her giving: She only gives to those who really need it—not just to anyone who asks for a handout. She gives because she thinks it's the right thing to do.

Strangely enough, the more she gave to those in genuine need, the more she got back. Some people give in order to get, but she considers that mere trading. Generous Genevieve gives for the sheer thrill of it. By giving she is keeping herself from emotional cancer. Emotional cancer, also known as greed, can take over one's heart and destroy their ability to enjoy even the simple things of life. Genevieve gives in order to increase her giving capacity.

Sometimes it hurts Genevieve to give. Sometimes she is short of cash because she has given to someone else, but that shortage doesn't last long.

Genevieve believes that there is always a reward for giving to those in need. She thinks that her generosity will come back to her benefit sooner or later. She coined the expression, “What goes



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around—comes around.”

