

What should you buy and hold forever? (23:23)

Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding.

THE TEXT (NASB)

Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding.

Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding. KJV - Proverbs 23:23

INTRODUCTION



This may not be your very first purchase, but it's certainly one of the most important, maybe even the most urgent.

Pay whatever it costs to get the facts. Do not waste your time and treasure on lies. Be extra leery of fancy packaging.

Be prepared to pay what it takes for the very best—what is it?



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COMMENTARY

This proverb comes in two parts. First, we're told to grab and hold truth—and don't part with it, even for ready cash. Second, we're given three elements or maybe aspects of truth.

There is something the text does NOT say. It does not forbid the purchase and re-sale of truth-filled commodities, like the Scriptures, maps, or certified weights-and-measures—though one of my friends tried to use it that way, as if it forbade the commercial distribution of Bibles.

Translations: *buy and sell*



The Hebrew word for “buy” here, קנה (qā•nāh, pronounced “qah-nah”), appears seventy-six times in the Scriptures, used broadly in the sense of “getting” (as first of all in Genesis 4:1, when Eve “got” her first child), but then more frequently about commerce, as when Abraham (Genesis 25:10) and Jacob (Genesis 33:19) “purchased” real estate. This word is also used in Proverbs 4:5, 16:16, and 20:14.

The Hebrew word for “sell,” מכר (mā•kār, pronounced “mah-kar”), appears seventy-four times in the Scriptures, almost always referring to a transaction, the title to some merchandise changing hands for some payment: quid pro quo. Strangely, mā•kār is used first in Genesis 25:31-33, when Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew – the classic bad deal?

Translation: *Truth*

The Hebrew word for “truth,” אמת (ʾemēt, pronounced “ě-měth”), appears 125 times in the Scriptures. Note: It stems from the Hebrew word, אמן (ʾā•mēn, pronounced “ah-men”), from which we get the English word “amen,” meaning “so be it” or “that’s right.” ʾemēt is first used in Genesis 24:27, when Abraham’s chief steward praises God for his mercy and truth—which is to say, God’s reliability and trustworthiness.

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT) says: “As we study its [ʾemēt] various contexts, it becomes manifestly clear that there is no “truth” in the biblical sense (i.e. valid truth) outside God. All truth comes from God and is truth because it’s related to God.” So everything



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else is just shifting opinion, deceitful, as in our culture today.

Deception in Education



Unfortunately, much of modern “education” is filled with lies and treachery, especially in the area of humanities and social studies. Ironically, the dominant ideology today teaches that there’s no such thing as absolute truth. So, when I’m confronted with such a no-nothing argument, my usual question is, “Are you absolutely sure there’s no absolute truth? Do you really know that you cannot know?” Their claiming “not to know” means “doing whatever they want,” so it’s likely that they really don’t want to know. Thus, Martin Luther’s advice: “I would advise no one to send his child where the Holy Scriptures are not supreme. Every institution that does not unceasingly pursue the study of God’s word becomes corrupt.” [Answers.com](https://www.answers.com)

The marriage of truth with the reality of God is further evidenced by the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:7 as he warns his readers that those who disdain God will never be able to settle on what is truth. Truth is all that is worthy of trust, and nothing is truly trustworthy but our loving Creator. Our faith does not mean agreeing to an idea, but having trust in our LORD.

Learning From Dad and Mom



The context here speaks of listening to one’s father, and making one’s mother proud. It points to parents as the primary source of good teaching or truth. I remember my dad telling me, as he forced me to work with him, “The lessons you don’t learn at home, you’ll have to pay for, outside. So, learn all you can at home, for free. Life’s lessons are more expensive outside.”

Pleasing Mom and Dad

This proverb is surrounded by verses about pleasing one’s parents. I’ve found that no matter how responsible or irresponsible parents may be, no parent, not even a hardened criminal,



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wants their child to be deceived, ignorant, naïve, and confused. A wicked parent may want their child to be cunning and crafty, but certainly not blind to reality (as they see it).

Intangible Targets

This proverb speaks of four objectives: Truth, wisdom, instruction, and understanding. Now, all four of them are intangibles, but it seems to me that “instruction” is the one easiest to grip, since instruction comes packaged from outside of me. It’s easier to grasp than some sort of thinking. We get instruction from teachers, courses, seminars, books, videos, and other educational materials. But there’s a problem. Much of what is taught is not truth.

Truth Under Siege

The cosmic battle between truth and lies, fact and fancy, wisdom and folly continues. So this text admonishes us to get more truth, not necessarily more books. Many books, videos, and internet sites, despite magnificent packaging and preparation, are filled with nonsense and misinformation. It’s hard to separate fact from fiction, truth from lies. We need discernment.

Discernment



Remember that when this text was written, books were rare and extremely expensive. The printing press would not be invented for another 2,500 years. So most wisdom and history was passed on verbally. Often only the most reliable data was committed to writing. Today however, the written word is ubiquitous. Both talk and text are cheap. How do we discern the precious from the worthless? Sixteenth century scientist Francis Bacon gave this advice: “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some are to be chewed and digested.” I would take that one step further: Some books, magazines, videos, and internet sites should merely be smelled and then quickly flushed.

If we devote all our time and treasure to pursuing truth, we’ll have none left for damnable lies.



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus was once asked a very profound question: What is truth?

He was being interrogated about his vague crimes by Pontius Pilate, the brutal Roman ruling Jerusalem. Pilate found no guilt with Jesus, yet still ordered his execution by crucifixion. Pilate asked Jesus the question, but didn't wait for an answer. Perhaps he'd seen so much lunacy, malice, lies, and fraud that he'd become cynical, jaded, and indifferent even to the possibility of truth. Such a pity. Standing before Pilate was Jesus Christ, the Person of Truth himself (John 18:28-19:22).

Pilate would have done well to listen to his wife (Matthew 27:19).

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Think! Use your head! But be sure to fill it with quality reading material rather than nonsense. (i.e. Don't buy tabloids or junk literature.)
- Read accredited history books, especially those which have withstood the test of time. Cherish unaltered old photographs, books, paintings, videos, and music.
- Be ready and willing to pay money for the facts. Don't waste it on nonsense.

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



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KEY WORDS

education, deceit, instruction, less assets (quantity), truth, understanding, wisdom, bf spending

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Prudent Pauline?



Prudent Pauline is a planner. She looks before she leaps, she thinks before she speaks. Her favourite mottos are: “Haste makes waste,” “brains over brawn,” and “don’t jump to conclusions.”

When Pauline first heard that famous maxim: “The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step,” she said NO! It begins with a good map. The map must be studied and the best route plotted. Consider road conditions, terrain, rest stops, refuelling, hostile territory, expected weather, travelling companions, clothing, supplies, and many more factors, including (if necessary) a guide.

She has studied the wisdom of Solomon and even helped teach him a thing or two. Solomon wrote these words about 3,000 years ago in honour of Prudent Pauline. “Whatever your hand finds to do (no matter what you are doing) do it with all your might (give it your full ability and energy) for there is no activity or planning or wisdom after you die—it will be too late.” Pauline says, “First comes wisdom, then comes planning (her favourite activity), and then comes activity.”

Pauline makes the time to do tax planning. She does a work plan every day. She uses a day timer or planner to assign priorities to her activities. She and Diligent Daniel are an incredible



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pair. Pauline does all her homework before she starts an activity.

