

When is it better being poor than being rich? (Proverbs 28:6)

Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than he who is crooked though he be rich.

THE TEXT (NASB)

Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than he who is crooked though he be rich.

Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich. KJV - Proverbs 28:6

INTRODUCTION



Integrity beats wealth. If riches won't come except through cheating or lying, then it's **better** not to **be rich**. The short-term power of riches is no match for the long-term power of integrity.

When forced to choose between the two, take integrity and leave wealth. In other words, 'how we accumulate wealth' is more important than 'how much wealth we accumulate.' *Our quality of life is more important than our quantity of assets.*

Although consumerism has taught us so, we need to closely examine its claim that "more is better."



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COMMENTARY



More is more and better is better. We must not confuse the two. More assets do not guarantee more life or more pleasure. The text identifies a major battleground: More vs. Better. More is not better. For example, ten jalopies are more car than one new BMW, but ten jalopies are not better than one BMW. Consumerism in our affluent society has so strongly affected our thinking that believing “more” does not always make things “better” is difficult.

If we sacrifice our integrity to gain more assets, then we will become rich losers. But before we look at the conflict between “more” and “better,” let’s look carefully at the translation.

Translation: *poor man*

The Hebrew word for **poor man**, רָשׁ (rāš, pronounced “rash”), is used frequently in Proverbs. Note that in this case the poor man may be voluntarily poor, that is, he chooses poverty over dishonesty. There are two other Hebrew words in Proverbs that are translated as poor. The distinguishing subtle difference may be that roosh is voluntary.

Note the word **his** in ‘his integrity.’ This implies that, to some degree, integrity is personalized—the same way one might personalize a cup of coffee with varying amounts of sugar and cream. Romans 14 deals with matters of individual integrity and preference. God commands Christians to allow each other some “personal space,” that is, some diversity in living out their righteousness before God. Some are vegetarians and others enjoy eating meat. They should get along and not impose personal preferences on another. In the same way, God may allow differing standards of integrity, so long as there is real integrity in God’s eyes.

The Cost of “More” in Money and Time

“More” increases maintenance, storage, and insurance costs. “More” means extra maintenance and easily leads to clutter and hurriedness. “More” can reduce our quality of life by stimulating more worry and reducing our free-time. Each of us has a limited capacity to absorb or utilize material wealth. If we forfeit intangible treasures to increase tangible possessions we end up being net losers.



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Ron Blue, a noted authority on personal financial management warns against careless pursuit of “more.”

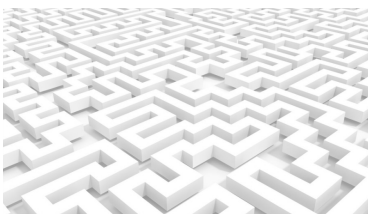
Blue told about a fisherman in a coastal town sitting on the dock, relaxing after he had caught enough for his family and his modest business, selling fresh fish. A successful businessman passing by asked him, “Why are you not fishing.”

“I have enough,” the fisherman replied. The businessman suggested that he should work harder and try to catch more fish, eventually enabling him to expand his business, purchase more fishing boats and become more prosperous. “Why would I want to do that?” the fisherman asked.

“So you could sit back and enjoy life,” was the reply.

With a wry smile, the fisherman responded, “What do you think I'm doing now?”

Complexity Facilitates Crookedness



The marginal reading of **crooked** is “perverse of two ways.” Not all rich people are crooked but many have gained their wealth through by acting “perverse of two ways.” Honesty and simplicity usually come together as do complexity and crookedness. Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) a Scottish author and novelist said it well, “Oh what a tangled web we weave, when we first practise to deceive!” If personal integrity has been lost on the road to riches, then it's worth going back to recover integrity. Often that includes a return to simplicity and transparency.

Personal wealth is measured with dollars, and can be reported to others, but how is personal integrity measured? Unfortunately, it gets less attention. Some organizations such as the Better Business Bureau (BBB) offer public recognition for businesses run with integrity. Most professional organizations have a code of ethics as a membership requirement.



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Failing at Ethics



Many business schools offer a course in business ethics, but most cannot teach ethics effectively simply because they have no ethical anchor, that is, they do not believe in moral absolutes. It's rather like trying to establish a global mapping system without first establishing the Prime Meridian. The Prime Meridian line runs vertically, north and south, right over the British Royal Observatory in Greenwich England, from the North Pole to the South Pole. A brass strip about five centimeters wide, embedded in the cobblestone, marks zero degrees longitude. The Western Hemisphere on one side and the Eastern Hemisphere on the other. It serves as an unchanging point of reference.

In the same way, ethics need a line of demarcation between right and wrong. Unless God and His word, the Bible, are used, all ethics will be purely relative. Even if other “sacred books” (such as the Qur’an (Islam), the Vedas (Hinduism), or the Dao de jing (Taoism)) are used as platforms, the resulting ethics will not stand the test of time and the pressure of reality since they are not inspired by the Designer and Creator of all. This is God. He rose from the dead, physically, just like He said He would (John 10:18). Indeed if Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead physically, then His followers are pitifully deluded (1 Corinthians 15:14).

Therefore any educational institution that rejects the reality of Christ’s physical resurrection, and all the associated implications, simply cannot teach ethics effectively. Chuck Colson, an ex-marine and a lawyer, served as Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon. Colson wrote an excellent paper titled, “Why Harvard Business School Cannot Teach Ethics”¹ based on this very point. When moral absolutes are rejected, business ethics become purely relative and ultimately a failure.



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus told His followers to put God's kingdom and righteousness ahead of basic needs such as food and clothing (Matthew 6:33).

Those who have no personal relationship with God put material concerns first, but Jesus said that we should seek first His kingdom and righteousness. Then our heavenly Father would add all else that we need.

When tempted in the wilderness to turn stones into bread (Matthew 4:2-4) Jesus refused to put His own basic needs ahead of His relationship and obedience to the Father.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Study keywords "more assets (quantity)" and keywords "better life (quality)"
- Crookedness sometimes comes in the form of cheating or stretching the "truth" on tax reports. Certainly don't overpay taxes, but also don't think that withholding legitimate taxes will bring you more of God's blessing.
- Work harder at being honest and consistent than at being rich.
- Return all funds (adjusted for inflation) obtained by crooked means.

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



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KEY WORDS

better life (quality), contamination, deceit, ethics, insurance, integrity, poor (rāš pronounced “rash”), rich, taxes, honesty

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



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timer or planner to assign priorities to her activities. She and Diligent Daniel are an incredible pair. Pauline does all her homework before she starts an activity.



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FOOTNOTES

[1 Harvard Business School and Ethics](#)

