

Do bribes work? (17:8)

A bribe is a charm in the sight of its owner. Wherever he turns, he prospers.

THE TEXT (NASB)

A bribe is a charm in the sight of its owner. Wherever he turns, he prospers.

A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth. KJV - Proverbs 17:8

INTRODUCTION



Money talks, and people listen—some more than others.

A bribe is like a enchanted talisman: It exerts its invisible influence wherever it's waved. The briber hits his goal, the recipient gets richer, and any third-party observer is impressed by their cooperation and admires the power of the gift.

Bribes work like magic, but what must we know about their “magic?”



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COMMENTARY

This proverb is simply descriptive, and surely not prescriptive. It describes a common-place financial tactic, but does not recommend it. Just because bribes can work, that doesn't mean they're virtuous! Other texts, like Proverbs 17:23, warn against the use of bribes: God explicitly forbids bribery in the Mosaic law, in the same way that he forbids even "useful" magic.

Translation: *bribe, gift, charm, prospers*

The Hebrew word translated as "bribe" here, דָּחַשׁ (šō•ḥăd, pronounced "shō-khad"), is used twenty-three times in the Bible and first appears in Exodus 23:8, as God lays down the law for his people: "You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of justice." The different translations of the same Hebrew word reveal an important fact: When a bribe is offered, it's only ever called a "gift." Anyone offering even a substantial bribe calls it a "small gift."

The translation of this word as "gift" by the KJV is somewhat misleading. There is another word in Hebrew, מַתָּן (măṭ•tān, pronounced "mat-tahn"), used in Proverbs 18:16, which is more plainly translated as "gift." Receiving a gift, măṭ•tān, is not forbidden by God.

The word "charm" here is really made of two Hebrew words, literally translated as "stone of favour." This Hebrew phrase is not the term used for precious stones or jewels. It means a lucky stone—a good luck token.

The translation "prospers" here comes from the Hebrew, שָׁכַל (śā•kāl, pronounced "sah-kal"), used sixty-two times in the Bible. Curiously, it first appears in Genesis 3:6 where śā•kāl is translated as "wise"—as the clever serpent entices Eve to eat the Forbidden Fruit. This word is also translated as "prudent," "understanding," and "successful." It refers to something greatly desirable! Is "prospers" pointing to the giver of the bribe, the receiver of the bribe, or the bribe itself? Perhaps all three. Consider the difference in translation of these last two words with the NASB, "He prospers," and the KJV, "It prospers." Does the briber prosper or does the bribe prosper—that is, work efficiently?

Lucky Charms



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In this text, is the Bible acknowledging any power in lucky charms? Clearly, yes. God allows the Prince of Power of the Air, Satan, a restricted degree of supernatural or miraculous power, as shown in the first contest between the magicians of Pharaoh and Moses (Exodus 7:8-13). The spiritual world, though invisible, is a competition of powers, where the LORD, God is the final referee (Exodus 8:18-19).

Given the range of plausible translations, it remains mysterious whether the briber, the bribed, or bribe itself is successful. But the text makes one point plain: Bribes work like a magic. They have limited, but real power. Note this story from Bloomberg News (2 Mar 2011):

The Swedish company, Ikea Systems BV, says it won't build more stores outside the Moscow region until local officials stop withholding permission for two outlets in the central cities of Samara and Ufa. After investing US \$4-billion in Russia over 10 years, Ikea placed a freeze on expansion in June 2009.

The reason the stores aren't opening is that Ikea is refusing to pay bribes to safety inspectors, said Kirill Kabanov, head of the non-governmental National Anti-Corruption Committee in Moscow.

We have a zero tolerance on corruption and we have a very clear policy, and then things must take the time they take,' Ikea Russia managing director Per Wendschlas said in an interview...Foreign companies have repeatedly faced difficulties in Russia. Royal Dutch Shell PLC, Europe's largest oil company, in 2006 ceded control to state-run OAO Gazprom of its biggest project in the country, the US \$22-billion Sakhalin-2 oil and gas development, amid threats by regulators to revoke the permits on environmental grounds.

What's clear from real-life experience is that bribes are deadly for the growth of a national economy. They work in "taking wealth," but not "making wealth." Competition in pricing is necessary to ensure the justice, efficiency, and innovation of the market, but cooperation in enterprises is necessary for the growth, efficiency, and innovation of the whole economy. Bribery kills real cooperation.



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Did you know that Jesus was offered a bribe? When? At what price? By whom?

We read in Matthew 4:8-10 that Satan offered Jesus Christ “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory,” if Jesus would worship him. Satan offered Jesus the biggest bribe in history—all the treasures of the world for all time (until the end of time)—but Jesus turned him down, because God Alone is to be worshipped. Unlike us fallen mortals, Jesus was the Son of God, in his humanity as physically weak as us, but not subject to sin. So Satan, the ruler of this age, found no handle to pull Him into rebellion against his Father.

Jesus could not be bribed, since He was not stained with sin (John 14:30 NASB).

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite translation and think about it often.
- Can you be bought for a price? How much?
- Don't try to resist bribes in your own power. Ask Jesus to give you the ability to say no.
- If you use gifts in business as tokens of appreciation, keep the gifts small and personal.

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



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KEY WORDS

bribe, charm, wisdom, folly, honesty, prosperity, worse life (quality), bf sharing

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.*

He goes on trips and conferences so that he can take the tax write-offs. He loves limited



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partnerships investments and other tax shelters. For some investors tax considerations are secondary, but for Tax-Driven Ted, they come first.

