

Do bullies get rich? (11:16)

THE TEXT (NASB)

A gracious woman attains honour and ruthless men attain riches.

A gracious woman obtains honor and strong men retain riches. Classic KJV - Proverbs 11:16

INTRODUCTION



Bullies often get rich.

The word Hebrew word for “ruthless” may also be translated, “violently aggressive.” In business there’s often a violent scramble for riches. Riches and honour are distinct: Someone might have one without the other. Riches and honour do not always come together.

Does this text encourage ruthless behaviour?



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COMMENTARY

Translation: *Ruthless*



The fact that violent men attain riches is neither condemned nor condoned in the text. It's not forbidden nor recommended, merely observed. This proverb is descriptive, not prescriptive. One way to get rich—fight for money. It's a common tactic. It works, at least in the short-term.

The Hebrew word for “ruthless,” עריץ (*ʾā-rîṣ*, pronounced “ah-reets”), is used twenty times in the Old Testament, almost always referring to aggressive, evil men. Its first use is in Job 6:23, when Job prays, “Redeem me from the hand of the mighty” (NASB: tyrants). Translations of *ʾā-rîṣ* include “ruthless” (NIV), and “cruel” (Living Bible). German translations use the word, tyrannen, akin to our English “tyrants.” Though it's true, strength is necessary to retain riches, I believe the intent of the text is to contrast aggression and graciousness. The word “strong” in the KJV is a poor translation, I believe.

Two Distinct Prizes

The text makes a clear distinction between riches and honour. They are alike in that they are enjoyed in varying degrees: A person can have few, some, or many riches, and likewise little, some, or much honour. However, they are very different by nature. Riches are tangible; honour is not. Riches can be stolen, honour cannot. They are different types of rewards: Riches we can take, but honour, we must earn. The text may be implying that women more often seek prestige, while men seek wealth. Yet both men and women may seek wealth, because it is honourable, though honour does not required riches.



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus described himself as being “gentle and humble of heart,” Matthew 11:29.

No one, after reading the gospels, could describe Jesus as a tyrant or a bully—not even a committed enemy of Christ could say this. Jesus was the exact opposite.

Jesus came to help the weak, the needy, and invalids. The only time Jesus ever demonstrated aggression was toward religious authorities who were abusing their position and power—such as when he cleared the temple of merchants (Matthew 21:12), or when he warned the Pharisees of their religious hypocrisy (Matthew 23:1-36).

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Emphasize the difference between riches and honor. Give examples of each.
- Are you getting rich by being aggressive and belligerent in business? This strategy works but produces undesirable by-products. Use another method.
- Don't envy those who have attained their wealth by bullying others. Their enjoyment of such wealth will be brief.

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



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KEY WORDS

bully, contentment, envy, honor, lean and mean, monopoly, more assets (quantity), oppression, wealth, tyrant, woman, win-lose

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Self-Centered Sam?



Self-Centered Sam looks out for number one. Who's that? It's Sam, of course! Sam doesn't consider himself to be self-centered. One of his favourite books is ["The Richest Man in Babylon."](#)

What does Sam do with his income? The cream, the very best goes to his own long-term growth fund. His motto is 'pay yourself first.' Some call him Stingy Sam. But he's not stingy; he's just making careful preparation for his own future, comfort, and well-being. He is part of the "me" generation. He typifies the Maslow's hierarchy of needs with self-actualization as apex of all values. Sam is a dedicated humanist. He doesn't recognize any higher power than himself. He's a tough negotiator.

Sam doesn't ignore charity. But how could he possibly help anyone one else unless there was something in it for him? Therefore any and all charitable donations must have full and public credit given to the donor. The more people are aware of his generosity the better. After all, a little bit of advertising is good for business. When his corporation gives a gift it comes as a percentage of profits, not revenues.

His financial hero is the multi-millionaire, whose assets once exceeded the entire US treasury:



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The great Railroad and Steamship Baron [Cornelius Vanderbilt](#).

