

How should church and state influence business? (16:11)

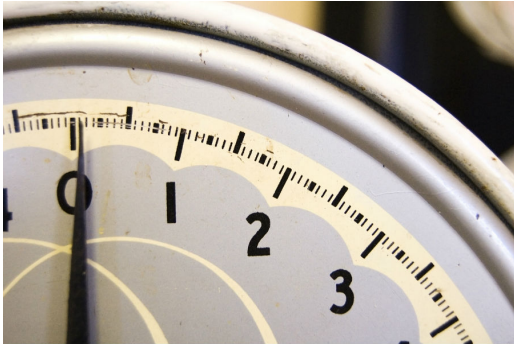
A just balance and scales belong to the LORD. All the weights of the bag are His concern.

THE TEXT (NASB)

A just balance and scales belong to the LORD. All the weights of the bag are His concern.

A just weight and balance are the LORD'S. All the weights of the bag are his work. Classic KJV - Proverbs 16:11

INTRODUCTION



The church and state should both promote consistent commercial standards.

Who sets the standards? Who enforces them? If this is government work, does the government need any higher authority to guide it? Why does the LORD concern himself with all the weights and standards used in business?

Is the LORD just “spiritual,” or is He also into business?



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COMMENTARY

The LORD is a businessman. The LORD expects honesty in business—everywhere, every time. God wants to see businesses run in compliance with predetermined standards. God ordains human government with the responsibility to provide a consistent, legal framework for accurate transactions. The courts and regulators have a God-given duty to ensure that business is transacted honestly.

Translation: *Concern*

The Hebrew word for “concern,” מַעֲשֶׂה (mă•'ăšěh, pronounced “ma-a-sey”), is used 235 times in the Bible. It’s first used in Genesis 5:29, to describe Noah’s ability to give rest from our work. The noun’s primary meaning is “that which is done or made,” and it’s often translated as “deed,” “act,” “business,” “workmanship,” and “purpose.” Thus the LORD takes personal responsibility for the standards (weights and measures, definitions of goods and services) used in business.

Constant Commercial Standards

Both church and state—both authorities established by the LORD—must nurture and correct the marketplace, to ensure consistent weights and measures. Prices fluctuate with market conditions, but commercial standards must not. Quality may vary, but the vendor must honestly represent it. This implies that church and state should not interfere in the market forces determining prices. Let free consumers decide where and what to buy, and how much to pay. This assumes, of course, that consumers can choose from several vendors. So the state has the legal duty to break up monopolies.

Clear, Simple Disclosure



This proverb speaks of the weights and measurement of dry goods, but the principle applies broadly to everything: Time, distance, space, energy—all the products and services in the marketplace. Goods and services must be truly represented. God does not tolerate false advertising, misleading labelling or inaccurate measurement. Goods and services must be as represented by the seller.



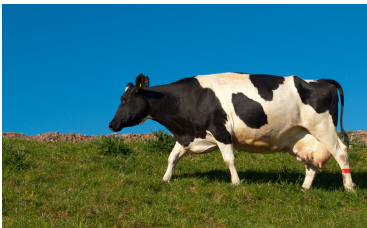
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The LORD does not address pricing policy, but claims personal ownership regarding the accuracy of transactions, like the use of a single standard for weights and measures. The convention may be metric, imperial, or any other, so long as one imperial pound is always 454 grams, not 453 or 455 grams. Posting multiple conventions (like displaying imperial and metric) may make the item easier to sell to diverse cultures, but may also confuse the consumer. Complex labelling can make it harder to calculate the cost per unit. But the biblical marketplace regulates weights and measures, not wages and prices.

Trust and Commerce

From the Christian Research Institute newsletter (1 Oct 2009), promoting the book, *Truth and Transformation*:



In 1980, Vishal Mangalwadi, a philosopher from India, and his wife Ruth were in Holland on a speaking assignment. One afternoon his host, Dr Jan van Barneveld, asked Vishal to accompany him on a walk across the beautiful Dutch countryside.

“Come,” said Jan, “let’s go get some milk,” and together they set off for the dairy.

“I had never seen such a place!” Vishal recalls, “It had a hundred cows, there were no staff on site, and it seemed amazingly clean and orderly. In India we had a small dairy of our own, but our dairy had two workers and it was filthy and smelly.”

What surprised him even more than the immaculate state of the dairy, was that there was no one there to actually milk the cows or to sell the milk to them.

What Dr. van Barneveld did next was shocking!

Vishal was expecting him to ring a bell for service, but instead he just opened the tap, put his jug under it, and filled the jug. Then he reached up to a windowsill, took down a bowl full of cash, took out his wallet, put twenty guilders into the bowl, took some change, put the change in his pocket, put the bowl back, picked up his jug, and started walking.

“I was stunned,” says Vishal. “If you were from India, you would take the milk and the money,” he recalls telling Jan.



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Years later, in retelling this story, an Egyptian gentleman laughed out loud. “We are cleverer than Indians,” he said. “In Egypt we would take the milk, the money, and the cows.”

Such is the cost of mistrust. When trust is dead, when a culture fails to trade justly, commerce is ruined. Economies all over the world struggle to survive, not because they lack resources or energetic entrepreneurs, but because they lack a culture of trust, honest cooperation and fair competition. A market of thieves is no market at all. A monopoly of thieves is even worse. Capitalism needs Christianity.

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus did not tell Zaccheus, a chief tax collector, to stop working as a tax man (Luke 19:2-10). Salvation came to Zaccheus from his faith in Jesus Christ, confirmed by his generosity and honesty. Most Jewish tax collectors in Christ’s day were dishonest, collecting more taxes than the Romans determined.

Likewise, John the Baptist did not tell Jewish tax collectors to change professions, but to “collect no more than you are authorized to do,” Luke 3:13.

God expects full adherence to commercial standards. And again, to operate properly, efficiently, and to survive, capitalism needs Christianity.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite translation and think about it often.
- Identify the industry regulations and standards governing your business and follow them.
- Support your police department in the administration of commercial justice.

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



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KEY WORDS

advertising, government, honesty, inspection, LORD, measurement, more assets (quantity), price, truth

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.

