

When is it dangerous to laugh? (17:5)

He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker. He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.

THE TEXT (NASB)

He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker. He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.

Who so mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker, and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished. KJV - Proverbs 17:5

INTRODUCTION



Be careful: Do not laugh at the poor; do not make fun of them; do not mock them. Some are poor through no fault of their own—none whatsoever.

Do not rejoice when others stumble, fall, or suffer any sort of mishap. Slapstick is the lowest form of humor, because we're only celebrating ourselves.

When we belittle the poor, we're criticizing their Maker, the Creator God. We're criticizing the Being vastly superior to ourselves in vision, intelligence, power, and glorying in ourselves. BAD MOVE.



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COMMENTARY

This proverb addresses the uncontrollable factors in our finances. God Himself is the ultimate source and first cause of anybody's poverty or wealth. The text is similar to Proverbs 14:31: "He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honours Him." The expression "taunts his Maker" is identical and is analyzed in the question, ["Why are the poor so very important?"](#)

Translation: *Poor, Mock*

The Hebrew word translated as "poor" here, רָשׁ (rāš, pronounced "rash"), is used twenty-two times in the Old Testament. Rāš is a word that refers to the dispossessed and expresses their hardship. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT) says its root "refers to a condition common in the lower class." David used this word to describe himself to King Saul as being unworthy to marry the king's daughter. It's used frequently in Proverbs.

The word translated as "mock" here is the Hebrew, לָעַג (lā'āg, pronounced "lah-ag"), which is used seventeen times and also translated, "insult," "scorn," and "make fun of." When first used in 2 Kings 19:21 lā'āg is translated as "laugh to scorn" (KJV). So those who laugh at the poor, perhaps mocking their shabby clothing, ramshackle housing or "beater" cars, must answer to God.

Accidents Happen



The second sentence of this proverb refers to calamity. Any of us can end up poor because of a miscalculation, unavoidable accident, or unpredictable circumstance. The text warns us that anybody's calamity could be our calamity. It may even be cautioning against crude slapstick humour—laughing at another's spills, trips, and falls—though it may be beneficial and righteous to laugh at our own.

Insurance is a tool to share in the risk of calamity and share the cost of another's accident. From this perspective, paying an insurance premium is really helping someone else in their misfortune. That's almost a form of charity—provided that the insurance company is competitive



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in its rates and not gouging.

Pride Precedes Punishment

The text warns us not to extract our enjoyment from the trouble of others. It could happen to us. Or are we so arrogant, that we think ourselves immune from disaster and so superior to them? Are we thinking that our wealth is the result of our own effort and intelligence, while the poverty of others is the result of their laziness and stupidity? Think again! (Exodus 4:11).

If we take credit for our wealth and fail to recognize God's hand in our blessings, then we're blind in our arrogance and destined for a reckoning. Likewise, if we belittle the poor, we're implying that God has made a mess. As the preacher John Gill said, "He that derides a work derides the workman." Our treatment of the vulnerable and handicapped reflects our reverence of God Himself (Leviticus 19:14).

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus always treated the poor with dignity.

Jesus taught his apostles "to remember the poor" (Galatians 2:9-10) as part of spreading the Gospel.

Jesus warned against even poisonous attitudes when we see accidents happen to others. We must not laugh even privately at their calamity, because we're thinking we're superior (Luke 13:4).

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Name three people you consider poor. Do you, in any way, feel condescending towards them?
- Don't gloat over your wealth or flaunt it. Thank God for it and use it wisely with discretion.
- Respect the poor—don't belittle them.

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



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KEY WORDS

calamity, dignity, wisdom, honor, insurance, Maker, poor (rāš pronounced “rash”), rich, taunt, worse life (quality), bf sharing

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](#).

