

*Opening comments overheard in a Christian Business Class at imaginary Quest Bible College*

**Dr. Quest** (on buyers and sellers being careful)

Should the buyer beware? Yes, of course, because of the dishonesty spoken of in Prov. 20:10 and 20:23. Between these two verses, however, there is also a warning to sellers (20:14). Buyers often dishonestly claim that items are no good to get a lower but unfair price. Because of these dishonest bargain hunters, sellers must be cautious as well. Seller beware!

**Frank** (on not enjoying detailed studies)

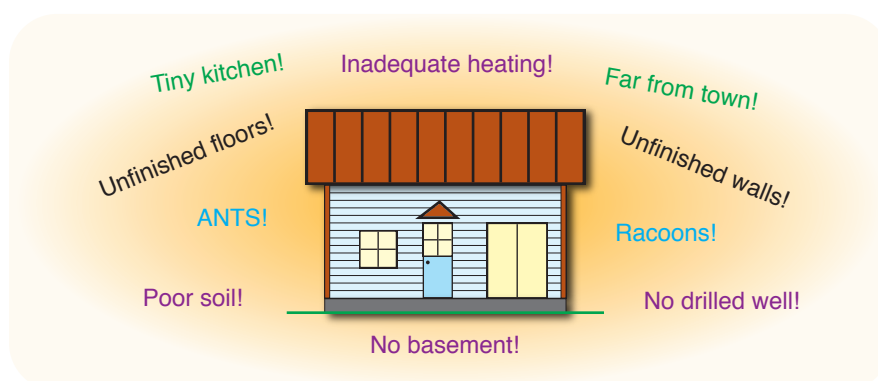
Great points, Dr. Quest! I totally agree. So can we now move on to the next chapter? There is so much great practical stuff in Proverbs that it is a shame to get stuck on a verse or two. If we quickly get what a verse is telling us to do, why should we study it any longer? Frankly, I'm tired of all the details in these S.E.E.D. studies.

**Dr. Quest** (on there being various ways to study Proverbs)

You make a good point too, Frank, because there is more than one profitable way to study Proverbs. So if you wish, you are free to spend the remainder of the hour reading Proverbs chapters 19 through 21. That should be a blessing. Before you begin, however, please help the rest of us out a little. Can you give us an example from your personal experience, on dealing with a selfish bargain hunter?

**Frank** (on selling a small cabin in the mountains)

Hmmm... Ok, but this is sad. Our family had a small second house in the mountains. It meant a lot to us, but my parents decided to sell it to help my brother and me with college. A lady who wanted to buy it wrote a letter to Dad listing **everything** that was wrong with the property. What she wrote was all true but totally negative. Dad declined her offer. Later the cabin was sold to someone who also knew the problems but was fair and appreciative. We miss our cabin, but we don't miss the lady who was so negative about it. She claimed to be a Christian, but, frankly, I have my doubts. She seemed to love money way too much.



**Dr. Quest** (on the illustration bringing Prov. 20:14 to life)

Thanks, Frank. Your story is very helpful. Why? Well, your heart-felt account added a lot to the bare-bones truth presented in Prov. 20:14. You spoke about sinful, earthly things like the love of money (the first E. step), and you also wondered if the lady in your story really knew the Eternal one or not (the second E. step). These steps help bring Prov. 20:14 to life.

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### Dr. Quest (on the size of the passage, the S question)

Frank's story got us thinking about the two E points, about earthly sin and the Eternal one (God) in 20:14, but we haven't discussed the size (S) of the passage to be studied. I assume everyone agrees that we can safely focus on one verse, on 20:14. Is that correct?

### Red (on 20:14 and not forgetting related verses)

Well, I've been reading through the chapter, and 20:14 does not seem to fit well with either 20:13 or 20:15. Yet, in 20:17 the subject seems to come back to deceit and dishonesty in business. And, of course, we also have 20:10 and 20:23 which are like a pair of bookends on dishonesty in sales. We can't just forget these similar but somewhat scattered verses.

### George (on Proverbs 20 being like mixed seeds or a tossed salad)

Red is a smart guy, but he's a bookworm. So he seems to worry about there being several topics in the same chapter. Proverbs, like seeds, get mixed up, but that is not a problem for a farm boy like me or for a farmhouse chef. I think many chapters in Proverbs are like tossed salads, healthy and multi-colored. So let's take verse 14 as our main course, and nibble on similar vegies or seeds, like verses 10, 17 and 23, on the side as desired. Eat healthy!

### Dr. Quest (on needing to adjust to salad like proverbs)

Ok, George. I suspect your tossed salads are also good for bookworms and professors.

## S size & structure

How many verses should be studied? What's the structure?

### ONE VERSE OR FOUR?

There are several verses in the context (20:10–23) which have to do with work and business ethics, but 20:14 is the only verse in which deceit in purchasing / buying is the focus. In contrast to this, deceit in sales is the focus in 20:10 and 20:23, and 20:17 is about deceitful gain no matter how it is obtained.

Although four verses (20:10, 20:14, 20:17, 20:23) could be studied together, it is easier to pick one and let the other play supporting roles. So 20:14 was chosen.

### CONTRASTING LINES

The first and second line of 20:14 contrast with each other. The same is true in 20:17 which is also about profit gained through deceit. Together these show that the consequences of deceit are always bad.

notes

## E earthly (sinful) things

What human weakness or sinfulness is seen in the text?

### BREAKING THE COMMANDMENTS

Cheating a seller is usually not illegal, but coveting is breaking the 10th commandment, lying is breaking the 9th, and putting something before God is breaking the first commandment. Also taking advantage of a seller is much like stealing, breaking the 7th commandment.

### BARGAINING & BOASTING

Bargaining can seem like an innocent ritual, in which each party tells half the story, but is it really innocent? The boasting after the sale indicates that the deal was probably one-sided and more like the outcome of a fight or theft than respectful interaction. The boasting is also, of course, prideful and indicates disrespect for others and a lack of consciousness of God presence, as was the case in 20:10 and 20:23 as well.

notes

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### Frank (on the woman who tried to buy the family cabin)

I've been listening carefully, and frankly I think George's point about Proverbs chapter 20 being like a healthy tossed salad confirms my point about it being better to read whole chapters in Proverbs instead of getting stuck on the details of a verse or two.

Nevertheless, I am very interested in verse 14 because of the story I told earlier. The woman who tried to buy our family's cabin only told part of the story. She knew the cabin was worth more than she was willing to pay. So she tried to show that it was not. Some might say that she was a shrewd business woman, but I think she was a liar and a crook. Maybe what she did was legal, but I don't think God was pleased with her. He saw it all.

### Dr. Quest (on the need to be careful about calling someone a crook)

Thanks, Frank. Your testimony is helpful, but was the woman really a crook? Those who cheated customers by using inaccurate scales were crooks (11:1, 20:10, 23), for sure, but the boastful buyer in verse 14 is not said to be an abomination to the Lord. Deliberate use of an inaccurate scale is criminal but trying to get a lower price by being negative is not.

I'm not siding with the woman you described, but calling her a crook—even though she was selfish, one-sided, and somewhat dishonest,—may be going too far. Our verse seems to show that everyone is naturally selfish when bargaining, and that prayerlessness and godless boasting should be condemned. Even so, we need to be careful with terminology.

## E the Eternal One

How is the text connection with the Giver of life?

### SEEING GOD IN CHAPTER 20

God is directly mentioned five times in chapter 20 (20:10, 12, 22, 23, 24) and his interest in business transactions is clearly stated in verses 10 and 23.

### FORGETTING GOD

The main thing that can be said about God in 20:14 is that he was forgotten. The unthankfulness of the boastful buyer shows that he had forgotten God. If his purchase had involved prayer, he would have praised the Lord after the fact rather than praising himself.

### FORGETTING GOD'S IMAGE IN OTHERS

The fact that the seller is important to God also was forgotten. Rather than thinking of the seller as another person who was created in the image of God, the buyer acted like a hunter who was seeking an animal to kill.

### notes

## D doing

What should we do and / or not do?

### BUYER APPLICATION

Pray that you may obtain a good deal, but beware of your attitude toward the seller. Is he or she properly respected? Don't try to rip off the seller, because the Lord is watching (20:12, 17).

### SELLER APPLICATION

Beware of the ungodly would-be buyer who wishes to take advantage of you. Carefully consider the buyer's words and character. Pray!

### personal applications

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**Red** (on why business ethics is stressed)

I've been reading through chapter 20, and I noticed that there are only two verses, 20:4 and 20:13, in the chapter about laziness, but there are several about selfish business transactions. This emphasis shows that those who work with their hands, like farmers, are not as likely to harm others as businessmen. Probably this is why there are many books on business ethics, but book on ethics for farmers are much more difficult to find.

**Dr. Quest** (on chapter-by-chapter variety in emphasis)

I agree, but the emphasis changes from chapter to chapter. So there is far more about laziness in chapter 26, and we are in chapter 20 today because of the greater focus on business in this chapter. Several verses in our chapter show that buying and selling are to be taken seriously. Why? Because God is watching.

**Red** (on Prov. 20:14 sounding humorous)

Yes, but the notes in one of my study Bibles says that Prov. 20:14 is humorous because of the quick change in the purchaser's words. In a way I can see that, but I'm sure Frank doesn't think it is funny.

**Frank** (on Jezebel stealing Naboth's land)

No, I don't! Frankly, I think the boastful purchaser in 20:14 and the woman who tried to steal our family's cabin are like Jezebel! Yes, Jezebel, the woman who had Naboth killed in order to steal his vineyard. [See First Kings chapter 21.] She didn't care about Naboth as a person or about honesty before God. She just wanted the vineyard. Thankfully, the woman in my story did not have as much power as Queen Jezebel.

**Dr. Quest** (on the Jezebel analogy)

In the worst case scenario, it is correct to compare the purchaser in Prov. 20:14 to Jezebel, because of covetousness, dishonesty, and a blatant disregard for the lives of others. However, Jezebel did not try to convince Naboth to lower his price, because his land was not for sale. Moreover what Jezebel said about Naboth was totally false, but the negative statements of would-be purchasers are often true. So the Naboth-Jezebel story may not actually have much in common with Prov. 20:14.

**Frank** (questioning the humor of Prov. 20:14)

Is Prov. 20:14 humorous, then, like someone said? Frankly, I don't think it is funny at all.

**Dr. Quest** (on how to bargain and sell without sinning)

If our verse was intended to be humorous, other proverbs in the context would probably be as well, but they are not. Is it wrong for a would-be-purchaser to point out all the problems with an item, if such is done honestly? In principle, no, but selfishness is usually involved. Boasting is a sure sign of sin. So what should we do? Those who are looking for a bargain should pray more, argue less, be thankful, and never boast. Those who wish to sell something at a fair price should be prayerful as well as careful. There are deceitful people out there!

**Evan** (on the worst fault finder)

Yes, but don't forget about the evil, negative words of the one who deceived Eve, falsely accused Job, and continues to find fault and deceive the world today (2 Tim. 3:13, Rev. 20:10).